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## RUNES AND EDITORS: THE CHANGING FACE OF CORPUS EDITIONS

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IN A RECENT ARTICLE (2005) Karin Seim discusses the relationship between observation and interpretation in runic studies. She takes as her starting-point a statement by the nineteenth-century Professor of English in Copenhagen—and prolific writer on things runic—George Stephens (1867, 214): ‘Jeg giver kun, hvad der står, ikke hvad der burde stå’ (I only reproduce what is there, not what ought to be there). This affirmation of the primacy of observation came in reply to critics, in particular Ludvig Wimmer, who complained, *inter alia*, that Stephens’s readings of runic inscriptions were often unconstrained by the grammars and lexica of the languages in which they were written (Wimmer 1867, especially 1–27). While in no way offering a defence of the would-be *savant* of Copenhagen, Seim stresses the danger that dogs those with a better understanding of languages and linguistic development than Stephens: they will tend to see what their training has led them to expect to see. But of course the ignorant are not to be deemed free of preconceptions either. Indeed, it is hard to conceive how anyone could set about reading an ancient text without some notion of what it might say. Nevertheless, it must be counted one of the prime tasks of those editing epigraphic texts to distinguish as rigorously as they can between observation and interpretation.

The editor has many other tasks as well. One is to present what he or she has read. In the case of runic inscriptions presentation can take a number of forms. Today’s editors will usually offer the reader several or all of the following: normalised runes; a transliteration into another, usually the roman, alphabet; an edited text; a translation into a modern language. These four modes imply clear distinctions, some of which go back to that between observation and interpretation. Even though the presentation of an inscription in the form of normalised runes and/or transliteration cannot be without an element of interpretation, it should be firmly rooted in observation. The runes and/or roman letters should render as closely as is useful what the runologist thinks to have seen. An edited text and translation, on the other hand, will normally emerge from the interpretation.

The difference between a rendering in normalised runes and one in another alphabet, as also between an edited text and a translation, might be thought clear enough, but is only so on the most obvious level. The reduction of the runic graphs found in inscriptions to some printed or electronic ideal involves many of the same processes and problems as transliteration. In particular it requires the editor to decide on the level of detail required: to what degree is infinite graphic variety to be systematised? Transliteration does, of course, involve the additional and by no means straightforward question of the basis on which roman or other alphabet equivalents are to be chosen. Edited text and translation are, one would think, distinct enough entities, but in practice the two can become entwined, as we shall see.

There was in times past less appreciation of what the presentation of runic inscriptions involved, or should involve, than is the case today. It would be troubling if that were not so, for it would indicate a total lack of progress in this area of runology. However, the past is not a single *primaeval* night from which modern runology emerged into the light of day. Just as there are marked differences between the types of preconception earlier runologists bring to their reading of inscriptions, so too we find clear disparities in the ways they present what they have read.

Stephens fares no better in this department than as a reader of inscriptions. One of his several presentations of the older-*fubark* Möjbro stone may serve as an example (1884, 11–12). What I think he would have called his transliteration runs: *ÆNÆHÆ, HÆISLÆ, GINIA, FRÆWÆRÆDÆA*. That is rather different from the **frawaradaz|anahahaislaginalz** on which modern runologists seem mostly to have agreed. The accompanying translation, offered ‘with great diffidence’, is: ‘*Sir-ÆNÆHÆ, Sir-HÆISLÆ, the-lady-GINIA, raised-this-stone-to-the-lord-FRÆWÆRÆD*’. That too is considerably at variance with the messages others have derived from this inscription, though it does conform broadly to Elmer Antonsen’s typology of the older runic inscriptions (1980; 2000, 207–35), which assigns almost all texts on stone to the commemorative category. I do not criticise here the fact that Stephens bases his reading on a drawing of the inscription taken from Göransson’s *Bautil* (1750), though we may wonder why he also prints, but then ignores, a rival drawing by Carl Säve, whose runes conform more closely to those identified by modern runologists (and now painted on the stone). Misreadings, or divergent readings, are to some extent a hazard of the game. Nor am I greatly concerned that he treats older runic **ᚠ** as though it were Anglo-Saxon **æ**. It took some time before all the characters of the older runic alphabet were recognised for

what they are. It is the presentation of the Möjbro inscription that is so woefully inadequate. The reading is neither a transliteration nor an edited text, but a hybrid. The runic characters are rendered into roman one by one right enough, but spaces are introduced between words, and commas and a stop added. Far worse: the roman rendering of individual runes can vary according to Stephens's understanding of what the inscription says. To mention the cruder sleights of hand: the penultimate character is shown as a clear **l** in the drawing, but he nevertheless renders it <Æ>; conversely, his rune 10 is shown as **ᚠ**, but the roman equivalent he chooses is <L>; the character he gives as <W> is portrayed in the drawing as **ᚱ**. Things are no better in the translation. The lower case letters are Stephens's 'expansions', which are in fact indistinguishable from interpretation. Here, then, we have confusion of translation with the text that would most naturally and clearly emerge as the end product of a discussion of the reading. It must undeniably have been easier to invent bits of text in English than in pre-Old Norse, but judging from his efforts here and elsewhere (see, e.g., 1863, 87; Barnes 1994, 24, 103–04), Stephens was not one to resist the linguistic challenges that came his way. Quite what preconceptions led him to give his reading of Möjbro the interpretation he did, I am unsure. He would of course have been aware that many runic stones are of commemorative type, and for whatever reason he seems to have concluded that -Æ represented a nominative masculine singular ending, while -A might be nominative feminine or dative masculine singular (though 'to GINIÆ [m.] [and] to FRÆWÆRÆDÆ' would then appear to be an alternative interpretation). The 'sir's, 'lady' and 'lord' presumably reflect the sensibilities of the Victorian age rather than a belief that it was in such terms people addressed each other in Migration-Age Möjbro.

It is hard in the light of the foregoing to subscribe to Stephens's view in the foreword to his *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments* . . . (1884, vii): 'On the whole, my system of transliteration and translation remains, as far as I can see, not only unshaken, but abundantly strengthened and proved by the many *new* finds.' On the contrary, the 'system' almost guarantees that unless an inscription conforms to Stephens's preconceptions and is brief, plain and clear to read, it will emerge battered and bruised from its brush with the 'errander of Cheapinghaven' (Wawn 2000, 215–44). The text of the (almost certainly) ninth-century Rök stone from Östergötland provides a good example of what Stephens can achieve with a lengthy and relatively obscure piece of runic writing. Part of face A of this inscription is read, edited and translated as follows by modern scholars (with occasional variation in the detail):

**sakumukminiþathuariarualraubaruarintuar|þarsuaptualfsinumuarin  
umnartualraubu|þaparsāmānāumisumānum**

*Sagum ok minni* [or *ungmænni*] *þat, hværiar valraubar varin tvar þar, svað  
tvalf sinnum varin numnar at valraubu, þaðar sāmān ā ymissum mǫnnum*

‘I also tell that ancient tale [or: ‘I tell the young men that’, or yet something  
other], which two pieces of war booty they were that were taken twelve times  
as war booty, both together from various men.’

We may argue about certain features here (for my part I am far from  
certain there was no *u*-mutation in early ninth-century Östergötland),  
but few, I think, would want to depart radically from the above. Stephens’s  
system can bring up rather different readings and translations (e.g.  
1884, 36):

SAKUM, UK MINI ÞAT:

HUAR I AR-UAL  
RAUBAR UARIN  
TUA, ÞAR’S UA\_Þ  
TUALF SINUM  
UARINUM NART,  
UAL-RAUBR  
BAP, AR SOMO,  
NOUMIS\_SU-MONOM.

‘We-saw, and remember-thou that:

*Where in yore-fight  
booty’s Warin (hero, = WAMUTH)  
two—where he battled on  
with-twelve his  
Warins bravely—  
war-spoils  
gained. Thane of Glory.  
from-Noumi’s sea-men.’*

Sensing that this close translation lacks clarity and punch, Stephens goes  
on to take the text ‘more freely and poetically’. That gives us the following  
stirring piece of alliterative verse (1884, 38):

‘WE SAW, FORGET IT NEVER!  
WHERE, IN FIRST FIELD  
FRESH SPOILS SEEKING,—  
WITH HIS WARINS TWELVE  
WARRING BRAVELY—  
TWO FOLD VICTORY,  
HARD-EARN’D TRIUMPHS,  
THE STRIPLING GAIN’D  
O’ER SEAMEN OF NOUML.’



From these glimpses of a deservedly forgotten past one might readily conclude that Stephens represents the nadir of what in its day was offered and accepted as serious runic scholarship. But that would be to do him an injustice. As Wawn has shown (1995; 2000, 215–44, especially 236–42), Stephens's scholarship was the product of a relatively coherent world view. He was fiercely opposed to what he regarded as the 'Germanisation' of philology, and saw attempts to systematise and standardise languages of the past as the outcome of a German obsession with order and rules. He argued that there had once been a loose-knit old-northern linguistic unity that encompassed England and Scandinavia. The Migration and Viking-Age runic inscriptions of Britain, Denmark, Norway and Sweden he viewed as prime sources for this northern form of Teutonic, claiming that they bore more reliable testimony to its fragmented and unstandardised nature than the reconstructed Old Icelandic of nineteenth-century grammars. As Wawn points out (2000, 241), an essential benefit of this line of reasoning is 'the creation of a scepticism-free zone inside which his [Stephens's] own runic decipherments and broader dreams of old northern glory can have free rein'. Even so, Stephens touches on a dilemma that has often been ignored. When dealing with periods of language development for which there is little direct evidence, scholars tend to reconstruct a uniform variety and try to match such evidence as exists with their reconstruction. They do this not so much from a love of order and discipline as to impose constraints. For in a world where readings can be justified by appeal to otherwise unknown dialectal varieties, nothing can be tested and so nothing falsified. Yet the idea that the Germanic of Scandinavia was variation-free until well into the Viking Age conflicts with the results of socio-linguistic research and general linguistic experience. It is in particular hard to see how the radical changes of the Scandinavian syncope period can have been accomplished without wide-scale dialectal variation (cf. Barnes 1997; 2003). The dilemma is thus between uniform reconstruction masquerading as reality on the one hand and unrestrained speculation on the other. It is of course possible to take a position somewhere between the two extremes. But Stephens—who clearly did not think in the terms I have just outlined—located himself unhesitatingly on the speculative fringe.

That fringe was in fact rather crowded. As a speculative interpreter of runic inscriptions Stephens had several formidable British rivals, who hastened to join in the fun. These were on the whole people with rather less knowledge than their Copenhagen colleague. And they lacked the protection of the 'scepticism-free zone' he had created for himself, for, unlike Stephens, they offered no justification for the readings and interpretations

they put into circulation. Their approach was rather that of the ill-prepared undergraduate struggling with an unseen translation: grasp at such words as you think you recognise and fill in the gaps with guesswork. Where the brighter undergraduate will use the context provided by his or her understanding of the passage concerned, the nineteenth-century British runester seems to have been guided by little more than vague perceptions of the ancient North—although in the case of the Maeshowe inscriptions from Orkney there were the added dimensions of wild weather and treacherous seas.

Judging by the number of competing interpretations offered, the Maeshowe corpus exerted an irresistible fascination on the nineteenth-century antiquarian mind. Of the various contemporaries of Stephens who had a go at making sense of these graffiti, I will mention the three most outrageous: Thomas Barclay, Ralph Carr and John Mitchell. Their presentation of the inscriptions is more or less on a par with Stephens's efforts. The romanisations of the runic sequences hover uncertainly between transliteration and edited text; translation and interpretation can be hard to distinguish; and so on. But it is the end results that give the mind serious cause to boggle. These surpass anything I have encountered from undergraduates doing battle with Old Norse texts. Barclay's Maeshowe inscriptions (1863) tell of udallers, of murder, banishment and gallows, of travel in southern lands, golden numbers, funeral honours, eternal rest in heaven, and of 'a lady of faultless character, of graceful manners, and of honourable descent'; he also introduces us to a number of named individuals, of whom the charmingly named 'Okon of the tooth' certainly deserves mention. According to Carr (1868), Maeshowe once boasted a 'How-warden'; other characters that populate his inscriptions include a 'Mirk-Quene', 'Purblindy the snow-stricken', 'Jarl Æily' and 'Simon Sihry from Ronaldsey'. We also learn of falcons, otters, whalesmen and of shag-behosed, kilted, swimming harpooners. Mitchell's Maeshowe world (1863) chiefly revolves around ships and shipwrecks. The messages of the inscriptions range from the tame 'wrecked, and near this', by way of 'Dark misty weather. Ship labouring hard' to 'Behold the Ship was abandoned/ and the Hull lies there among the breakers'. This last text perhaps points to the visible remains of an earlier dramatic episode that Mitchell conjures up: 'Jerusalem leaders wrecked on the Orkney cliffs/ In a mist slothfully'. Even the Maeshowe *fupark* inscription (No. 5) is pressed into nautical service. In Mitchell's interpretation, it becomes 'Futhorkh bound to the North-East', where Futhorkh is the name of a 'ship or person . . . returning home' (1863, 58).

Had Barclay, Carr and Mitchell been rank amateurs or raw students, their efforts might have been dismissed with a marginal ‘tut tut!’ together with some general indications of where they had gone wrong. But Barclay was an established academic—Principal of the University of Glasgow, no less. Carr and Mitchell did not enjoy quite the same elevated status, but, like Barclay, both were members of antiquarian societies of repute, Mitchell styling himself ‘Fellow of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries of Denmark; Joint-Secretary for Foreign Correspondence Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, etc.’ (1863, [iii]). None of them made their runic offerings in any spirit of humility. Barclay refrains from comment on his interpretations, but presents them with the assurance of a man in total command of the subject. Carr feigns a kind of modesty, before going on to opine that with his ‘somewhat long experience’ of Anglo-Saxon he may be able to ‘perceive the meanings of some words or turns of expression more clearly than even Scandinavian scholars have yet explained them’ (1868, 71). Mitchell is at once withering in his judgement of others and confident of the worth of his own contributions: had anyone working on the Maeshowe corpus ‘afforded the requisite elucidation of the Runes’, he would, he affirms, ‘have been spared considerable labour’ (1863, x).

Such misguided ‘scholarship’ is of course not the exclusive domain of the nineteenth-century enthusiast. The internet, as we know, is awash with runic tosh. The names of O. G. Landsverk and Alf Mongé can still raise a weary smile (cf. Haugen 1981). And it is only a few years since a member of the Celtic Department in the University of Aberdeen transformed a selection of Pictish ogam inscriptions into some distinctly odd-looking ‘Old Norse’ texts (Cox 1999).

Compared with these dilettantes Stephens can almost take on the appearance of a rigorous scholar. At the request of James Farrer, excavator of Maeshowe, he made one of the first attempts to read and interpret the runic inscriptions in the cairn, and the results of his efforts were included in Farrer’s 1862 publication of the excavation. There is no doubt that Stephens gets much closer to the sense of these graffiti than Barclay, Carr and Mitchell. But, alas, Farrer cast his net more widely, and side-by-side with the Cheapinghaven professor’s expositions stand the rival contributions of Carl Christian Rafn and Peter Andreas Munch (Farrer 1862, 25–40). In this test of talent the competition is for the most part too stiff. The Scandinavian scholars exhibit a far clearer understanding than Stephens of the workings of Old Norse grammar and are thus in a much better position to offer plausible interpretations of the inscriptions. One might ask why there should be this difference between the British Stephens

and the Scandinavian Rafr and Munch. We can hardly assume that the medieval language was more accessible to the latter two as native speakers of Danish and Norwegian respectively, since Stephens was himself quite at home in the modern Scandinavian idioms. The more likely explanation is that Scandinavian philological scholarship was strongly influenced by the German orderliness the Englishman so despised. Nineteenth-century Scandinavian education at all levels was, after all, based on the German model. In Britain, on the other hand, the tradition of the amateur gentleman scholar seems to have been firmly entrenched.

Scandinavian philological scholarship in general and runic studies in particular undoubtedly had solid foundations on which to build. Pioneers like Bureus in Sweden and Worm in Denmark—working before the era of ‘wissenschaftliches Runenstudium’ as an early historian of the field dubs it (Jaffé 1937, 47; cf. also Düwel 2008, 220)—managed by and large to get closer to the message of the inscriptions they treated than the nineteenth-century British amateurs. Thus Worm, for example, makes fairly short work of the two Jelling inscriptions (north Jutland), faltering only in a few places. The widely-known and cited **tanmarkar:but** ‘Denmark’s betterment’ of Jelling 1 is interpreted as a relative clause ‘QVÆ DANIAM EXORNAVIT’, **but** being seen as some part of the Danish verb *bygge* ‘build’; the interpretation of the phrase as a byname, already current in Worm’s day, is challenged (1643, 339–41). The sequence towards the bottom of face A of Jelling 2, **sa|haraltr[:]lias:sār.uan.tanmaurk** ‘That Haraldr who won for himself Denmark’, is read *Haraltr Kesor van Tanmaurk* (the initial **sa** being transferred to the previous word) and taken to mean ‘HARALDUS IMPERATOR RECUPERAVIT DANIAM’. Face C of the same inscription with its worn middle section becomes *Aug tini folk Kristno* ‘ET EARUM INCOLAS AD FIDEM CHRISTIANAM CONVERTIT’ instead of **aukt(a)ni|karpi|kristnā** ‘and made the Danes Christian’ (1643, 333). These divergences from the modern interpretation apart, Worm delivers an accurate analysis of the words and their grammatical relationships, and is thus able to arrive at a fairly satisfactory understanding of the two inscriptions. He had less success with the Norwegian older-*futhark* Tune inscription, which is barely recognisable in the schematic drawings he published (1643, 478)—but then he was working almost 200 years before the older runic alphabet was satisfactorily deciphered. Recognising his inability to read the Tune runes, Worm does not embark on the type of idle guessing game favoured by nineteenth-century British interpreters. He is content to admit defeat (1643, 479): ‘Ejus [Tune’s] delineationem exhibere placuit, etsi de interpretatione planè desperem.’

In Sweden, Worm's near contemporaries, Bureus and Verelius, showed equally good understanding of the younger *fupark* and its inscriptions. Bureus mastered many of the finer details of runic writing, and Verelius knew enough to engage in serious polemic against Worm. It is no surprise to find that both are able to offer reasonably accurate readings and interpretations of numbers of inscriptions. Under their detailed scrutiny, the complex text on the Hillersjö stone, for example, emerges clearly enough as an inheritance document (cf. *U* 1, 36–37), though it is not clear why Verelius locates this Upplandic stone in 'Helsingeland' (1675, 34). Like Worm, when faced with the indecipherable these two early runologists are willing to admit defeat. Verelius reproduces Bureus's careful drawings of the staveless Malsta and Hälsingtuna inscriptions but declares that such *Willoruner* 'cryptic runes' are not meant to be understood and that effort spent on trying to decipher them has little point. The drawings are included, however, just in case anyone wants to try his hand at interpreting them (1675, 66–67). As Jansson points out (1983, 7–8), it must have come as an unpleasant surprise to Verelius to discover that in the very same year he published his *Manuductio compendiosa ad runographiam Scandicam antiqvam*, his compatriot, Magnus Celsius, had found the key to the staveless runes.

With forerunners of the calibre of Worm, Bureus, Verelius and Celsius, it is scarcely surprising that by the nineteenth century runic studies had progressed further in Scandinavia than in Britain. In the editing department the names of Liljegren and Dybeck in Sweden, Thorsen and Wimmer in Denmark and Munch and Bugge in Norway come particularly to mind.

Liljegren's *Run-urkunder* (1833) makes reference to 3000 inscriptions, Swedish and other, some 2000 of which are transliterated into the roman alphabet. Although Liljegren's transliterations are not as precise as modern scholarship demands, they most definitely are transliterations: there is nothing of the confusion with interpretation and edited text we find in nineteenth-century British scholarship. Indeed, Liljegren offers no interpretations at all (nor does he include drawings).

Dybeck (1855–57[–59]; 1860–76) presents a selection of Swedish inscriptions in the form of normalised runes, transliteration and drawing, but provides little in the way of interpretation. His transliterations are less precise than those of Liljegren in that he replaces separators with spaces between words. Nor is he above the occasional bit of editorial interference, as where the Gripsholm inscription's (*Sö* 179) **pinsat** becomes PINSA (A)T (1855–57[–59], 1: 24).

Thorsen (1864–80) organises a fairly comprehensive ramble through the Danish rune stones, offering some sound and some

implausible interpretations on the way. Instructive is his treatment of the Jutlandic Bække 2 inscription. This runs, rather unpromisingly: **hribnā:ktubi:kriukubpsij|aft:uibrukmpusin**. Thorsen's transliteration is identical with the modern version, except that he uses bold capitals, with a slightly variant capital <A> to indicate what is here given as **ā**, the fourth rune of the younger *futhorc* (1864–80, 1: 22). His interpretation, which recognises that the inscription is drastically abbreviated, doubtless owes much to other scholars, in particular C. C. Rafn and Carl Säve (Thorsen 1864–80, 2 II: 4; Rafn 1861, 189–94, 272–73). But where Säve saw the first **k** of the inscription as an abbreviation of the conjunction *auk* 'and' connecting two personal names and **kriu** as a shortened form of *gerðu* 'made', Thorsen reshaped the sequence as 'KUBTI:GIRUA', i.e. *køpti gerva* 'paid to make' (1864–80, 2 II: 5). Such a construction, is, I think, without parallel, but is perhaps only slightly less plausible than Rafn's explanation of **kriukub** as *grjótkumbl* 'stone-monument' (1861, 193), an interpretation recently resuscitated by Moltke (1985, 386). All more or less agree that the remainder of the inscription is to be taken as *þósi aft Víborg móður sína* 'this [monument] after Víborg, his mother' (cf., e.g., DR, 55–57; Moltke 1985, 386). While we may detect here a faint echo of the wild guesses of nineteenth-century British runesters, the crucial point that the message is abbreviated has been understood. Stephens, as it happens, cheerfully accepted Säve's interpretation (1866–1901, 2: 731–33), though it is amusing to speculate what he would have made of Bække 2 without the guidance of the Scandinavians—not to mention the fun Barclay, Carr and Mitchell and their ilk could have had with it.

Thorsen's transliteration of this difficult runic sequence is irreproachable. The very uncertainty of Bække 2 seems to have inspired him with caution. When faced with more readily comprehensible texts, however, Thorsen has no qualms about adding a dose of interpretation to his observation. Instead of a transliteration of Jelling 2, for example, the reader is given a 'Læsning . . . i Olddansk' (reading . . . in Old Danish) (1864–80, 2 II: 28). While this follows the original reasonably closely, all **ks** that denote /g/ are rendered <G>, spaces are introduced between words unseparated on the stone, the fourth rune is given as <O> (contrast Bække 2 above) and the text is here and there expanded. This procedure marks a decline in comparison with Liljegren's faithful reproduction of the runes in roman letters.

P. A. Munch, unlike Liljegren, Dybeck and Thorsen, and later Wimmer and Bugge, did not produce a runic corpus edition. He was nevertheless a leading figure in nineteenth-century runological research. Munch's

approach to runic inscriptions is critical, sober and cautious, and he is able to bring a wealth of linguistic and historical knowledge to bear on their interpretation. In 1857, for example, we find him castigating Ole Worm for the inaccuracy of his illustrations in *'Monumenta danica'* (1857b, 3–4; see also 1857a, 72–73). Since this criticism comes as a prelude to a (for its time) remarkably penetrating analysis of the Tune inscription, that is perhaps not surprising (cf. p. 12 above). But Munch goes further, claiming that few, if any, of Worm's illustrations are faithful copies of the runic inscriptions they claim to portray, and concluding that far from benefiting scholarship his work has caused considerable damage. Although one may suspect a certain anti-Danish sentiment in this attack, the viewpoint and style are in fact fairly typical of the author: Worm is condemned first and foremost for having been far less accurate than someone treating runological topics should be. Munch can be equally withering about aspects of British scholarship. Making one of several contributions to a long-running polemic in the Scandinavian press (cf. Barnes 1992), he speaks of those

som sandsynligvis efter engelske Dilettanter Viis snarere føle sig tiltrukne af hvad der gjør Sprell og synes 'striking' end af det grundigere, der optræder i en beskednere Form.

who probably in the manner of English dilettantes feel themselves more drawn to what causes a stir and seems 'striking' than to more painstaking endeavour that appears in a humbler guise (Munch 1862, 28).

This polemic arose from a dispute about who had the right to publish the Maeshowe corpus, a project in which Munch was heavily involved. His provisional readings and interpretations of the inscriptions appeared in the Norwegian *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* (Munch 1861), and were followed by a more considered account in Farrer's Maeshowe book of 1862 (p. 11 above). Comparing Munch's efforts with those of Stephens and Rafn in the Farrer volume, one cannot deny it is the Norwegian who best understands what the inscriptions say. And just as well, for Munch affirms in one of his contributions to the polemic how easy most of the Maeshowe corpus was to read and interpret (1862, 27):

de Dele af Indskriften, som kunne læses, ere saa lette at finde ud af, at Læsningen er den simpleste Sag af Verden, og for alle Sagkyndige maa synes saaledes.

those parts of the collection which can be read are so easy to understand that reading them is the simplest thing in the world, something that must be obvious to any expert.

As a transliterator, or perhaps one should say presenter, of runic texts Munch is less convincing. His readings, like those of so many of his

contemporaries, combine the reproduction of the runes in roman with editorial features such as word spacing, punctuation and capitalisation. He may also use one and the same roman letter to transliterate different runes as when <o> is allowed to represent the ȥ, ƿ and ʀ of the Maeshowe inscriptions (e.g. 1861, 206; Farrer 1862, 26, 32). It should be observed, however, that Munch may not have been solely responsible for the final form of his contribution to Farrer's volume.

With Ludvig Wimmer's *De danske runemindesmærker* (1895–1908), we enter the era of the modern runic corpus edition. The work is by no means comprehensive, concentrating on commemorative rune-stones to the exclusion of much else, but each of the inscriptions included is treated according to a set format. Information is given about the stone or other object bearing the inscription—find circumstances, history (as far as is known), current location, material and dimensions. The inscription is described, and the size, shapes and peculiarities of individual runes commented on as appropriate. There follows a transliteration into lower-case, wide-spaced roman, with separators shown. Rounded brackets indicate uncertain readings, square brackets expansions and readings taken from earlier accounts, although the distinction here is not absolute. Next comes an edited text in a normalised 'olddansk' (Old Danish) and then a translation into modern Danish placed within double inverted commas. Each runic object is illustrated. Treatment of the individual inscriptions is preceded by a lengthy introduction in which the Danish commemorative rune-stones are discussed as a group. Themes here include: the purpose of the stones; their general appearance; the age, geographical spread, names and current locations of the inscriptions; rune forms; the sound value(s) of the runes; the language and content of the inscriptions; rune carvers; the art of the rune-stones; stones with rune-like symbols; Danish runic monuments abroad.

With such a range of useful topics covered, it seems churlish to point to weaknesses in Wimmer's edition—yet weaknesses there are. One of the most serious deficiencies is the absence of a discussion of the principles on which the work is based and an account of how it was compiled. This can lead to various kinds of uncertainty, of which, by way of example, I mention one. The Snoldelev inscription (*DR* 248) is transliterated thus by Wimmer (1895–1908, 2: 342):

kun'ualtstain'sunar'

ruhalt'sþular'asalhauku(m) [']?

Although this looks to be a fairly careful piece of work, the end result disguises the fact that the carver used both ʀ and ƿ for /a/. Thus the first



Like Wimmer's monumental work, Sophus Bugge's edition of the Norwegian inscriptions in the older runic alphabet (*NIæR*) has many of the trappings of a modern corpus edition. Each inscription is treated in more or less the same way: introductory remarks about its discovery and state of preservation are followed by measurements and an indication of where it is currently to be found. The runes are reproduced in normalised form and precisely transliterated into bold roman lower case (although uncertainty of reading is not normally indicated). Out of the ensuing discussion, which takes in runography, language, message and context, comes a modified transliteration incorporating word separation, which is then translated into Dano-Norwegian. Drawings and/or photographs of the inscriptions are also provided. The lengthy introduction which precedes the treatment of individual inscriptions takes the reader far afield: to the origin and development of runic writing, rune names, and related topics—matters we today might think do not belong in an account of Norway's inscriptions in the older runes. However, we should remember that Bugge's edition was compiled at a time when knowledge of the older alphabet and its relationship with the younger was relatively fresh, so that much that is second nature to us required explanation. More pertinently from the modern reader's perspective, the introduction also offers a brief account of the older *fupark*, in the course of which transliteration equivalents are given for each of the twenty-four runes, variant forms discussed and sound values elaborated. Here we are not far removed from the idea of the distinct written character, whether defined as grapheme or *fupark* unit (Barnes and Page 2006, 66–70)—although Bugge could not of course have thought or written in such terms.

From Bugge we move firmly into the twentieth century and the corpus editions we still by and large consult—notwithstanding some of the volumes go back well over 60 years. These editions, *Sveriges runinskrifter* (*SR*), *Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer* (*NIyR*), *Danmarks runeindskrifter* (*DR*), *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (*RäF*) and *Islands runeindskrifter* (*IR*) differ considerably from each other in approach, structure and degree of personal input. *SR* and *NIyR* concentrate on the individual inscription, consigning the broader aspects of their corpus to

introductory remarks, final reflections, indices or asides. *SR*, not least because of the size of the corpus, has a spread of contributors. Perhaps because of this, it is less subject to editorial whim than *NlyR*, which up to and including vol. 5 was virtually the private province of Magnus Olsen. In some respects *SR* seems to have been guided by a remarkably consistent editorial policy. Thus the runes of the younger *fupark* tend to be transliterated by the same letters of the roman alphabet from volume to volume: ʀ and its variants, for example, are regularly *o* (irrespective of assumed pronunciation). There is greater emphasis on presenting the inscriptions than interpreting every detail—a tradition that perhaps owes something to Liljegren and Dybeck. Throughout, considerable attention is paid to earlier research. Differences between particular parts of the series can of course be observed: it would be strange otherwise given that the edition has been over 100 years in the making. The practice of printing a normalised version of the runes of each inscription, for example, is found only in *Ölands runinskrifter* (*Öl*), the very first volume. And as time goes on interpretation tends to loom larger. Certain discrepancies appear to go back to individual editors. The volumes that bear Sven B. F. Jansson's name lack detailed introductions and thus often fail to deal with broader questions raised by the corpus. A partial exception is *Gästriklands runinskrifter* (*Gs*), whose brief introduction nevertheless emphasises the role of the individual inscription as the basic building block of *SR* according to 'runverkets planläggning' (the planning of the [Swedish] corpus edition) (*Gs*, 22).

*NlyR*, as already noted, has the same general structure as *SR*. However the Norwegian work differs from its Swedish counterpart in an important respect. Olsen, the chief (and for a long time sole) editor devotes a great deal of space to the context and background of his inscriptions, and in doing so is apt to allow his imagination to wander. Instead of a sober weighing up of the possibilities, a tale is spun—though often with such conviction that the unwary reader may take what he is told for fact. In his presentation of the individual inscription, Olsen for the most part follows the pattern established by Bugge. He gives normalised runic representations, transliterations and translations, but in the place of *NlæR*'s modified transliteration he provides an edited text in italics. Olsen is less fastidious in his transliterations than Bugge. He introduces word spacing right from the start—not perhaps too serious in that he also includes a normalised representation of the runes. More problematically, ʀ may be transliterated by both *a* and *o*, ʁ and its variants by *q* and *ø*—all according to Olsen's understanding of the sounds denoted. This element of uncertainty means

the reader cannot rely on the transliterations of *NlyR* to reflect observation; an element of interpretation lurks within. The procedure whereby Ȧ is rendered now Ȧ now Ȧ can of course be justified by appeal to different systems of runic writing, but Olsen does not do this. Indeed, nowhere in *NlyR* are the principles that underlie transliteration practice discussed or even enunciated.

*DR* is organised very differently from *SR* and *NlyR*. More like an encyclopaedia, it is much easier to use for those seeking specific details than either of the other two. The disadvantage is that the story of an individual inscription may have to be teased out of different parts of the work. Nevertheless, *DR* contains a much wider spectrum of information than its Swedish and Norwegian counterparts, and this information is presented in more structured, systematised and accessible form. A clear distinction is maintained between observation and interpretation, which means that transliteration practice, for example, is transparent even though the principles that underlie it are not discussed.

Like the first five volumes of *NlyR*, *RäF* is very much the product of a single mind—a fairly capacious mind, it must be said, which could call on a wide range of knowledge and also grasp the importance of giving the runic material it was dealing with precise, systematic and consistent presentation. It was not, though, a mind that understood the virtue of transparency. Thus, the introduction to *RäF*, while offering some useful insights into the older runic alphabet, provides few clues for those who would understand how this corpus edition came into being, why it takes the form it does, and what thinking lies behind the presentations. Nor do the introductory remarks reveal why the editor had such a firm belief in the value of rune forms as a dating tool. Furthermore, the background of cult and magic against which many of the inscriptions in *RäF* are seen appears to be a fundamental premise rather than a hypothesis to be substantiated.

In some respects Anders Bæksted's *Islands runeindskrifter* is the most advanced of all the early and mid-twentieth-century runic corpus editions. It begins with a foreword—a light mixture of *modus operandi* and *apologia pro opere meo*—and continues with a full-blown introduction. The introduction deals with the following topics: the history of runic writing in Iceland; the types of runic material found there; the content of inscriptions and of runic writing found in medieval manuscripts; the general appearance of different types of inscription; the rune forms employed; dating; the history of research on the Icelandic runic material. Treatment of individual inscriptions is based on the following template:

find circumstances, history and present location; specification of the runic artefact or the position of the runes in the case of those found in caves etc.; particulars of the inscription including measurements; date of examination; transliteration into wide-spaced, lower-case roman; edited text in italics. Peculiarities in the inscription or problems with the reading are dealt with in notes that follow the edited text. In conclusion there is a bibliography for each inscription with selected quotations from the works cited.

About the principles underlying his transliteration practice, Bæksted is a little more forthcoming than his contemporaries. The Icelanders, he maintains, used runes as roman alphabet equivalents: ‘som ligefremme erstatninger for det tilsvarende latinske bogstav’ (as simple replacements for the corresponding latin letter) (1942, 37). His system of transliteration is based on this notion of equivalence and thus has the roman alphabet as its starting point rather than the runic—a reversal of the normal procedure. While clear and explicit enough, such an approach obviates the need for discussion of the finer points of transliteration. It is hardly self-evident, for example, that ᚠ and ᚱ should both be transliterated <o>, but Bæksted is content to do so because he considers <o> to be the letter an Iclander writing in the roman alphabet would have used in the relevant contexts.

It remains to be said that all of these twentieth-century editions are copiously illustrated, though the quality of photographs and drawings, in particular in *NlyR* and the early volumes of *SR*, may leave something to be desired.

The editing of runic inscriptions did not of course end with Bæksted and his contemporaries. Occasional volumes and fascicles have appeared since their day, although the tempo of production has sunk—indeed, it can sometimes seem to stand in inverse proportion to the money, time and technological know-how employed. Much of the runic corpus editing of the last fifty years or so has been in continuation of existing projects, notably *SR* and *NlyR*. Although the most recent volumes of *SR* show marked improvements on those published earlier and vol. 6 of *NlyR* makes something of a leap forward in terms of information density, accuracy and clarity, neither project can reasonably be expected to provide the forum for a radical reappraisal of editing techniques.

There will of course be different views on what makes for a good runic corpus edition. I therefore conclude by setting out what I consider the requirements of such a work.

The first concerns explicitness. There should be an account of how the editor(s) moved from concept to end product. As part of this there would be discussion of:

(a) How the corpus was established: what was admitted, what left out, and why.

(b) The circumstances in which the editor(s) examined the inscriptions and the extent to which this could have affected the reliability of their readings.

(c) The form in which the inscriptions are presented and the reasoning behind the choice.

(d) The principles according to which runes are normalised and transliterations made.

(e) The distinction between observation and interpretation, and how far it is possible to maintain it.

(f) The preconceptions the editor(s) bring to their task. Do they espouse a particular point of view or are they agnostic? On what premises are their interpretations based?

A second requirement is for caution. Authoritarian pronouncements about the meaning and age of inscriptions should be avoided where no certainty exists. The chief task of the editor must be to set out the data, allowing readers to make their own judgements. That is not, of course, to say that editors must refrain from expressing opinions about what they think plausible.

A third requirement is for awareness of the pitfalls confronting the editor who dabbles in disciplines of which s/he has little experience. And as a corollary to this: circumspection in relying on assertions by scholars in fields the editor is not trained to assess.

These three basic requirements should be observed throughout the edition. Other desiderata can probably be satisfactorily accommodated in introductory chapters.

One such chapter should place the corpus in a wider context. How do the inscriptions relate to what is known of the society in which they are believed to have been carved? How do they relate to writing in other alphabets? And how do they relate to one another—are there common features or is the collection scattered and disparate?

Another chapter might consider how far the corpus reflects what was actually carved. If, as often seems likely, the material represents a tiny fraction of the total number of inscriptions made, what conclusions about language, culture, technical competence and political and ethnic relationships can safely be drawn from it?

A further chapter could usefully ponder how the inscriptions came into being. What was the source of the text? What opportunities did the

carver's material offer? How much care did he bring to his task? How skilled was he?

Investigation should normally also be made into the system or systems of runic writing employed, and the type or types of language and orthography found. Here the editor may occasionally draw a blank, in which case s/he should refrain from seeking to impose order where none can be discerned.

Something could also be said about the location and accessibility of the inscriptions. Where are they to be found and what conditions is the runologist likely to meet when s/he goes to examine them? It may also be helpful to stress that runic artefacts in collections (e.g. in museums) are not necessarily static: they may move between collections, and collections may change name and location—quite often and rather bafflingly in some cases.

It goes almost without saying that consistency is a virtue, because it makes things easier for the reader. Each inscription should as far as practicable be presented in the same way; transliteration principles, once established, should be adhered to; those using phonetic and phonemic notation should distinguish rigorously between the two. And so on.

Finally, I enter a plea against electronic editions. I appreciate the ease with which they can be updated, but therein lies the snag. Nothing is permanent, and therefore there is nothing that can usefully be referred to. For all its alleged disadvantages, the old-fashioned book still has much to recommend it.

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## TRADITIONS OF CONVERSION IN MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA: A SYNTHESIS

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‘OUR BROTHER, YOUR BISHOP R. who has come to the threshold of the apostles, has informed us about the recent conversion of your people, how having abandoned the error of heathenism it has come to the truth of the Christian faith.’ Thus reads a pastoral letter which Pope Gregory VII sent in 1081 to King Ingi of Sweden and his co-ruler Halsten (*The Register of Pope Gregory VII* 2005, 414).<sup>1</sup> One must assume that ‘Bishop R.’, whose identity is otherwise unknown, delivered to Gregory VII a verbal report concerning the conversion of the Swedes. Little over a century earlier King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark had boasted on the younger Jelling rune-stone that he had ‘made all Denmark Christian’. In Sweden, at a more local level, the inscription of the Frösön stone (1030–50) records that a certain Östman, presumably a prominent chieftain in the region, had made the Jämtlanders Christian. Likewise the inscription on a stone from Kuløy on the western coast of Norway, dated to 1034, reveals, albeit rather cryptically, that for ‘twelve years Christianity had been’ in Norway (or, as an alternative reading ‘had improved’ Norway for twelve years) (Spurkland 2005, 108–12; Hagland 1998). More expansively, at the turn of the millennium the Icelandic Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, a career court-poet of a kind, reflected on his journey from paganism to Christianity in his remarkable ‘Conversion verses’ (Whaley 2003). Prior to c.1100 it is only in such reported oral accounts, runic inscriptions and skaldic poetry that one encounters Scandinavians engaging with the fundamental questions about the conversion: when, why and how did it take place?

Longer written accounts that attempt to answer the same questions first emerged in Scandinavia around the turn of the eleventh century. These texts reveal the aspiration of the emerging literary élite to align the conversion with the political and ecclesiastical realities of the times. The aim is understandable, for the power and prestige of both the secular and the

<sup>1</sup> ‘Fratr noster R. episcopus vester ad apostolorum limina veniens suggestit nobis de nova gentis vestre conversione, scilicet qualiter relicto gentilitatis errore ad christiane fidei veritatem pervenerit’ (*Das Register Gregors VII* 1923, 593).

ecclesiastical authorities relied partly on the roles they had played in the Christianisation process. This was not of course a purely Scandinavian phenomenon, for authors in the recently converted parts of Central and Eastern Europe were also confronted with the need to interpret the past in the service of the present (see e.g. Franklin 1992). Above all, these literary pioneers grasped the importance of sacralising the conversion and post-conversion history of their lands or regions. For this purpose three particular events or occasions were of especial import: the baptism of a king (or any other ruler), which was usually followed by the baptism of the people; the founding of a local monastery, church, bishopric or archbishopric; and finally the life, death, martyrdom and miracles of indigenous saints. Such sacral events—which Lars Boje Mortensen in an important study has termed ‘mythopoeic’ moments—were essential for harmonising local history with Salvation or Universal History (Mortensen 2006). The conversion traditions which emerged in Scandinavia were largely shaped by the approaches or attitudes of these early authors towards the given mythopoeic events or developments in the history of their institution, polity or kingdom. And it hardly needs spelling out that their stance was moulded by their own political and ecclesiastical interest and background.

The principal aim of this survey is therefore to contextualise and compare the conversion traditions of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the North Atlantic colonies. What follows is an attempt to present a synthesis of the subject, and more detailed analysis of particular texts will thus inevitably be the exception rather than the rule. A comparison of the conversion narratives across the Nordic spectrum has been attempted only by Birgit and Peter Sawyer in a study which is particularly strong on cross-national descriptions (Sawyer and Sawyer 1987). This overview, conversely, is primarily concerned with the national traditions of conversion and how they differ amongst Scandinavian regions and countries. This is not difficult to justify, for early Scandinavian narratives about the past were composed primarily, although not exclusively, from a national and/or dynastic perspective.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> There is a substantial body of scholarly literature dedicated to medieval depictions of the conversion of Scandinavia (for individual items I refer to this article’s bibliography). This is especially true regarding the Old Norse corpus where Ari Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók* (‘Book of Icelanders’) (1122–32) is the natural point of departure for any exploration of the Icelandic tradition(s) (for a good overview of the scholarly approaches to the early Icelandic texts, see Grønlie 2005). Moreover, the portrayal of Iceland’s conversion in the Sagas of Icelanders and perhaps especially the *þættir*, or short sagas, has attracted considerable attention in the

## Sweden

In the unlikely event that Pope Gregory VII had read an early version of Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (hereafter referred to as *GHEP*) from c.1075 before dispatching his letter to the Swedish kings, he would have encountered a rather different view of Christianity in Sweden from that apparently presented by Bishop 'R'. *GHEP* was composed by a canon of Hamburg-Bremen at a critical point in the history of that archbishopric. Adam's immediate purpose in writing the work was political and his primary concern was to emphasise and revive the claim of his archbishopric to sole ecclesiastical authority in northern and north-eastern Europe. It was in support of this agenda that Adam wrote the *GHEP*, which explains why it includes the earliest known account of the Christianisation of Scandinavia. This tale begins with Anskar, the founding father of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, and how he and his successors brought the Gospel to the Danes and the Swedes. Adam derived the material for this story from Rimbert's *Life of Anskar*, composed sometime between 865 and 876, and from assorted Frankish and German sources. But as he came closer to his own time in the early eleventh century, Adam was confronted with the reality that his archbishopric no longer enjoyed the prerogative of bringing the Cross to the North, if indeed, it had ever truly had it. Even though political developments within Scandinavia had severely confined Hamburg-Bremen's influence, however, Adam continued to promote the archbishopric's legal and spiritual duty to further the cause of Church and Christianity in these parts of Europe.

Adam of Bremen presents Sweden as a particular problem, or rather perhaps as a challenge for new missionaries. Thus, although both Erik the Victorious (c.970–c.995) and Olof Skötkonung (c.995–c.1022) had been baptised, and while missionaries from Hamburg-Bremen (and elsewhere) had preached the Gospel in Sweden since Anskar's time, there were still Swedes who refused to renounce their ancestral customs. Svealand, in

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last three decades or so (e.g. Duke 2002; Harris 1980; Rowe 2004). In Denmark, Saxo Grammaticus's erudite account of the Christianisation is the key line of enquiry (e.g. Inger Skovgaard-Petersen 1985 and 1987; Johannesson 1978), while his twelfth-century predecessors have perhaps been left in his substantial shadow to some extent. In Norway, the main focus has been on the portrayal of the two missionary kings, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, in both Latin and Old Norse accounts (e.g. Bagge 2006), whereas in Sweden the attention has, in the absence of alternative texts, concentrated on the legends of the missionary saints (e.g. Fröjmark 1996). For an up-to-date overview of the conversion of Norway, Sweden and Denmark see Berend, ed., 2007.

particular, is depicted as being in urgent need of religious rectification. Indeed, Adam contends that parts of this region had effectively rejected Christianity in general and the authority of Hamburg-Bremen in particular.<sup>3</sup> At the centre of this pagan stronghold stood the Temple of Uppsala where Adam maintains that sacrifices were still being performed and that the kings were either unable or unwilling to terminate this practice (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, IV 26–28, 257–61; Hallencreutz 1984). Adam's account is manifestly an exhortation to further missionary efforts.<sup>4</sup>

As we shall see, Adam of Bremen's *GHEP* did influence early Scandinavian writings on the conversion (see, for example, Sawyer and Sawyer 1992, 39). His impact on the Swedish conversion tradition(s) is however impossible to assess, for neither 'national histories' nor narratives which addressed the conversion of Sweden as a whole were composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—or at least, none have survived. The reason for this has not been adequately explained, although the late development of an effective Swedish kingship is likely to have played a part (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, 232). It could also be argued that the near-monopoly of the Cistercian Order on twelfth-century Swedish monasticism had a retarding effect on historical writing. The principal twelfth-century monastic foundations were Cistercian, including the earliest one, Alvastra in Östergötland, founded in 1143, a daughter-house of Clairvaux. Over the next two decades four other Cistercian houses were founded (France 1992, 27–42). If one follows this line of thought, the Cistercians arguably had less of an incentive to record the past than their Augustinian or Benedictine brothers, who are likely to have drawn their members from the native population at an earlier stage in the development of Scandinavian monasticism. Here the absence of monastic archives in new Cistercian foundations could also have played a role, although this observation hardly applies to Scandinavia, where all monasteries were by definition new foundations, the earliest dating from the late eleventh century. Moreover, it can be pointed out that Danish Cistercian houses were at the forefront of historical writing in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Another and more convincing explanation for the dearth of historical writing in twelfth-century Sweden was the relatively late development of

<sup>3</sup> For one interpretation of the political and ecclesiastical context of the region in this period see Janson 1998, 105–75.

<sup>4</sup> It must be stressed, though, that the problem appears to have been the absence of a pliant church organisation rather than the dearth of Christians in this region. Indeed, their presence is amply attested in runic inscriptions from the late eleventh and early twelfth century (e.g. Williams 1996, 46).

cathedral chapters (on the earliest cathedral chapters see Brink, Blomkvist and Lindkvist 2007, 198–99). As has been convincingly demonstrated, such institutions played a key role in preserving historical memory in Norway and Denmark (Gelting 2004b; Mortensen 2000). Lastly, the absence of national and dynastic histories in Sweden might suggest a greater divide between secular and ecclesiastical élites than was the case in other parts of Scandinavia (Lönnroth 1999, 58). Here the prominence of the Cistercian Order could indeed be significant: as incoming foreigners they would have concentrated on establishing foundation in a new, and on occasions hostile, environment where their cultural (as opposed to political) ties with the local aristocracy were probably less intimate than those enjoyed by their native counterparts in the rest of Scandinavia. Moreover, the place of the Cistercians within Swedish society would not have been improved by political developments. The order had arrived under the protective wing and patronage of the Sverker Dynasty which in 1155 was ousted from power by the Erik dynasty (Line 2007, 83–89).

The earliest Swedish narratives to mention the conversion in some shape or form are local rather than national in their outlook. The texts deal with missionaries who are saints and are, furthermore, associated with particular regions and bishoprics or other local ecclesiastical institutions. These are the English bishop-monks Sigfrid, David and Eskil and the Swedish Botvid, a merchant who had received baptism in England before returning to his homeland. Their legends have a relatively uniform narrative pattern and can be summarised as follows:<sup>5</sup> In the eleventh or early twelfth century a missionary arrives in a pagan region of Sweden where he preaches the Gospel and erects a church and / or a bishopric. In two instances, those of Botvid and Eskil, the preacher suffers martyrdom at the hands of pagans, whereas Sigfrid, an English bishop, loses three of his Christian companions. Since the hagiographic corpus on Sigfrid, Botvid, David and Eskil continued to evolve throughout the Middle Ages it is difficult to establish the earliest version of each legend. These narratives were naturally shaped by historical influences and liturgical needs. For example, the emphasis on the English origins of these saints reflects a wish, probably from an early date, to dissociate the Swedish Church from that of Hamburg-Bremen. Moreover, the legends emphasise the ancient credentials of the bishoprics and institutions involved (e.g. Larson 1964, 27–49). In other words, they served as foundation myths that bestowed legitimacy and lustre on

<sup>5</sup> For the legend of St Botvid see *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* 1818–28 2: 337–88; of St David, 405–12; of St Eskil, 389–403; of St Sigfrid, 347–76.

bishoprics and religious houses rather than royal dynasties: Sigfrid for the bishopric of Vaxsjö; Botvid for a stone church in Södermanland which housed his relics and became a pilgrim destination; Eskil for the diocese of Eskiltuna and later Strängnäs and finally the Cluniac monk David in Munktorp in Västmanland and the bishopric of Västerås.

A legend of Botvid was undoubtedly in existence in the late twelfth century, while the earliest versions of Sigfrid's and Eskil's legends date to the first half of the thirteenth century. The oldest manuscripts containing the legends of St David date from the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, although his cult is attested in the late fourteenth century (Fröjmark 1996, 399). Indeed, this late provenance of St David's legend and cults demonstrates the strength and longevity of the tradition relating to the foreign missionaries and their work in conversion-era Sweden.

Two especially notable features of these legends are the almost non-existent role of the royal authority in the conversion and their emphasis on the clash between Christianity and the pagan world. Eskil and Botvid are martyred in Svealand, the region which Adam of Bremen associates with paganism, while Sigfrid's three companions suffer their fate in Småland, which as late as the early twelfth century was perceived by some commentators as insufficiently Christian (Line 2007, 338). As to royal participation, it is only in Sigfrid's legend that the king plays any part in the proceedings. The pagan Olof (Skötkonung) asks an English king (named Mildred in one version of the legend) to provide him with a missionary bishop. Mildred dispatches Archbishop Sigfrid of York who baptises Olof and then founds the bishopric of Vaxsjö with royal help and blessing. Sigfrid's three nephews are killed by pagans and this prompts the Swedish king to come to his aid. But he does so more in the role of a feuding ally than a partner in any missionary effort. It is Sigfrid alone who baptises the twelve most important chieftains in Sweden while King Olof, ostensibly their secular lord, is conspicuous by his absence. Even posthumously the saints can continue their missionary effort. Thus in Botvid's legend the martyr's grave becomes a sanctuary of comfort and a source of miracles in a region rife with paganism. In point of fact the miraculous power of St Botvid's relics eradicates pagan idols and practices. The scene is Svealand in the 1120s and the converter to Christianity is the corporeal relic of a saint rather than the sword of a king.<sup>6</sup> A dead missionary saint was more effective than a living Swedish king.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the historical context of this episode see Blomkvist 2005, 599–603.

There is nevertheless one text, a very different one from the legends of the saints, that does associate the conversion of Sweden with royal authority. This is the so-called 'Kings-list' of the U version of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, an Icelandic legendary saga (*fornaldar saga*) which is traditionally attributed to the latter half of the thirteenth century. The U version of the saga narrates the history of the Swedish kings to the early twelfth century. One episode tells of King Ingi Steinkelsson (d. c.1100), whose attempt to rid Sweden of paganism is seen as a threat to peoples' ancient customs, which leads to his deposition. The throne is then presented to his brother-in-law, Sven, who revives the pagan ceremonies. Three years later, however, Ingi is able to muster his forces, defeat Sven and restore Christianity (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* 1976, 70–71). The episode has an important function in the U version of *Hervarar saga*, for it appropriately concludes a saga which commences with the creation of the world (Hall 2005, 15–16). The material for this narrative in *Hervarar saga* may have come from Ari Þorgilsson's now-lost list of kings which he composed in the early twelfth century (Ellehøj 1965, 85–108; Schück 1910). Alternatively it could have reached Iceland shortly before the composition of the saga (Janson 2000). But such speculations are incidental to the present argument. What is relevant is how the clash between paganism and Christianity in Svealand in the late eleventh century, as described by *Hervarar saga*, replicates a pattern familiar in West Norse sources: the king's crushing of heathenism, or more precisely how the ruler eradicated apostasy (see below p. 52).

In the early Swedish sources Erik Jedvardson (d. 1160), St Erik, is the sole ruler directly associated with missionary activity.<sup>7</sup> His legend, which is preserved in a manuscript from 1344 but composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, depicts Erik's crusade against and conversion of the Finns.<sup>8</sup> In this effort King Erik is joined by Bishop Henrik

<sup>7</sup> The earliest native source which alludes to the conversion is found in an attachment to the *Older Laws of the Västergötar* from the mid-thirteenth century (*Westgöta-lagen* 1976). The addendum to the law-code includes a list of the lawmen of the region, kings of the Swedes and the bishops in Västergötland, along with brief annalistic commentaries. This text informs us that Olof (Skötkonung) was the first Christian king in 'Sweriki' and that he was baptised by Bishop Sigfrid, while King Ingi is simply referred to as a firm and fair ruler and his role in the defeat of paganism is not mentioned. It is also noteworthy that this text counts St Sigfrid as the first bishop of Sweden. Indeed, English bishops proliferate and the German bishops mentioned by Adam of Bremen are conspicuous by their absence (Hellström 1996, 144–45).

<sup>8</sup> The best introduction to the Erik literature is still Cross 1957–61. For the Latin text of Erik's *Vita*, see *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* 1818–28 2: 270–77.

(or Henry), an English bishop of Uppsala who is subsequently killed by a pagan. St Henry's own legend was also composed in the latter half of the thirteenth century (on Henry or Henrik see Dubois 2008).<sup>9</sup> So in Finland's case we see a narrative pattern that appears in the Swedish sources—a saintly English bishop who extends the boundaries of Christendom—translated to newly Christianised territories inhabited by Finns. Furthermore, the legends of St Erik and St Henry contain ideas about crusading and the proper harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*. The appearance of crusading ideology in these thirteenth-century texts is not surprising in light of the Swedish king's expansion in Finland and the Baltic in this period (Lindkvist 1996, 16–19; 2001, 124–25).

The conversion tradition in Sweden was intimately linked to the emergence of local sanctity, which in turn was bound up with the formation of local ecclesiastical identities. It is thus not attracted to the potent magnet for conversion traditions: royal or secular involvement recorded in national chronicles and histories. It is above all these elements which distinguish the traditions of Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

## Iceland

Adam of Bremen's view of Christianity in Iceland centres on one event in particular: the investiture of Iceland's first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarrson, by Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen in 1055/56. At first glance Adam appears to treat Iceland solely from the perspective of his archbishopric (*History of the Archbishops* 2002, 218):

Our metropolitan returned vast thanks to God that they had been converted in his time, even though before receiving the faith they were in what may be called their natural law, which was not much out of accord with our religion.<sup>10</sup>

The second part of this sentence indicates that Adam knew that the Commonwealth had adopted Christianity into its law in AD 999/1000. But from his point of view the conversion proper only occurred with Archbishop Adalbert's investment of Ísleifr.

Adam of Bremen mentions neither the role of King Óláfr Tryggvason nor that of the Icelandic chieftains. They constitute two of the five principal elements behind the conversion of Iceland according to Ari Þorgilsson's

<sup>9</sup> The *Vita* of St Henry can be found in *Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* 1818–28, 2: 331–43. For a modern edition see Heikkilä 2005.

<sup>10</sup> 'De quibus noster metropolitanus immensas Deo gratias retulit, quod suo tempore convertebantur, licet ante susceptam fidem naturali quadam lege non adeo discordabant a nostra religione' (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, IV 36, 273).



*Íslendingabók*, composed 1122–32. The other three elements are the diligence of the Icelandic bishops, the work of missionaries both before and after the formal acceptance of Christianity and the assembly at the *Alþing* in AD 999/1000 where Christianity was incorporated into law. This final component is at the heart of Ari's conversion account and, in fact, of *Íslendingabók* as a whole. And in light of the importance of this event it is not surprising that attempts have been made to place it within a European literary context. In particular, Gerd Wolfgang Weber's interpretation and conclusions deserve further consideration (Weber 1987, 116):

While the Alþingi's decision in 1000 AD to accept the faith appears to modern students of ancient Icelandic society to be an instance of political common sense and rationality unparalleled elsewhere, it is in reality the ingenious application of a missionary topos which Ari the historian could find in virtually all reports on the conversion of nations prior to the Icelandic one—in Adam of Bremen, in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, in Bede, in Gregory of Tours, etc.: the topos of the voluntary acceptance of Christianity on the part of the neophyte which constitutes a dogmatically important element of baptismal theory.

Weber extrapolates the European 'conversion tradition' from well-known historical works of the early Middle Ages. He divides the accounts of the baptisms of Clovis in Gregory's *Gesta Francorum* and of Edwin of Northumbria in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* into five stages which, he contends, also appear in one form or another in *Íslendingabók*: (1) A king has 'provided the Christian missionary with a chance to preach the faith among the heathen'; (2) 'the faith should actually be preached to the heathen'; (3) 'on account of its innate beauty and rationality it will appeal to the natural intelligence (*ratio*) with which God has endowed them', which leads to (4) 'acceptance of the faith' and (5) 'the king is baptised' (Weber 1987, 122).

The last three points of this list, however, cannot be easily aligned with the conversion episode in *Íslendingabók*. That Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði, the law-speaker of the assembly, used his god-given *ratio* to deduce that the Icelanders should embrace Christianity is uncontroversial. In conversion scenes all those who accept Christianity of their own accord do so partly because of the inherent truth of the religion, which they grasp by their god-given faculties. In the Scandinavian context the obvious example of this *topos*, or rather a variation of it, appears in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* which tells how Herigar, a recent recruit to Christianity and the prefect of Birka, twice attempted to convert the assembly at Birka (*Vita Anskarii* ch. 19, Rimbert 2000, 39–44). Herigar applies a *verbal* and *demonstrative* reasoning that Christianity is the only rational religion, and this is

confirmed by miraculous signs. If these two elements are not present, however, the alternative method is forced conversion, which is a relatively rare feature in medieval conversion narratives (see below).

Ari Porgilsson's account includes neither the verbal nor a demonstrative element. True, *Íslendingabók* tells that 'Gizurr and Hjalti went to the Law-Rock and announced their mission, and it is said that it was extraordinary how well they spoke (*Íslendingabók*; *Kristni saga* 2006, 8)'.<sup>11</sup> Ari is clear, however, on the point that no one embraced Christianity on account of their eloquence. On the contrary, their speeches are immediately followed by a division of the assembly into a pagan and a Christian faction. Gizurr and Hjalti literally preach to the converted, and their orations bring about a result opposite to that produced by the usual conversion speeches. Moreover, Ari does not have Þorgeirr, the law-speaker, elucidate the benefits and truths of Christianity. Þorgeirr presents a purely political reason for why the assembly should adopt Christianity into law, and in this way he certainly applies his *ratio*. But this is fundamentally different from the factors which influence kings or assemblies prior to their baptism: a verbal and miraculous demonstration of the superiority of the Christian religion over their ancestral customs. It is precisely divine inspiration or demonstration that is needed for the pagan in possession of *ratio* fully to comprehend the superiority of Christianity over paganism. A classic combination of the two appears, for instance, in the so-called *Primary Chronicle*, which was composed or compiled in Kievan Rus' a decade or so before Ari's *Íslendingabók*. The pagan Vladimir (c. 958–1015), grand-prince of Kiev, dispatches emissaries to evaluate the merits of Catholicism, Judaism and Orthodox Christianity. Using his *ratio* Vladimir opts for Orthodoxy, although he undertakes baptism only after he is divinely aided in his quest to conquer the city of Kherson and, for good measure, he is miraculously cured of his blindness (*The Russian Primary Chronicle* 1953, 96–113).

In the absence of these two key elements—the application of inborn reason and the appearance of the miraculous—any attempt to place the *Alþing* scene within a broader European tradition is inevitably fraught with difficulty.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 'En annan dag eptir gingu þeir Gizurr ok Hjalti til lögbergs ok báru þar upp erendi sín. En svá es sagt, at þat bæri frá, hvé vel þeir mæltu' *Íslendingabók-Landnámabók* 1968, 16.

<sup>12</sup> I am in agreement here with Pizarro who acknowledges that in broad terms the scene at the *Alþing* of AD 1000 can be categorised alongside 'royal conversions'. However, this 'structural analogy does not prove a source relation between Ari's and any stories of [royal conversions]' Pizarro 1985, 823.

An interpretation along those lines must of necessity employ concepts such as 'voluntary acceptance', which are so general in nature that they become almost meaningless. Accordingly, Weber's assertion that apart from the presence of a king—whose role is assumed by the *Alþing*—Ari's report 'is fully congruent with the conversion stereotype of medieval Latin historiography' cannot be upheld (Weber 1987, 123). But it by no means follows that Ari's presentation of Iceland's conversion reflects his rational view of history or his unfamiliarity with conversion narratives. Ari's principal aim was to highlight the key role of the *Alþing* in the conversion of Iceland and to show how it provided the foundation for the constitutional arrangement which prevailed at the time of writing. In this arrangement, along with the law-speaker, the bishops of Skálholt and Hólar were the only formal holders of power in Iceland, and both were of course involved in revising Ari's original version of *Íslendingabók*.

It is interesting in this context to compare Ari's account with Theodoricus monachus's presentation of Iceland's conversion in the history of the Norwegian kings which he composed around 1180 and dedicated to Archbishop Eysteinn of Nidaros (1161–88). Theodoricus—whose interest in the Icelandic constitutional arrangement was presumably limited—tells how Theobrand (Þangbrandr), the emissary of King Óláfr Tryggvason, turned the Icelanders away from paganism with his spellbinding rhetoric: 'The grace of the Holy Spirit attended the preaching of this priest to such good effect that in a short time he converted all that barbarous nation to Christ' (Theodoricus monachus 1998, 16).<sup>13</sup> Theodoricus, steeped in Christian learning, follows this verbal display with a demonstrative sign. When the Christians were outnumbered at the *Alþing* of AD 1000, a miraculous event occurred: 'by divine intervention they were so restrained that although it was only a tiny band of Christians who opposed them, they neither could nor dared to do them any harm (16)'.<sup>14</sup>

Theodoricus attributes the conversion of Iceland to King Óláfr Tryggvason, and as has been mentioned, in Ari Þorgilsson's account the king's involvement is one of the principal elements of the conversion. Although the contribution of Óláfr Tryggvason is acknowledged in *Íslendingabók*, however, the emphasis is firmly on the Icelanders, or rather the Icelandic chieftains, who adopted Christianity into law at the General Assembly.

<sup>13</sup> 'Hujus presbyteri praedicationem tam efficax gratia sancti spiritus comitata est, ut totam illam barbariem in brevi ad Christum converteret' (*Theodorici monachi* 1880, 21).

<sup>14</sup> 'sed ita sunt divinitus coerciti, ut minima manu christianorum eis obsistente nec possent nec auderent quicquam eis adversi inferre' (*Theodorici monachi* 1880, 21).

Thus the same body that elected the Icelandic bishops and which Ari eulogises in the final part of his text formally adopts the religion as law. Ari is keen to associate the law-speakers, along with the bishops, with the conversion and thus both are presented ‘as the dual upholders of a Christian polity’ (Clunies Ross 1998, 188). This goes some way to explain why Ari records the deliberations at the *Alþing* at such length. Finally, it must be stressed that Ari’s description *does not contain a scene of baptism* at the assembly. He only states that ‘it was then proclaimed in the laws that all people should be Christian, and that those in this country who had not yet been baptised should receive baptism’ (*Íslendingabók*; *Kristni Saga* 2006, 9).<sup>15</sup> Ari could easily have included a baptism scene, but chose not to do so as this would potentially have deflected attention from his principal aim of embedding the conversion deeply within the Commonwealth’s legal framework.

It is an obvious but often forgotten fact that the Icelandic *Alþing* represented the only non-sacral national political authority in early twelfth-century Christian Europe. If in the pagan era the *Alþing* had been hallowed by ancestral customs, whatever was left of its religious authority in AD 1000 disappeared with the adoption of Christianity. In the rest of Europe the baptism of a king added a new, sacral, dimension to the authority of his persona and office. Conversely, in Iceland the ‘baptism’ of the single secular authority had arguably the opposite effect. With the establishment of the second episcopal see at Hólar in 1106 the sacral authority resided in the two bishops, who were chosen by the most powerful families and who in *Íslendingabók* are the pivotal agents in the Christianisation. The secular authority, however, was devoid of divine sanctification, and this is presumably what prompted Cardinal William of Sabina, on his visit to Norway in 1247, allegedly to comment that it was unseemly for Iceland not to be ruled by a king (*Hákonar saga* 1887, 252).<sup>16</sup> In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Christian political identities which were not ruled by kings went out of their way to compensate for this by associating with the divine by ritual means. For instance, the other most notable king-less polity of the

<sup>15</sup> ‘Þá vas þat mælt í lögum, at allir menn skyldi kristnir vesa ok skírn taka, þeir es áðr váru óskírðir á landi hér’ (*Íslendingabók-Landnámabók* 1968, 17).

<sup>16</sup> As David Ashurst (2007) has argued, it is likely that the words are those of Sturla Þórðarson rather than William of Sabina and moreover, that they echo a passage in 1 Samuel 8 which deals with the transference of power among the Israelites from the Judges to a king. As I see it, this interpretation supports the understanding that William’s words relate to the concept of divine sanction of authority rather than simply the absence of a king.

period, the Venetian republic, adopted St Mark as its eternal patron and, in theory, the Doge received his authority from the Pope (see e.g. Fenlon 2008, 9–47). Although no such celestial sanctification was available to the Icelandic Commonwealth, Ari Þorgilsson could sanctify the General Assembly and the constitutional arrangement with lustre and legitimacy through his authoritative account. In *Íslendingabók* the law is in effect baptised by the Icelandic élite and a Norwegian king who is associated—at least in the late twelfth-century sources—with sanctity. In other words, the uniqueness of Ari Þorgilsson's account of the conversion reflects the singularity of the political and religious environment within which he worked.

In the late twelfth century Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson, both monks in the Benedictine abbey of Þingeyrar, highlighted one element in Ari's conversion narrative: the involvement of Óláfr Tryggvason. In Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* the king is depicted as God's agent in converting Norway as well as the North Atlantic and indeed Northern Europe as a whole (see e.g. Duke 2001, 156). He is thus portrayed as playing an important role in turning Grand Duke Vladimir of Rus' to Christianity and aiding Otto I's forced conversion of King Harald Bluetooth of Denmark (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 171–74). Oddr hence places King Óláfr Tryggvason's role in the conversion of Iceland within a broad supra-national context. Moreover, through the association of Iceland with Óláfr Tryggvason, its inhabitants are brought into a closer affiliation with the inheritor of his missionary mantle, the greatest saint of the North, St Óláfr Haraldsson (Oddr Snorrason 2003, 35):

Hear me, oh Christian brothers and fathers! I assert before God and the saints that it gladdens me to exalt the most beneficent king Olaf Tryggvason, and gladly would I honor him with my words. You too should honor King Olaf, who is the root of your salvation and baptism and of all your welfare, the namesake of Saint Olaf, King Olaf Haraldsson, who then built up and adorned Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

This passage is particularly poignant in light of the fact that at the end of the twelfth century Icelandic ecclesiastics were still scouring the horizon for their first native saint.

<sup>17</sup> 'Heyri þér, bræðr enir kristnu ok feðr! Því játi ek fyrir Guði ok helgum mönnum at mik gleðr dýrð at vinna enum heilsamligsta Óláfi konungi Tryggvasoni, ok gjarna vilda ek hans veg vinna með mínum orðum. Slíkt sama gæri þér veg Óláfi konungi, er undirrót er yðarrar hjálpar ok skírnar ok alls farnaðar, ok samnafna ens helga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar, er þá kristni timbraði upp ok fegrði' (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 125).

But the monks of Þingeyrar Abbey were far from being the final interpreters of Iceland's conversion. The thirteenth-century sagas show that although Ari Þorgilsson had presented a general parameter for the conversion of Iceland, later authorities were able to emphasise or downplay different aspects of it. Moreover, two new elements were added to the Christianisation story: the localisation of the conversion experience and the miraculous. Both appear in *Kristni saga*, which was composed around the middle of the thirteenth century and which, it should be noted, is the only Scandinavian work solely dedicated to the conversion. The saga retains Ari's five-part schema but focuses to an even greater extent on the involvement of the Icelanders in the conversion at the expense of King Óláfr Tryggvason. As Siân Grønlie has observed, Icelanders from all four Quarters are brought to the fore and not exclusively the narrow élite of the Southern Quarter with whom Ari is principally concerned. The influence of European hagiographic and conversion traditions is also evident in *Kristni saga*'s descriptions of miracles and its extolling of Christianity over paganism (*Íslendingabók-Kristni saga* 2006, xxxvii–xlvi).

The more expansive treatment of the subject in *Kristni saga* does not necessarily suggest that its author was more familiar with European conversion traditions than Ari Þorgilsson had been. Rather, the different perspectives adopted by the two authors reflect the different political and religious environment which prevailed at the time of composition of each. The political (and ecclesiastical) landscape of the mid-thirteenth century had changed considerably since Ari's day. With the emergence of regional lordships in the first half of the thirteenth century, the constitutional arrangements of the Commonwealth had effectively become defunct and, furthermore, the authority and prestige of the bishops had been severely curtailed. In the thirteenth century it is also possible to sense a fear of Norwegian intervention which could possibly explain the diminished role of the Norwegian king in the conversion process (Duke 2001, 250–51). Set against this background the author's emphasis on the participation of Icelanders from all four Quarters in achieving the ultimate goal, the Christianisation of Iceland, must have resonated in a society rife with civil strife. But still the one constant was the *Alþing* of AD 1000 which provided the Icelandic conversion tradition with a gravitational centre to which other narratives, such as the celebrated conversion episode in *Njáls saga*, were drawn.

Thus with the decreasing importance of the *Alþing* and the constitutional set-up of the Commonwealth in the course of the thirteenth century, it is not surprising that local initiatives and concerns came increasingly to the fore in the conversion narrative. For instance, at the beginning of *Íslendingabók*,

Ari notes that the first settlers of Iceland found Christian relics which the Irish *papar* had left behind. This reference could indeed be interpreted as Ari's attempt to hallow the whole of Iceland as a Christian country from the beginning of human habitation (Clunies Ross 1998, 145). Ari's near contemporary, the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle*, certainly applied this method when he described how St Andrew had erected a cross among the pagan Slavs on the site where Christian Kiev would eventually arise (*The Russian Primary Chronicle* 1953, 53–54). In later Icelandic sources, however, this sanctification of the land is localised to specific centres of Christianity rather than to Iceland as a whole. Thus *Landnámabók* ('The Book of Settlements') records that Irish monks had lived at Kirkjubær á Síðu, where a Benedictine monastery was founded in 1186, and that no pagans had lived there since (*Íslendingabók-Landnámabók* 1968, 324–25).

## Norway

Óláfr Tryggvason, the ruler most closely associated with the conversion of Norway in the Scandinavian sources, is portrayed in less than flattering terms in Adam's *GHEP*. The work tells of his baptism in England and notes that he was the first king to preach the Gospel in Norway. Still, Óláfr's adherence to Christianity is suspect and he ends his life effectively as an apostate (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II 40–44, 100–01). Otherwise Adam of Bremen has little to say about the involvement of his archbishopric in Norway, for the country had effectively been outside the orbit of Hamburg-Bremen in the ninth and tenth centuries. St Óláfr, on the other hand, is presented as a pious king who effectively establishes Christianity in Norway; his death is described as a martyrdom for the faith. Óláfr's half-brother, Haraldr harðráði (1042–66), is depicted as an enemy of the religion and a persecutor of Christians (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II 17, 159–60). But the positive view of the state of Christianity in Norway following Haraldr's death at Stamford Bridge in 1066 suggests that Adam expected Hamburg-Bremen to enjoy good relations with King Óláfr kyrri (1067–93) (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, IV 31–32, 263–65). Not surprisingly, therefore, *GHEP* had, at least from the point of view of content, a limited influence on Norwegian (and Icelandic) descriptions of the Christianisation of Norway.

The earliest native accounts attribute the conversion of Norway and the North Atlantic to just two kings, Óláfr Tryggvason (995–1000) and Óláfr Haraldsson (1015–28/30). The depiction of Óláfr Tryggvason as the missionary king *par excellence* appears in the earliest Norwegian histories, the so-called Norwegian synoptics—the Latin *Historia Norwegiae*,



Theodoricus's *Historia Antiquitate regum Norwegiensium* and the Old Norse *Ágrip*—which probably all date from the second half of the twelfth century. These texts, which are organised around the reigns of the Norwegian kings, are interrelated, although precisely in what manner has not been conclusively established (Andersson 1985, 200–11). Theodoricus monachus can certainly be associated with the archbishopric of Nidaros, and the author of *Ágrip* is likely to have had close ties with or even resided in Trondheim. The background of the Norwegian author of *Historia Norwegiae* is, however, less clear. One interpretation links the work's composition with the establishment of the archbishopric of Trondheim in 1152/53, while a more convincing interpretation locates the author in other centres of learning in Norway (or even Denmark). This said, as Lars Boje Mortensen observes, the work 'must have been conceived in government circles, episcopal, royal, or both, in Norway in the second half of the twelfth century' (*Historia Norwegie* 2003, 24; for a good overview of the scholarly debate see *History of Norway* 2001, ix–xxv). It is also quite possible that Adam of Bremen's episcopal history served as a model for the structure of *Historia Norwegiae*. The geographical introduction can thus be seen as mirroring Adam's missionary map of the North (*Historia Norwegie* 2003, 17). The emphasis on the role of the two Óláfrs in the Christianisation of Norway can therefore be interpreted as the author's response to Adam's promotion of Hamburg-Bremen as the main agent of conversion in general and to his ambiguous portrayal of Óláfr Tryggvason in particular.

There is no reason to conclude that Óláfr Tryggvason's missionary profile was the invention of these early Norwegian authors. Apart from Óláfr's role in *Íslendingabók*, the king's burning of soothsayers apparently figured in the lost *Royal Chronicle* of Sæmundr fróði (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 232) and the skaldic poems of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld attest to his missionary reputation around the turn of the first millennium (Bagge 2006, 481). This pre-existing missionary image was upheld in both Norwegian and Icelandic texts and was adapted to prevailing political and ecclesiastical concerns and undoubtedly augmented in the process. Thus in both Theodoricus monachus's work and the anonymous *Historia Norwegiae*, the king's pivotal role in converting both Norway and the North Atlantic colonies is clearly aligned with the interests of both the newly-founded archbishopric of Nidaros and the Norwegian crown, since both claimed the region as their preserve. Moreover, as already noted, Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson emphasised Óláfr's part in Iceland's conversion and thus, in the absence of a native saint, placed the conversion of the country within a larger salvific context.



The portrayal of the other Óláfr as a missionary king enhanced the prestige of the archbishopric of Nidaros, where his relics were kept, as well as the royal authority which could bask in the martyr's reflected glory.<sup>18</sup> The second half of the twelfth century saw the relaunching of St Óláfr's cult which followed the establishment of the Nidaros archbishopric in 1152/53. This was also the period when the Norwegian king adopted the ideology of the *rex iustus* and *rex dei gratia* (see e.g. Orning 2008, 57–68). The two indeed were conjoined in the reign of Magnús Erlingsson (1161–84), who presented himself as the vassal of St Óláfr who, in turn, was depicted in official documents as *rex perpetuus Norvegiae*.

The missionary tradition regarding St Óláfr appears to have subtly shifted in the second half of the twelfth century. From skaldic poetry, and particularly the verses of Sighvatr Þórðarson, it is evident that there was a tradition about Óláfr as a king who had conquered and Christianised regions such as Upland (*Oppland*) and imposed Christian laws in the whole of Norway. There is scant evidence, however, that this missionary element formed an important part of Óláfr's saintly image. The two skaldic poems which specifically focus on Óláfr's sanctity, Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* from 1032 and Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*, composed on the occasion of the establishment of the Norwegian archbishopric, hardly mention St Óláfr's missionary effort: his sanctity is firmly based on the miraculous potency of his relics. With the active promotion of Óláfr's cult in the second half of the twelfth century, however, Norwegian authors were confronted with the task of explaining Óláfr's sanctity to a non-Scandinavian audience. Now it was advantageous to downplay the image of Óláfr as an aggressive king who converted by force, and instead to highlight his peaceful preaching, eradication of apostasy and, more generally, the life of the saint as one of suffering and persecution.

This is most obvious in the *Passio Olavi*, which was probably composed in the 1170s by Eysteinn of Nidaros or at least under the archbishop's tutelage. *Passio Olavi* aimed to promote Óláfr Haraldsson's saintly status to an audience outside Norway, as is suggested both by the introduction to the work (see below) and the preservation of its two principal manuscript witnesses in England and Flanders. The short *Passio* portrays King Óláfr Haraldsson as the pivotal figure in the conversion of Norway. Indeed the text throws Óláfr's missionary achievement into stark relief by altogether ignoring the contribution of his royal predecessors. Until the second half

<sup>18</sup> For an extensive overview of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century tradition on King Óláfr Haraldsson, see Bagge 2010.

of the twelfth century, King Óláfr's claim to sanctity had primarily rested on the miracles performed through him at the Nidaros shrine, and some of these are recorded in the *miracula* that accompany the *Passio Olavi*. The author of the *Passio Olavi*, however, broadens Óláfr's profile by depicting him as the converter of Norway who in the end suffers martyrdom for that cause. Óláfr 'played an apostle's part and he, the ruler, himself preached the Grace of the word of Christ to all people far and wide' (*History of Norway* 2001, 27).<sup>19</sup> The emphasis is on the king's peaceful preaching of the Gospel, which he undertakes with the help of foreign missionaries. To an outsider, ignorant of Norwegian history, the very opening of the *Passio* enforces this perception (*History of Norway* 2001, 26):

When the illustrious King Óláfr ruled in Norway, a vast country located towards the north and having Denmark to the south, there entered into that land the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things. The peoples of that country, previously subject to the ungodly rites of idolatry and deluded by superstitious error, now heard of the worship and faith of the true God—heard indeed, but many scorned to accept.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting that this missionary image of Óláfr's sanctity had indeed been presented a century earlier in the work of a foreigner, namely Adam of Bremen.

The ambiguity towards Óláfr's missionary image can be observed, albeit only faintly, in the ways in which Theodoricus in his *History* and the anonymous author of *Historia Norwegiae* present his role in the Christianisation. The latter explicitly proclaims the conversion of Norway as one of its principal themes, aiming to describe 'the full extent of this wide-flung region, to recreate the genealogy of its rulers and to reveal both the arrival of Christianity and the expulsion of heathendom, with the present situation of each' (*Historia Norwegie* 2003, 51).<sup>21</sup> *Historia Norwegiae* then divides the honour of converting the country between the two Óláfrs. The first

<sup>19</sup> 'Et nouo rerum ordine rex apostoli uice fungens, ipse dux uerbi Christi gratiam passim omnibus predicabat' (*Passio et Miracula Beati Olai* 1881, 68–69).

<sup>20</sup> 'Regnante illustrissimo rege olauo apud Noruuegiam, que est terra pregrandis, versus aquilonem locata, a meridie daciam habens, eandem ingressi sunt terram pedes euuangelizantium pacem, euuangelizantium bona. Hactenus sacrilleges ydolorum mancipate ritibus, et supersticiosi erroribus deluse, nationes ille ueri dei cultum et fidem audierant; audierant quidem, set multi suscipere contemperant' (*Passio et Miracula Beati Olai* 1881, 67).

<sup>21</sup> 'Estenim[mihi]imperitogruissarcinasitumlatissimeregionis[ci]rcumquaque discribere eiusque rectorum genealogiam retexere et aduentum christianitatis simul et paganismi fugam ac utriusque statum exponere' (*Historia Norwegie* 2003, 50).

Óláfr ‘brought all those of his compatriots who lived along the seaboard into union with the King of Kings’ (95).<sup>22</sup> Although the single manuscript witness of the *Historia Norwegiae* terminates with Óláfr Haraldsson’s arrival in Norway in 1015, it seems certain that the latter part of the work must have dealt with the king’s completion of the conversion by force. Theodoricus monachus, on the other hand, presents Óláfr Tryggvason as having already achieved this outcome by the time of St Óláfr’s arrival. Theodoricus essentially depicts the latter Óláfr as a peacemaker and a law-maker who is martyred for the cause of justice. In this respect Theodoricus is closer to the *Passio Olavi*, which is of course not surprising considering that he dedicated his work to Archbishop Eysteinn of Nidaros. It is arguably the more ‘secular’ texts that display scant concern about St Óláfr’s violent missionary methods. Thus the Norwegian *Fagrskinna* (c.1220) which, it has been argued, presents the only ‘truly secular perspective on Óláfr’s history’ (Finlay in *Fagrskinna* 2004, 9; see also Phelpstead 2007, 128), tells that the king ‘set such store by all men being Christian in his kingdom that it was necessary either to lose one’s life or leave the country, or as a third choice accept baptism, in accordance with the king’s command’ (*Fagrskinna* 2004, 142–43).<sup>23</sup> It was, however, quite possible for one and the same work to express contradictory views about St Óláfr’s missionary methods (see below).

St Óláfr’s part in the conversion could not but enhance the prestige of the Norwegian monarchy. In fact in the medieval corpus the unification of the country under the rule of one king and the spread of Christianity are generally presented as two sides of the same coin. Moreover, through the portrayal of Óláfr Haraldsson as Óláfr Tryggvason’s divinely appointed successor, the former effectively inherited the achievements of his predecessor. As has often been pointed out, Óláfr Tryggvason could be seen as the king who both foreshadowed and paved the way for St Óláfr’s final conversion of Norway (Zernack 1998; Lönnroth 2000). The reigns of the two kings define the temporal parameters of the Norwegian conversion: it commences with the arrival of Óláfr Tryggvason in Norway in 995 and culminates with the death of his saintly namesake some thirty-five years later.

The neat confinement of the conversion period to 995–1030 is complicated by the figure of King Hákon (c.920–61), the son of Haraldr hárfagri,

<sup>22</sup> ‘Interim Olauus Regi regum reconsilians omnes compatriotos suos in maritimis’ (*Historia Norwegie* 2003, 94).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Óláfr konungr lagði svá mikla stund á þat, at menn skyldi allir kristnir vera í hans ríki, at annat hvárt skyldi láta líf eða fara ór landi, þriðja kosti taka skírni, eptir því sem konungr bauð’ (*Fagrskinna* 1984, 178).

who, according to the sagas, was fostered at the court of King Athelstan. Adam of Bremen refers to a certain King Hákon who was restored to his throne with the aid of Harald Bluetooth, which made him well disposed towards Christianity (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II:23, 84). Here, Adam appears to conflate this Hákon with Earl Hákon of Lade (c.971–95) while associating Danish, and by association German, influence with the early history of Christianity in Norway. Hákon's attempt to convert his kingdom receives scant attention in the earliest Norwegian works. *Historia Norwegiae* presents him as an apostate, while Theodoricus says nothing of Hákon's attempt to uphold the religion prior to his demise and death at the battle of Fitjar. In both of these early Norwegian works the country is essentially a religious wasteland prior to the arrival of the two Óláfrs on the scene. Hákon's Christianity first receives more than a passing mention in *Ágrip*, a Norwegian work from around the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century. *Ágrip* relates how Hákon built churches and turned some of his subjects to Christianity and further explains that the Tronder rebelled against the king when they felt their ancient customs to be under threat; Hákon duly caved in to their demands but kept his religion (*Ágrip* 2008, 11). This story pattern was later adopted and elaborated in *Fagrskinna* and Snorri's *Heimskringla*.

The sagas' accounts of Hákon's frustrated attempts to promote Christianity can be interpreted as a false start: the time of salvation had not arrived and hence his efforts were doomed to failure (Weber 1987, 111–13). They may also reflect the saga authors' wish to emphasise the failure of an admirable king in order to place the achievement of the Óláfrs in even starker relief. Moreover, it is worth noting that the two early Latin Norwegian works—both arguably composed from the perspective of the Norwegian ecclesiastical establishment—ignore Hákon's religious affiliation and emphasise his apostasy. Thus both *Historia Norwegiae* and Theodoricus's *Historia Antiquitate* refrain from casting any shadow over the reputations of the two Óláfrs who are presented as the first Christian kings of Norway (Bagge 2004).

The strength of this Norwegian tradition is partly explained by the incorporation of Óláfr Haraldsson's sanctity, which in turn bestowed legitimacy on the two pillars of the kingdom: royal authority and the archbishopric. The 'mythopoeic moment' of this tradition is the martyrdom of King Óláfr at Stiklestad in 1030, an event which represents both the culmination and the termination of the Norwegian conversion and assures the kingdom's place within salvation history. Óláfr Tryggvason's strong association with the conversion was essentially incorporated into the story of Óláfr

Haraldsson to highlight the latter's sanctity further. Consequently Óláfr Tryggvason's saintly status is rather ambiguous, for he uses forceful methods of conversion and his fate after the battle of Svolder is uncertain. All these elements were merged in Óláfr Haraldsson, who is certainly a saint and employs a different method of conversion, and whose relics are physically present in Nidaros Cathedral.

### The North-Atlantic Colonies and Gotland

The conversion traditions of the Norse lands outside the principal countries—Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland—can be arranged on a spectrum of Norwegian royal involvement. At one end of the spectrum is the earldom of Orkney. Both *Orkneyinga saga* and Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar* record that the Orkney earl was baptised only after Óláfr Tryggvason had threatened to kill his son (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 211–12; *Orkneyinga saga* 1965, 26). In *Grœnlendinga saga* Leifr Eiríksson converts Greenland at the command of the Norwegian king (*Grœnlendinga saga* 1935, 415). These two texts emphasise the extension of the Norwegian *imperium* to the Norse regions of the North Atlantic but give little indication of the ambiguous relations between the local élite and Óláfr Tryggvason, which is such an important feature of the Icelandic conversion tradition.

The conversion of the Faroes, as reported in the Icelandic *Færeyinga saga* which is traditionally dated to around 1200, has ostensibly much in common with the Greenlandic tradition: the isles are Christianised at the behest of Óláfr Tryggvason's chosen envoy and with the limited participation of the local élite. But *Færeyinga saga* traces a more complex interchange between the Norwegian king and the conversion of the isles. As already observed, Óláfr Tryggvason prefigures St Óláfr in both the Norwegian and the Icelandic literary traditions. A variant of the same idea is adopted by the Icelandic author of *Færeyinga saga*, who embeds it within the narrative in an especially inventive manner. Chapter 29 describes how Sigmundr Brestisson, who along with Þrándr from Gata is the most powerful figure in the Faroes, is summoned to the court of the Norwegian king (*Færeyinga saga* 2006, 68–70); earlier in the saga we are told that in athletic prowess Sigmundr alone could rival Óláfr Tryggvason in the North (29). The king delivers a remarkable monologue in which he draws parallels between his own and Sigmundr's lives. Both men had been forced as children to flee to foreign lands, from Norway and the Faroes respectively, to escape enemies who perceived them as threats to their own standing. Both were saved by strangers and fought

to regain their patrimony.<sup>24</sup> Óláfr then claims that just as he had brought Christianity to Norway following his extended exile abroad, Sigmundr should now receive baptism and convert the Faroes. Sigmundr heeds the king's command, but in order to achieve his goal must bully the Faroese chieftains into submission. Sigmundr's earthly glory, like that of his Norwegian patron, is short-lived and he is finally overwhelmed by his enemies and suffers violent death.

Through this ingenious narrative ploy the conversion of the Faroes is effected by a native hero whose life is both foreshadowed by and synchronised with the career of a fabled missionary king. In the absence of a native saint, through the double association with the semi-saintly Óláfr Tryggvason and the heroic and martyr-like Sigmundr, *Færeyinga saga* adds a dimension to the Christianisation which is absent from other conversion accounts about Norse-Atlantic settlements. It is likely that the author is here shaping a written, learned, tradition rather than relying on local tradition.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the career of Sigmundr Brestisson, whose formative years are conspicuously associated with pre-Christian tradition, is given a Christian gloss by an author who was intimately familiar with Óláfr Tryggvason's missionary reputation.

In Icelandic and Norwegian texts, King Óláfr Tryggvason converts Orkney by force, whereas he introduces Christianity to Greenland and the Faroes with the aid of chosen emissaries. Both Leifr and Sigmundr receive Christianity directly from the Norwegian king, although as we have just seen, the status of Sigmundr is elevated by his special association with Óláfr Tryggvason. In the Icelandic conversion tradition the chieftains are also baptised at the king's court and it is only at Óláfr's prompting that the religion is adopted into law in AD 1000. But in another sense the Icelandic tradition stands apart from those of Greenland, Orkney and the Faroes in as much as it was composed by natives rather than outsiders.

In this respect the Gotlandic conversion tradition, as recorded in the so-called *Guta saga*, can be placed alongside the Icelandic tradition. The saga, written in Gotland in the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century, records that the exiled King Óláfr Haraldsson came to Gotland and

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of this speech see Harris 1986. There are undeniably notable parallels between their respective main opponents, Earl Hákon of Lade and Þrándr of Gata.

<sup>25</sup> As argued by Ólafur Halldórsson, the caveat must be made here that the speech is likely to represent a later addition to the saga, although relying on Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and Snorri Sturluson's *Separate Saga of St Óláfr* (*Færeyinga saga* 1987, x-xvii).

exchanged gifts with prominent local magnates. More importantly, King Óláfr baptised a chieftain who subsequently built a chapel on the island (*Guta Saga* 1999, 8–9). Christianity is here given by the king in return for services rendered, namely, the hospitality of the Gotlanders. St Óláfr's role in the saga is clearly intended to add prestige to a conversion which is otherwise ascribed to the local élite. *Guta saga* recounts how long before Óláfr's arrival the Gotlanders had become acquainted with Christianity: 'the merchants saw Christian customs in Christian lands. Some of them then allowed themselves to be baptised, and brought priests to Gotland' (9).<sup>26</sup> In all of this the Swedish king is conspicuous by his absence. *Guta saga* thus emphasises the Gotlandic magnates' voluntary acceptance of Christianity whilst a peerless royal saint, whose cult featured prominently in the Gotlandic religious landscape (Blomkvist 2005, 382, 386), provides an element of sanctity to a conversion tradition that is firmly entrenched in the historical myth defining Gotlandic political identity. As has been observed, the conversion narrative in *Guta saga* represents a 'wonderful example of a legalism that characterises the entire Gotlandic medieval culture' (Blomkvist 2005, 386). The similarities with Ari's depiction of the conversion of Iceland need hardly be elaborated on.

### Conversion by Force

The author of *Guta saga* goes out of his way to emphasise the voluntary conversion and political independence of Gotland (*Guta saga* 1999, 10):

Síþan gutar sagu kristna manna síði, þa lydu þeir Guz þuði ok lerþra manna kennu. Toku þa almennilika víþr kristindomi miþ síelfs vilia sinum utan þuang, so at engin þuang þaim til kristnur.<sup>27</sup>

Christianity, or rather baptism, is here received willingly, just as gifts are exchanged between free men. In both *Guta saga* and Ari's *Íslendingabók* the adoption of Christianity is steeped in the ethos of gift exchange: the Icelandic chieftains who are the courtiers of Óláfr Tryggvason receive baptism in return for their services, very much as St Óláfr repays the hospitality of the Gotlanders by baptising prominent chieftains. But gift exchange does not imply parity between those involved but rather a shared

<sup>26</sup> 'Þa sagu kaupmenn kristna síði i kristnum landum. Þa litu sumir sik þar kristna ok fyrþu til Gutlanz presti' (*Guta saga* 1999, 8).

<sup>27</sup> 'After the Gotlanders saw the customs of Christian people, they then obeyed God's command and the teaching of priests. Then they received Christianity generally, of their own free will, without duress; that is no one forced them into Christianity' (*Guta saga* 1999, 11).

recognition of the status of the participants. Thus in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* the court poet, Hallfreðr, acquires his nickname *vandræðaskáld*, or 'Troublesome Poet', for his impertinent request to be sponsored for baptism by the Norwegian king. Earlier in the same saga the same Óláfr is eager to preside over Kjartan's baptism because of the Iclander's prowess (an episode which also appears in *Kristni saga*) (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 243–45).

The baptism of the Icelandic chieftains at the court of Óláfr Tryggvason can be compared to the familiar act of a powerful ruler baptising a lesser or subservient leader. King Guthrum's baptism at the behest of King Alfred, and Louis the Pious presiding over the baptism of the Danish king, Harald Klak, in 826 (see below) spring to mind. Accordingly, in *Kristni saga* the 'lesser ruler' is represented by the chieftains Gizurr and Hjalti, who effect the official conversion of Iceland which had been unsuccessfully attempted by foreigners. But, as the cases of Guthrum and Harald Klak illustrate, there is a fine dividing line between receiving a gift and supplication.<sup>28</sup> And this evidently preyed on the minds of some Icelandic authors, for several of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sagas (or *þættir*) downplay or even ignore the role of the Norwegian king. For instance, *Þáttr Þiðranda ok Þórhalls* (which is found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, c.1300, but records a narrative that is probably of much earlier provenance), describes how the noble pagan Þiðrandi is killed by heathen *fylgjur* (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 418–21). A convincing analysis of this short saga, which in *Flateyjarbók* precedes the account of Þangbrandr's mission to Iceland, concludes that

the Iceland depicted in the *þáttr* is one whose virtue is largely independent of the efforts of the kingdom to the east, an image which could well have been attractive to Icelanders for whom the Commonwealth was still sharp in memory (Kaplan 2000, 387).

It has even been argued that the adoption of Christianity by the Icelandic *Alþing* led in time to the emergence of a sort of 'Freiheit Mythos', where the voluntary acceptance of Christianity underlined Icelandic religious and political freedom from Norway (Weber 1981). In this context one could even argue that Snorri Sturluson's depiction of how the Óláfrs forced Christianity upon the Norwegians reflects his ambiguous attitude towards the encroachment of the Crown in Icelandic affairs (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, 224). This may well have been the attitude of some authors dealing

<sup>28</sup> Indeed Harald Klak's baptism in 826 appears to have 'fatally compromised him in the eyes of his fellow rulers' in Denmark (Coupland 2003, 90).



with the conversion, but it should be noted that contrary cases can also be found. Thus in *Pórhalls þáttr knapps*, King Óláfr Tryggvason appears to Þórhallr in a dream-vision and tells him to build a church. Þórhallr, a well-respected pagan who has been suffering from illness, tears down his pagan temple to the chagrin of the local heathens. Shortly thereafter Þórhallr is baptised at the *Alþing* of AD 1000 and is miraculously relieved of his bodily affliction (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 439–41). Here the Norwegian king plays a direct role in the conversion of an Icelander within Iceland prior to the official conversion.

In *Færeyinga saga* the two concepts just discussed—the forced conversion and gift-exchange—arrestingly coalesce around the brutal killing of the saga's hero, the Sigmundr Brestisson mentioned earlier. Sigmundr convenes an assembly in the Faroes at which he, as Óláfr Tryggvason's liegeman, orders those present to adopt Christianity. This plan is wrecked by the wily old Þrándr of Gata whose conservative and anti-Christian character dominates the saga. Following the assembly Sigmundr surprises Þrándr with overwhelming force and offers him two options: he can adopt Christianity or lose his life. Þrándr chooses the former, which allows Sigmundr to convert all the Faroese. In a subsequent assembly scene Þrándr rehearses his various grievances against Sigmundr. Of all the outstanding issues between them the forced conversion is the one which most rankles with Þrándr. Thereafter, at the Norwegian court, King Óláfr Tryggvason asks Sigmundr to give him the golden ring which he had acquired from the pagan Earl Hákon of Lade. Sigmundr refuses and Óláfr, greatly angered, foretells that this ring will bring about his death. The saga notes that the relationship between the two never recovered from this exchange. The ring is patently a token of Sigmundr's pagan past which he is unwilling to relinquish, but there is also a sense here that the unwritten rules of gift exchange have been broken. This scene foreshadows Sigmundr's brutal killing where the ring plays a fateful role (*Færeyinga saga* 2006, 76–86).

Sigmundr's slaying can thus be seen as an enforced atonement for the brutality of Þrándr's conversion. This interpretation is particularly apposite in light of Óláfr Tryggvason's speech comparing his own life with Sigmundr's. There was a notable tradition in the Middle Ages, first recorded by Oddr Snorrason, that Óláfr had survived the battle of Svolder and embarked on pilgrimage to the Holy Land where he spent the rest of his life in a monastery (Cohen 1995). The coda to Óláfr's life is a sustained act of expiation for the Viking lifestyle of his youth. But, more importantly, it can be seen as atonement for the necessary but sinful way in which he converted the North. As an older and wiser Óláfr Tryggvason

admits in *Ólafs saga in mesta* ('the Greatest saga of St Olaf'), 'for though King Óláfr did some good deeds, he was guilty of many sins' (*The Saga of King Olaf Tryggvason* 1895, 468).<sup>29</sup> Sigmundur, on the other hand, is not allowed to atone for his sins while alive, and accordingly it is only in death that the careers of the two heroes diverge.

The medieval Scandinavian sources generally portray forced conversion in a negative manner. Thus, as previously noted, some twelfth-century authors were concerned to avoid compromising Óláfr Haraldsson's saintly status by associating him too closely with violent proselytising. Instead they emphasise Óláfr's preaching and his ability to demonstrate to the pagans the superiority of Christianity. The *Passio Olavi* does admittedly recount how the king had idols 'smashed, sacred groves felled, temples overthrown' (*History of Norway* 2001, 28). But this takes place within the context of an otherwise peaceful mission. In the Norwegian so-called *Legendary Saga of St Óláfr*, composed around the turn of the twelfth to the thirteenth century, the king converts by preaching and miraculous display, most memorably perhaps in the episode of Dala-Guðbrandr (*Olafs saga hins helga* 1982, 82–92; Andersson 1988). In Óláfr's dealings with another pagan, Earl Valgarðr of Götaland, the king explicitly states that it is best if people are not forced to adopt Christianity (*Olafs saga hins helga* 1982, 120). This particular episode is told in more detail in the Icelandic *Egils þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar*, which features in *Flateyjarbók*, in which St Óláfr delivers a set-piece speech where he vigorously sets out his hostility to forced conversion (*Egils þáttur Síðu-Hallssonar* 1991, 390). Indeed, Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, the editors of the *þáttur* in *Íslensk fornrit*, went so far as to suggest that it was composed around 1200 with the specific purpose of illustrating the wrongfulness of compulsory conversion (clxxviii). Nevertheless the author of the *Legendary Saga* has to concede that the king had on occasions to 'beat to improvement' recalcitrant Norwegian farmers.<sup>30</sup> It therefore does not seem quite correct to claim that the saga writers were 'totally convinced of the validity of such royal endeavours' (Pizarro 1985, 819). Indeed, in this and other cases the same author may have had conflicting opinions about forced conversion or, if such methods were unavoidable, he could always present the king's action in the best possible light.

<sup>29</sup> 'þvíat þo at Olafur konungr gerði nôckur goð verk. þa gerði hann þo margar syndir' (*Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* 1958–2000, 2: 344).

<sup>30</sup> 'Oc brann lutr boandanna við oc rukcu bænnðr undan oc fell mart manna firir þeim oc varo barðer til batnaðar' (*Olafs saga hins helga* 1982, 92).

Thus in Sweden the author of *Vita Erici*—undoubtedly working with a less powerful tradition than St Óláfr’s biographers—demonstrates that the Swedish royal saint did everything possible to avoid using compulsion to convert the Finns. King Erik leads an expedition to Finland but, according to the *Vita*, before engaging the pagans ‘the faith of Christ was first revealed to them [the Finns] and peace offered to them’ (Cross 1957–61). The Finns refuse this offer and ‘rebel’, which provides Erik and his follower with an excuse to ‘avenge the blood of Christ’,<sup>31</sup> a turn of phrase intimately associated with crusading ideology, especially in relation to attacks on Jews (Riley-Smith 2005, 23–25). King Erik is distraught after crushing the Finns and prays to God to forgive him for killing so many pagans before they could attain salvation. This episode interestingly combines ideas of crusading and the ambiguity associated with conversion through force.

In *Kjartans þáttur Ólafssonar*, also in *Flateyjarbók*, forced conversion is also an issue where, somewhat unexpectedly, it is Óláfr Tryggvason who describes it in negative terms (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 308–16; see also Rowe 2005, 189). The *þáttur* tells how Kjartan Ólafsson refuses to be coerced into baptism but later adopts it of his own accord after the following words from the king:

I will not constrain you at this present time to accept Christianity; for the living God, the king of heaven, accepts service which is freely and willingly offered, and into his glory no unwilling person may enter.<sup>32</sup>

The Icelandic author of the *þáttur* clearly had strong views on forced conversion. The issue is raised more subtly in Oddr Snorrason’s saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, where the king’s arrival on the isle of Moster in 995/96 follows immediately after his brutal conversion of Earl Sigurðr of Orkney. In a vision St Martin appears to Óláfr and informs him that if the king is willing to honour his memory he will aid him in convincing the Norwegians of the superiority of Christianity over paganism. The following day at an assembly Óláfr speaks with skill and fluency, but the pagans, who are in the majority, are miraculously unable to respond (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 212–14). From this scene onwards, which undeniably resembles Theodoricus’s account of the conversion of Iceland (see above), Óláfr Tryggvason confines his harsh methods largely to soothsayers and semi-pagans.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Ipsosque fide Christi prius oblata ac pace exhibita renitentes et rebelles in ultionem sanguinis Christiani manu valida aggreditur ac bello devictos victor prostravit’ (*Scriptores rerum Suecicarum* 1818–28, 2: 274).

<sup>32</sup> ‘skal ek ydr ekki pynta til kristni at sinne þuiat lifande gud himna konungr þiggr sealfrada ok vilianliga þionustu ok kemzst æingi madr naudigr til hans dyrdar’ (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 313).

Following the king's own baptism he had both a right and duty to convert his kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Force was indeed the only proper method against those who had once accepted the religion but had subsequently apostasised. In the early thirteenth-century *Legendary saga of St Óláfr* the king threatens the inhabitants of Uppland who had reverted to paganism with death if they refuse Christianity (*Olafs saga hins helga* 1982, 162–64). According to Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* Niels, king of Denmark (1104–34), requested help from King Sigurðr of Norway (c.1103–30) to Christianise the people of Småland 'for the people who dwelt there had no regard for Christianity, although some of them had allowed themselves to be baptised.'<sup>34</sup> Snorri adopted this episode from the Norwegian *Ágrip* where only a part of the account has survived. Here the application of force against this Swedish region is justified on the grounds that the inhabitants had formally taken the faith yet kept their old ways, and were thus effectively apostates—whose gruesome fate in the saga corpus is well-known. Two obvious examples are the disembowelling of Bróðir following the Battle of Clontarf in *Njáls saga* and the slave's killing of Earl Hákon of Lade in the pig-sty. In both cases apostates come to an ignominious end and their punishment is prescribed by biblical or hagiographic texts (Hill 1981; Sverrir Tómasson 2004). In this context the case of Þrándr of Gata in *Færeyinga saga* is interestingly ambiguous, for the saga specifically states that he had cast away Christianity shortly after his baptism at the hands of Sigmundr Brestisson (*Færeyinga saga* 2006, 79). Still, there is an element of sympathy in the saga for Þrándr's predicament which, arguably, harks back to the nature of his baptism.

The notion that apostates deserve harsh punishment is naturally not confined to the West Norse textual corpus. For example, Saxo Grammaticus, in his famous description of the conquest of Rügen in the late 1140s, maintains that King Sven Forkbeard had donated an exquisite cup to Arcona's pagan temple, 'preferring to cultivate an alien religion rather than his own, and for this impiety he later paid the penalty of a miserable death' (*Saxo Grammaticus* 1980–81, 2: 496).<sup>35</sup> The apostate thus receives

<sup>33</sup> This notion is especially marked in the *Legendary saga of St Óláfr*. See, for example, *Olafs saga hins helga* 1982, 82, 175.

<sup>34</sup> 'Því at þeir, er þar byggðu, heldu ekki kristni, þótt sumir hefði við kristni tekit' (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, III 263).

<sup>35</sup> 'Quam inter ceteros etiam rex Danorum Sueno propitiandi gratia exquisiti cultus poculo veneratus est, alienigenae religionis studium domesticae praefereundo, cuius postmodum sacrilegii infelici nece pœnas persolvit' (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 14.39, 466).

his just reward. In this case Saxo's willingness to draw *exempla* from most things leads to a rather glaring inconsistency. Earlier in the *Gesta Danorum* he had narrated how Sven, having finally embraced Christianity, died and 'departed in the glory of a most perfect life' (*Saxo Grammaticus* 1980–81, 1: 26).<sup>36</sup>

In late twelfth-century Europe conversion by force was an issue of immediate relevance rather than abstract debate. In theological terms forced conversion had never been condoned by the Papacy, although it had been on the agenda, in some shape or form, since the time of the Emperor Constantine the Great (Duggan 1997). In the wake of the Second Crusade in 1147, however, Pope Eugenius III came very close to justifying violent conversion. Moreover, the main ideologue of the Crusade, Bernard of Clairvaux, certainly had no qualms about exhorting *milites Christi* to unsheath the sword in service of the Gospel (Fonnesberg-Schmidt 2007, 37–43). In Scandinavia the matter became topical in the context of the Danish expansion into the Baltic from the Second Crusade onwards. Here, apostasy and punishment were useful tools of conquest. Thus in the late 1160s Pope Alexander III's letter to Valdemar I of Denmark reveals that the king had previously justified the Danish campaign against Rügen by referring to the alleged apostasy of its inhabitants (Fonnesberg-Schmidt 2007, 46–47). In the bull *Gravis Admodum*, sent in 1171 or 1172 and addressed to the Archbishop of Uppsala, his suffragan bishops and a certain *dux* Gutthorm, Alexander III decries the shiftily Finns who, having been forced to adopt Christianity, cast off the religion as soon as the threat receded. Nothing in the letter suggests that the pope had any qualms about the use of force in the conversion of the Finns. Indeed from the perspective of the pontiff the apostasy of the Finns appears to justify such measures.<sup>37</sup>

It would therefore be surprising if, from the second half of the twelfth century onwards, such belligerent sentiments had not influenced the way in which authors described the conversion of Scandinavia itself. And it would be mistaken in this context to distinguish sharply between Norwegian and Danish authors. For example, in *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, composed around the turn of the twelfth century, a Norwegian monk narrates the history of a crusading expedition undertaken by Norwegians and Danes (Karen Skovgaard-Petersen 2001). Indeed an exposure to crusading ideology is likely to have influenced

<sup>36</sup> 'Siquidem omni humana concussione vacuus in ipso perfectissimae vitae fulgore decessit' (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 10.13, 285).

<sup>37</sup> For a recent discussion of the papal letter see Lind 2005, 267–70. For the relevant section in Latin see Lind 2005, 280.

Theodoricus monachus's enthusiastic appraisal of Óláfr Tryggvason's violent methods of conversion:

And since they were little moved, he often reinforced words with blows, following the example of his Lord, who poured oil and wine into the wounds of the injured man, and following too those words of the Gospel: 'Force them to come in, that my house may be filled' (Theodoricus monachus 1998, 14–15).<sup>38</sup>

Theodoricus's literal interpretation of the Parable of the Banquet in Luke 14:23 can be juxtaposed with the Biblical language which his Danish contemporary Sven Aggesen adopted in his brief reference to King Valdemar's forced conversion of Rügen: 'In the first place, under his rod of iron and outstretched arm, he compelled the Rugians to be regenerated in the waters of holy baptism' (Aggesen 1992, 72).<sup>39</sup> Saxo, in his detailed description of the conquest of the same island, adopts a more nuanced approach: first the pagans comprehend the futility of their customs when their idol is dragged out of the citadel without putting up any resistance. The Danish king then dispatches clerics to the pagans to educate them about their new religion (Saxo Grammaticus 1980–82, 2: 506).<sup>40</sup> Saxo takes care to have words and deeds precede the actual baptism of the pagans.

No such procedural niceties disturbed the Icelandic author of *Svaða þáttur ok Arnórs kerlingarnefs*, which is preserved in *Flateyjarbók*, and contains the description of the only forced conversion that (supposedly) took place in Iceland (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 435–39). The *þáttur* also shows how the most diverse factors could influence the attitude of authors towards this issue. It describes how Svaði, a rich farmer from Skagafjörður, entices the poor people of his region to dig a ditch during a severe famine. Instead of feeding his workers, Svaði repays them by locking them in a shed with the promise that in the morning he will have them killed and buried in the ditch. That evening Þorvarðr Spak-Böðvarsson, a Christian who has been baptised by the missionary bishop Friðrekr, passes by Svaði's farmstead. When Þorvarðr hears the poor people's clamour he vows to free them if

<sup>38</sup> 'et quia minus movebantur ad verba, addidit frequenter et verbera, imitatus dominum suum, qui vulneribus sauciati infudit oleum et vinum, nec non et illud evangelicum: compelle intrare, ut impleatur domus mea' (*Theodorici monachi* 1880, 18).

<sup>39</sup> 'Nam <primo>. in uirga ferrea et brachio extento Ryenses sacri baptismatis compulsi unda renasci' (*Svenonis Aggonis* 1917–18, 138). Eric Christiansen has pointed out that Sven is influenced here by a papal letter from Alexander III which placed Rügen under the authority of the bishopric of Roskilde (Aggesen 1992, 137).

<sup>40</sup> *Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 14:39, 469.

they accept Christianity; to refuse would inevitably mean death in a mass grave. And not surprisingly the people accept Þorvarðr's offer. When Svaði is told of this development he is enraged, but as he rides past the ditch falls into it and dies. The poor people are fed, baptised and receive religious instruction from Þorvarðr's own priest. The story appears to be a kind of *exemplum* on Psalm 7:15 'he made a pit, and digged it, and he is fallen into the hole he made' (*King James Bible*), and from this perspective the conversion is incidental to the story.<sup>41</sup> Within *Flateyjarbók*, however, the poignancy of the episode is enhanced by the story which immediately follows *Svaða þáttur*. This is the episode, alluded to earlier, in *Þórhalls þáttur kna(p)ps*, where a respectable temple-owning farmer is converted directly and of his own free will through a dream-vision of King Óláfr Tryggvason (*Flateyjarbok* 1860–68, I 439–41). Thus within the space of a few pages (in the 1860–68 edition) poor, anonymous people adopt the religion under the threat of death, while a named respectable temple-owner receives illumination from a king through supernatural means. There is more than a touch of class prejudice in this episode: the poor should be thankful for their forced conversion or, as the author says in his prologue, perhaps somewhat cynically in the circumstances, Christ brings to him those who have not heard the Gospel with *elskuligri mildi* 'loving goodness'.

## Denmark

At the time when Danes were forcefully converting the pagans of the Baltic (or at least attempting to), Norwegian and Icelandic authors claimed that the German king had applied similar methods to the Danish kings. Thus Oddr Snorrason describes how Otto I bullied Harald Bluetooth into accepting Christianity in the wake of his invasion of Denmark. His main reason for recounting this episode is to highlight the crucial help which the German emperor received from Óláfr Tryggvason (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* 2006, 173). His contemporary, Theodoricus monachus, states that it was Otto II who placed 'the gentle yoke of Christ' on Harald (Theodoricus monachus 1998, 8).<sup>42</sup> The tradition of enforced imperial baptism originates, of course, in German historiography. Most notably, Adam of Bremen redates an German invasion of Denmark in order to align it with the early years of Haraldr Bluetooth's reign. In *GHEP* Otto

<sup>41</sup> I thank John McKinnell for suggesting this possible biblical parallel to me.

<sup>42</sup> 'qui et svave jugum Christi imponere disponebat' (*Theodorici monachi* 1880, 11).

I defeats Harald in battle, which leads to his submission and eventual baptism (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II 3, 62–64). Otherwise Adam upholds Harald as the pivotal Danish ruler in the conversion process who, moreover, ‘noted for his piety and bravery, had long before benignantly admitted Christianity to his kingdom and held it firm unto the end’ (*History of the Archbishops* 2002, 69–70).<sup>43</sup> The king’s life ends in a martyrdom of sorts and miracles are reported at his resting-place in Roskilde (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II:28, 87–88).

There is a notable ambiguity in Adam’s description of the conversion of Denmark. On the one hand, Harald’s baptism is presented as a decisive ‘conversion moment’; on the other hand, his reign, significant though it was, hardly heralds the final triumph of Christianity in the kingdom. *GHEP* tells how Hamburg-Bremen was frustrated by Danish rulers who, both before and following Harald’s baptism, were less than deferential to the German See or even Christianity itself. Adam states that in AD 826 Emperor Louis the Pious baptised Harald Klak, but that the king failed to establish his rule in Denmark (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, I 15, 21). Subsequently Anskar and his fellow missionaries achieved some success in their efforts, although political turmoil within Denmark and the piratical raids of the Northmen hindered the attainment of the ultimate goal. A breakthrough was achieved by King Henry I of Germany (919–36) who so terrified Gorm that Archbishop Unni of Hamburg (918–36) was allowed to preach to the Danes and turn the king’s son, Harald Bluetooth, to Christianity (I 58, 57). These developments pave the way for Harald’s baptism.

Otherwise, apostasy of kings is a prominent feature in Adam’s account of the ninth and tenth centuries. This theme is struck for the last time when Sven Forkbeard rebels against his father although he eventually returns to the Christian fold (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II 28, 87–88). It is only with the demise of the ‘English kings’ of Denmark, Sven and Knud the Great, however, that Hamburg-Bremen’s fortunes are reversed. Adam presents his friend Sven Estridsen (1047–74/76)—despite his character flaws—as the ruler who finally upholds the Church and Christianity in a proper fashion (III 21, 164). Adam, however, still appears ambivalent on the question whether Danish kings really possess all the qualities necessary for the full integration of their realms within Christian Europe (Fraesdorff 2002, 328–30).

<sup>43</sup> ‘Haroldus rex Danorum, religione ac fortitudine insignis, christianitatem in regno suo iam dudum benigne suscepit et constanter retinuit usque in finem’ (*Adam Bremensis* 1883, II 24, 83).



Adam of Bremen's upholding of King Harald Gormsson as the central figure in the conversion was never really accepted in Danish medieval historiography. Moreover, his baptism and reign, unlike those of the two Óláfrs in Norway and the *Alþing* of AD 1000 in Iceland, did not emerge as the core of the tradition. Indeed the absence of such a core partly explains why the conversion of Denmark constitutes a less distinctive component of the country's history than those of Norway and Iceland. In other words, the written tradition was less well formulated in Denmark than in either Norway or Iceland since there was no consensus as to which mythopoeic moments, if any, ought to be at its heart.

Ailnoth of Canterbury, the first author in Denmark to write on the conversion, was certainly clear about which event had had the greatest spiritual significance for this relatively newly converted kingdom. This was the martyrdom of King Knud IV who was killed in 1086 by his own people before the altar of a church in Odense. Ailnoth was an English ecclesiastic who had resided in Denmark for twenty-four years when he composed the *Gesta Swenomagni*, sometime between c.1110 and c.1122. Ailnoth's work is a curious hybrid of a chronicle about King Sven Estridsen's sons and heirs, and a *vita et passio* of Knud IV (Conti 2010; Meulengracht Sørensen 1986). The *Gesta* is dedicated to King Niels (1104–34) and it appears to have been composed as a *speculum regale* of sorts for members of the royal dynasty.

Ailnoth recounts how the might of the Roman Empire spread Christianity far and wide while in the North the religion made only a belated entry. The precocious Danes, however, saw the light earlier than the other inhabitants of the region, although their conversion was only completed when the German Bishop Poppo proved the superiority of the Christian religion by undergoing trial by fire and walking on hot ploughshares. In contrast the Svear and Götar adopted Christianity out of self-interest and apostasised when it suited them. Ailnoth then recounts how the English bishop Eskil suffered martyrdom in Sweden while preaching the Gospel (*Gesta Swenomagni* 1908–12, 77–85).

Ailnoth's account of the conversion is especially notable for what it omits. St Anskar is not even mentioned in passing, and nothing in the texts suggests that Ailnoth of Canterbury knew *GHEP* or Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*. Moreover, Ailnoth is distinctly vague about the historical context in which Bishop Poppo performed his miracles and, most strikingly, he does not associate Harald Bluetooth or any other king, by name, with the introduction of Christianity. Ailnoth simply observes that the kings had helped build churches in the various parts of their kingdom (*Gesta Swenomagni* 1908–12, 383). The Danish kings are

thus credited with supporting the Church rather than being instrumental in actually introducing Christianity. Hence a work which aims to extol the illustrious ancestry of Niels is silent about the involvement of the king's own dynasty in the conversion. This does not, of course, mean that Ailnoth thought the dynasty had not been involved, only that he clearly did not feel compelled to recount any specific tradition which associated the House of Jelling with this epochal development. Rather, the *Gesta* presents the Danes applying their *ratio* and sensing the superiority of Christianity, which is followed by a demonstrative display by Poppo and his miracle(s) (see below). The Poppo tale is the one instance where Ailnoth adheres to a recognisable tradition about the Danish conversion, although he probably derived this story from oral tradition, for the 'Poppo tale' never reached a stable textual form in the Middle Ages (Demidoff 1973). Rather, this story pattern was adapted by German, Danish and other Scandinavian authors in line with their differing approaches to the conversion of Denmark (see Foerster 2009). At no point, however, did it become the dominant 'mythopoeic moment' of an indigenous conversion tradition.

Thus, from a modern perspective at least, Ailnoth offers a distinctly vague account of the conversion. But of course Ailnoth—in all probability a member of the monastic community which guarded Knud's shrine—was primarily interested in presenting King Knud's martyrdom in 1086 as the central event in the history of the Danes. This is the occasion which firmly entrenches the history of the Danes within Universal or Salvation history, just as St Óláfr's martyrdom does for Norway. But unlike the Norwegian case, the Danish martyrdom occurs long after the official adoption of Christianity in the kingdom, which inevitably creates a disjuncture between the event and the conversion. Accordingly, neither Ailnoth nor later authors were able to incorporate the Danish proto-martyr into the conversion narrative proper. The contrast is striking here with the embedding of St Óláfr's sanctity into the Norwegian conversion narrative.

In comparison to Ailnoth, the anonymous author of the *Chronicle of Roskilde* (*CR*)—who narrates the history of Denmark from 826 to c.1140 (and in a later version to 1157)—knew and made use of Adam's *GHEP*. Indeed the chronicle, most likely composed in the late 1130s, is derivative of the German work for most of what it tells about the history of Denmark until the establishment of the See of Roskilde in the second half of the eleventh century. The author evidently had little other additional written material on pre-eleventh-century Denmark. Apart from highlighting the role of the bishopric of Roskilde in Danish history, the purpose behind the composition of *CR* is unclear. The most convincing hypothesis associates

the work with Bishop Eskil of Roskilde and his attempt to elevate his See to archepiscopal status. This endeavour may have come about following a papal decree of 1133 which reiterated Hamburg-Bremen's ecclesiastical authority over Scandinavia. The decree effectively revoked the authority which Lund had enjoyed in Scandinavia since the foundation of the archbishopric in 1104. This in turn may have presented an opening for the ambitious Eskil (see the introduction to *Roskildekrøniken*; Gelting 2004a). In any case, it is clear that *CR* upholds the interests of the Danish church while modifying the role of the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen in particular and the Germans in general.

Thus, the author's reliance on the staunchly pro-Hamburg-Bremen *GHEP* was clearly a potential source of embarrassment. In light of the lack of sources, however, it was hardly possible to write Hamburg-Bremen's contribution out of the story. Instead the author chose to elevate a relatively minor event in *GHEP* to an epochal occasion in Danish history: Emperor Louis the Pious's baptism of Harald Klak in AD 826. *CR* begins with this event and so, by implication, does the history of the Danes proper. The distinctly brief and unsuccessful reign of Harald is conveniently ignored. Otherwise *CR* notes the missionary work of Anskar, Archbishop Unni's baptism of the unhistorical King Frode (not mentioned by Adam) and Sven Forkbeard's baptism by the German Emperor. The chronicle records that in Sven's reign Archbishop Adaldag (937–88) dispatched bishops to Denmark and the Danes witnessed Poppo's trial by fire. It was Poppo's display which finally brought any lingering adherents of the old customs into the Christian fold (*Chronicon Roskildense* 1917–18, 14–21).

*CR* thus adapts Adam of Bremen's gradualist view of the Danish conversion while concomitantly tailoring the account to fit a particular agenda. A few relapses notwithstanding, Denmark is presented as a Christian kingdom because its rulers are Christian. Harald's baptism in Mainz is given pride of place since the event demonstrates the ancient roots of the religion in Denmark while negating Hamburg-Bremen's claim to ecclesiastical supremacy on account of its missionary heritage. Instead, as has been pointed out, the author wishes to portray the establishment of the Church as a joint partnership between the Danes and the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen as well as the German Emperors.<sup>44</sup> Conversely *CR* does not follow Adam of Bremen and single out Harald Bluetooth as the hero of the conversion story. In the final analysis, *CR* adopts a foreign

<sup>44</sup> Gelting 2004a, 183–84, referring to Hemmingsen 1996, 260–62 (which I have not had the opportunity to consult).

source with the purpose of shaping a new version or tradition about the coming of Christianity to Denmark.

One should probably not attribute too much sophistication to the author of *CR*, who seems genuinely ill-informed, not to say confused, concerning the history of Denmark in the Viking Age. The main point, however, is that he does not offer a particular conversion moment or even a loosely defined conversion period. True, Harald is baptised at the court of Emperor Louis the Pious and subsequently the Danish kings adhere largely to Christianity. But the author of *CR* is also interested in showing how the Christianisation of the Danish people went hand in hand with the development of the Church. This is apparent in *CR*'s carefully placed references to the establishments of the first churches in the different parts of Denmark. The jewel in the ecclesiastical crown is, of course, the establishment of the bishopric of Roskilde in the reign of Sven Estridsen (1047–74/76). But, like the martyrdom of King Knud, this late event could hardly serve as a focal point in a conversion tradition proper.

*CR* has on occasions been associated with *The Chronicle of Lejre* (*CL* hereafter) which is traditionally dated to around 1170 (Søgaard 1968), although it is generally assumed that the two are distinct works. *CL* tells of Denmark's legendary past and consequently does not dwell on the conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the text there is a curious passage that refers to a fictitious Frankish conquest of Denmark in the early ninth century which leads directly to the conversion of the Danes (*Beowulf and Lejre* 2007, 315):

The memory of people of old claims that those parts we mentioned, Jutland, Funen, Scania and Withesleth, were never conquered by anyone except the Emperor Ludwig. Thanks to his peaceful benevolence, the Danes accepted Christianity once king Harald had been baptised at Maguncia; otherwise they were not ever conquered by any of his successors or predecessors, but resisting all invaders they remained from the first hated by all.<sup>45</sup>

*CL*, like *CR*, presents the baptism of King Harald (Klak) as a pivotal moment in the Christianisation of the Danes. Thus the anonymous writer of *CL* elaborates on a detail that appears in Adam of Bremen's *Gesta*, namely the baptism of King Harald, but applies it for a very different

<sup>45</sup> 'Attestatur equidem nobis antiquorum memoria, predictas partes istas, Juciam, Feoniam, Scaniem et Withesleth, a nullo extitisse subiectas, excepto tantum Lodowico, cuius pace et beniuolencia baptizato Haraldo rege apud Magunciam Dani christianitatem receperunt; aliter nec <a> suo subsequente nec antecessore aliquo unquam erant subiecte, sed resistentes quibusque inuadentibus inuise ab omnibus in principio permanserunt' (*Chronicon Lethrense* 1917–18, 44).

purpose to that intended by the German author. There is nevertheless a notable difference here between the two chronicles. *CL* alone claims that the Danish kingdom was conquered by the Franks *before* the baptism of Harald at Mainz. Indeed the passage quoted above appears to conflate two events told in *GHEP*: the scene in 826 and Otto I's defeat of Harald Bluetooth and the subsequent baptism of his son, Sven Forkbeard. Accordingly *CL* associates the illustrious Carolingian with the conversion of Denmark and the German Ottonians are bypassed. This choice is perhaps not surprising in light of the fraught relationship between the Danish and the German kings in the latter half of the twelfth century (see e.g. Hansen 1966). Unless this choice is simply explained away as the muddled testimony of a confused author, *CL*, like *CR*, creatively manipulates a learned foreign tradition about the Danish conversion in the interests of a particular political or institutional agenda. This, incidentally, stands in stark contrast to the rest of *CL*, which apparently is completely reliant on oral sources.

Sven Aggesen's *Compendiosa Regum Daniae historia* (*CRDH*), composed around 1185, is marked by an anti-German outlook in the vein of *CR* and *CL*. However, Sven's anti-German stance was problematic since the role played by the German secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the Christianisation of Denmark could not easily be brushed aside (and we have just seen how the author of *CR* had been confronted with a similar dilemma). Aggesen may have felt that the less said about the matter the better. All the same, the low profile of the conversion in the *CRDH* is striking, especially if, as Eric Christiansen has tentatively suggested, Aggesen wrote the text in response to Theodoricus's *Historia* where the conversion is indeed prominent (Aggesen 1992, 23–25). What little Aggesen does say on the subject reads like a *conscious inversion* of Adam of Bremen's account. Sven states that Harald Bluetooth 'was the first king to reject the filth of idolatry and worship the cross of Christ' (61).<sup>46</sup> Aggesen carefully locates this reference within his narrative: it follows a lengthy account of how Queen Thyry, Harald's mother, terminated German overlordship in Denmark. Thus the adoption of Christianity occurs when Denmark is completely free from her powerful southern neighbour. In contrast to the account of *GHEP*, Harald Bluetooth's death and posthumous reputation is not that of a martyr. Sven Aggesen explains that the king was forced into exile on account of his heavy-handed rule and imposition of the new

<sup>46</sup> 'Is primus idolotatrie respuens spurcitas Christi crucem adorauit' (*Svenonis Aggonis* 1917–18, 117).

religion. Harald sought refuge among the Slavs and with the help of pagans waged war against Sven Forkbeard, his own son and heir (*Svenonis Aggonis* 1917–18, 117–21). The inference from this is that Harald Bluetooth effectively became a traitor and an apostate.

Aggesen presents the two ‘English’ kings, Sven Forkbeard and Knud the Great, as the real founders of Christianity in Denmark. Thus Sven Forkbeard

adopted as a true worshipper of God the faith which his fugitive father had in the end renounced. Reborn in the holy waters of baptism and made orthodox in the faith, he ordered the seeds of God’s word to be sown throughout the land (Aggesen 1992, 61).<sup>47</sup>

Knud, he claims, strengthened the religion in Denmark and even dispatched preachers to Sweden and Norway (Aggesen 1992, 64; *Svenonis Aggonis* 1917–18, 123). Thus the Jelling dynasty is credited with the conversion of Demark in three separate stages. An abortive introduction of the religion by Harald Bluetooth is followed by a successful one by his son, Sven Forkbeard; and lastly Knud establishes the Danish Church. Whether Sven Aggesen belonged to King Valdimar’s court or, as seems more likely, was ‘a comfortable prebend in the chapter of Lund’ (Christiansen in Aggesen 1992, 4), his short work focuses exclusively on the royal authority. There is, for example, no sense in his work of a history of an embryonic Danish Church, as we have encountered in the *CR*.

Thus when Saxo Grammaticus—who indeed was very likely a canon of Lund Cathedral—embarked on his monumental *Gesta Danorum* (hereafter *GD*) at the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century, he inherited a less than coherent written tradition about the Danish conversion. As noted, Adam of Bremen emphasises the role of Hamburg-Bremen and the official conversion of the Danes by Harald Bluetooth which follows in the wake of a German military conquest. Ailnoth effectively ignores the contribution of the Jelling dynasty and instead homes in on the salvific significance of Knud IV’s martyrdom. *CR* is concerned with the organic emergence of the Danish Church within a kingdom that was ostensibly Christian from the early ninth century and which co-operated with Hamburg-Bremen. And, finally, Sven Aggesen attributes the conversion exclusively to the Jelling dynasty and ignores any foreign participation in this achievement.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Quo exulante filius in regno surrogatur Sveno, cognomine Tiugeskeg, qui sancte Trinitatis fidem, quam profugus tamen pater abiecerat, uerus dei cultor amplexus est, sacrique baptismatis unda renatus uerbi diuini semina per uniuersam regionem propagari iussit’ (*Svenonis Aggonis* 1917–18, 119).

On the surface the conversion to Christianity does not figure prominently in the *GD*, at least not in comparison with, for instance, its high profile in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. But as has long been recognised, the centrality of the conversion is in fact reflected in the very structure of the *GD*. Saxo's work can be divided into four parts, each comprising four books. The first section sets the history of the pagan Danes against a pre-Christian European background, whereas in the next phase the Danes are still pagan while Europe has embraced Christianity. The following four books deal with the conversion of Denmark, while the concluding quartet emphasises the beneficial co-operation between the *regnum* and *sacerdotium* which culminates in the relationship of Bishop Absalon and King Valdemar (115–83) (Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, 1985). Not only is *GD* far more voluminous than anything previously written on Danish history, but Saxo adopts a much broader historical perspective than his predecessors. For instance, although both the *LC* and Sven Aggesen deal with pre-Christian Denmark, neither really engages with the Danes as pagans. Saxo, in contrast, underlines the religious context in which the events he describes take place.<sup>48</sup>

Saxo tells of Emperor Louis's baptism of Harald Klak in Mainz and how the latter thereby became the first king 'to bring Christian rites to an uncouth land and by extirpating the worship of devils fostered the true belief' (Saxo Grammaticus 1979, 290).<sup>49</sup> In this instance Saxo follows the *CR* and *CL*, or perhaps Adam's *GHEP*, which he almost certainly knew. Here we are far removed from Harald Klak, the hero of *CL* and *CR*. According to Saxo the king, when threatened by a domestic rival, lapsed back into paganism: 'from being the glorious promoter of this faith he emerged a notorious apostate' (Saxo Grammaticus 1979, 291).<sup>50</sup> One can only surmise that this reference to Harald's apostasy reflects Saxo's wish to play down the role of the Empire in the Danish conversion—whether of the Carolingian or Ottonian variety (Saxo Grammaticus 1980–81, 1: 159). Moreover, Saxo's description of Harald Klak's reign raises an important theme which appears repeatedly throughout the *GHEP*, namely the shifting fortunes of Christianity and paganism within the Danish

<sup>48</sup> For a useful review of the scholarly literature dedicated to Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, see Riis 2006, especially chapter 2.

<sup>49</sup> 'atque inconditae patriae Christianismi sacra primus intulit, reiectoque daemonum cultu divinum aemulatus est' (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 9.4, 261).

<sup>50</sup> 'Nam ut praecipuum inchoatae religionis specimen, ita primum neglectae spectaculum fuit atque ex splendido sanctitatis auctore infamis eiusdem desertor evasisit' (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 9.4, 262).

kingdom, between succeeding generations of kings and even within the reigns of individual rulers. Thus while Erik, Harald Klak's brother and successor, begins his rule as an apostate who persecutes Christians, he nevertheless returns to the fold at the behest of St Anskar. A succession of both Christian and pagan rulers follows. Erik's son Knud is a good king whose son Frothi is baptised in England and returns to Denmark with the aim of converting his compatriots. On the other hand Frothi's son, Gorm, is an ardent persecutor of Christians whereas his grandson, Harald Bluetooth, 'embraced the fellowship of the Catholic religion' through an agreement he made with the German Emperor (Saxo Grammaticus 1980–81, 1: 7).<sup>51</sup> As in *GHEP*, Haraldr's son Sven Forkbeard rebels and restores paganism, to the delight of the Danes (1: 14; 17–18). But having turned against his father, Sven finally adopts Christianity and returns to his kingdom where he endeavours to spread the Gospel. It is also in Sven's reign that Saxo introduces Bishop Poppo, who undergoes trial by iron at a public assembly and thus steers the Danes on the right course (1: 20–21). In this manner Saxo presents Sven as the real founder of the Danish Church, while his career also encapsulates the shifting fortunes of Christianity among the Danes.

Saxo thus draws together elements from both German and native accounts of the conversion—Harald Klak's baptism, the efforts of St Anskar, the miracle of Poppo and the role of Harald Bluetooth and Sven Forkbeard—but also adds new details, such as the apostasy of Harald Klak. After Sven's reign, his concern is not with paganism versus Christianity but rather with the imbalance between the king, the Church and the people which leads to calamities for the Danish kingdom: the defeats of Sven Estridsen and particularly the Civil War. The murder of Knud of Odense is another disaster which Saxo, unlike Ailnoth, shows little interest in elevating much above its political dimension. An equilibrium of sorts is only fully achieved with the establishment of the archbishopric of Lund in 1104 and the forging of a strong bond between Church and Crown in the reign of Valdemar I.

Saxo downplays the centrality of Harald Bluetooth in the conversion (Birgit Sawyer 1987, 96) while he is clearly keen to highlight the contribution of Sven Forkbeard. In short, Saxo inherited and moulded a number of conflicting traditions that Danish authors had recorded

<sup>51</sup> 'Verum Haraldus, rebus cum imperatore compositis, consortium catholicae religionis amplexus, divinam humanamque pacem regno suo conciliavit, sicque, Haquinum conceptae inaniter spei irritum reddens, se ipsum errore, patriam praeliis liberavit' (*Saxonis Gesta Danorum* 1931, 10.4, 272).



in the course of the twelfth century. Saxo's own version brings together the long-term view of the *Roskilde Chronicle* and its emphasis on the development of the Church, while retaining the anti-German, pro-*'English kings'* tradition presented by Sven Aggesen. But above all Saxo imbues the conversion with a sense of the spiritual progression of the Danes, and in this he approaches Ailnoth's apparent intentions in his work of hagiography. For this purpose Saxo applies stylistic devices such as prefiguration, where pagan characters foreshadow their Christian successors (Inge Skovgaard-Petersen 1985; 1987; Weber 1987). Saxo thus attempts to embed the conversion seamlessly into the history of the Danish people and their kingdom. This history is not told from a local partisan perspective; rather, it provides a bird's-eye view which encompasses and integrates the secular, religious and ecclesiastical advancement of the Danes.

### Concluding Observations

This overview has sought to highlight the principal features of early Scandinavian conversion narratives. Particular attention has been paid to how these narratives were shaped by contemporary political and ecclesiastical interests. In Iceland a core narrative of the Christianisation emerged right at the beginning of literary production. In Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* the conversion forms an integral part of a text which validated the constitutional arrangement of early twelfth-century Iceland and especially the distinctive relations between the *Alþing* and the Icelandic Church. The underpinnings of this arrangement were the laws, the *Alþing* and the bishoprics of Skálholt and Hólar. With changing political and ecclesiastical conditions new elements were added to the tradition but the *Alþing* of AD 1000 still remained at its heart. In Norway the earliest written histories also present a relatively uniform conversion tradition. As in Iceland there was a strong link between the 'master narrative' of the conversion and the main pillars of the Norwegian polity: the crown and the archbishopric of Nidaros. The Norwegian tradition thus embraced the establishment of a Christian kingship, and the sanctity of St Óláfr whose relics were located in the town established by his predecessor and prefiguration, Óláfr Tryggvason. This strong tradition, fortified by the contributions of Icelandic authors, overlapped with the conversion tradition about the Norse colonies of the North Atlantic. However, in Iceland and Gotland—unlike the Faroes, Orkney and Greenland—the tradition was adopted by indigenous writers who shaped it to fit their own regional or 'national' narratives and their agendas.

The conversion traditions of Norway and Iceland were formed at particularly interesting phases in the history of both countries. The early twelfth century in Iceland was a period of particularly close symbiosis between ecclesiastical and secular power; indeed the two were virtually indistinguishable. The episcopal arrangement had just emerged while the relative balance of power between secular leaders ensured, at least in the short run, the stability of the Commonwealth. This is expressed in Ari's *Íslendingabók*, where the bishoprics of Iceland are shown to have deep roots in the country's history, which encompasses the settlement, the founding of the *Alþing* and, above all, the conversion in AD 1000. In other words the secular and ecclesiastical history of Iceland cannot be separated, and the point at which they are irrevocably joined is at the fateful *Alþing* of AD 1000. Similarly, in late twelfth-century Norway the cult of St Óláfr was both a symbolic and a very real point of contact between Crown and Church, not necessarily in the sense that the cult cemented the relationship between the two—although that happened briefly in the reign of Magnús Erlingsson (1161–84)—but rather in that both *regnum* and *sacerdotium* had a stake in St Óláfr and the stories that were told and written about him and his predecessor, Óláfr Tryggvason.

In Denmark, unlike Iceland and Norway, a core tradition did not appear in the earliest stage of literary production. Rather, in the course of the twelfth century the conversion was primarily presented through the prisms of local institutional interests and, with one exception, a clear agenda to counter German influence and its primary literary manifestation: Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Adam had composed the first and most influential 'master narrative' whose focus on the role of the Germans and the reign of Harald Bluetooth was never accepted by the Danish writers. At the turn of the twelfth to thirteenth century, however, Saxo Grammaticus harmonised these discordant versions and portrayed the Christianisation as an integral part of the history of the Danes in which, in the end, secular, ecclesiastical and spiritual elements are held in a fine balance. Moreover, in Denmark even a work such as the *Roskilde Chronicle*, which was evidently composed in support of a single bishopric, adopts a 'national' rather than a narrowly localised perspective, reflecting a relatively well-established royal authority from c.1100 onwards. In Sweden, in contrast, the tradition of conversion was exclusively confined to local saints. These narratives were entwined with the concerns of the local ecclesiastical institutions and a 'master narrative' which encompassed the whole kingdom did not appear in our period.

The conversion traditions can be observed from a different perspective, namely the nature of the earliest local saints.<sup>52</sup> In Norway, St Óláfr dominated the scene to the extent that no cult of saints emerged from the ranks of missionaries. The earliest local saints were rather passive Christians who showed no interest in bringing the Gospel to Norway. Thus St Sunniva and the Seljumenn ('the men of Selja') only wish to be left alone with their prayers, while St Hallvard is an innocent Christian killed by his compatriots. In Denmark, on the other hand, the royal dynasty did not have nearly so strong a connection with the Christianisation; Ailnoth of Canterbury could write about the conversion while essentially ignoring what part the Jelling dynasty had played in the conversion. Thus in Denmark, unlike Norway, there was a space left in which missionary saints could emerge. Indeed in the twelfth century there is evidence for two cults of missionary saints. The Legend of St Theodgarus tells how in the early eleventh century this German missionary preached the Gospel among the people of North Jutland. In the late twelfth century the bishop of Ribe attempted to establish a cult of the missionary bishop Liefdag, who had allegedly served the town as bishop in the tenth century. Moreover, the seven gilt-relief plates from the church of Tamrup in Jutland dating to c.1200 could point to the veneration of Poppo. The plates, which depict Poppo performing his miracle by fire, are likely to have adorned a reliquary, presumably that of the German missionary (Demidoff 1973, 49–50). In Sweden, however, *only* such foreign missionary figures were involved in the conversion, with which the royal authority had little or no association. The missionaries, in other words, had the field completely to themselves.

Finally, a theme of forced conversion runs through the Scandinavian conversion traditions. In Denmark, Iceland and Gotland this was related to the ambiguous association these political entities enjoyed with the mighty German Empire, the Norwegian crown and the Swedish king respectively. In Norway, King Óláfr Tryggvason's violent methods of Christianisation were clearly an important topic for Icelandic and Norwegian authors. In general the Swedish expansion in Finland and, particularly, the Danish conquests in the Baltic are likely to have sharpened writers' awareness of this issue. Therefore it was not only internal political factors and foreign literary models that influenced Scandinavian traditions, but also stories of engagement between Christian and pagans on the periphery of Scandinavia and beyond. Such contacts continued long into the Middle Ages.

<sup>52</sup> For more on this, see Haki Antonsson 2010.

Thus in 1381 a canon of Nidaros Cathedral recorded an encounter between a Norwegian priest and a Saami in a market-place in pagan Finnmark. The episode, which would not have been much out of place in Rimbert's *Life of Anskar*, tells how the priest's elevation of the host rendered the pagan Saami unconscious and delusional. This was a miracle that proved the superiority of the Christian religion over the paganism of the natives and was accordingly worthy of submission to the archbishop of Nidaros. But, as the Icelandic scribe somewhat laconically noted, the report failed to clarify whether the pagan had turned to the true religion or not (*Alfræði Íslenzk*, 57–59).

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## THE STRUCTURE OF VATNSDÆLA SAGA

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MOST SAGAS DEAL WITH THE FATE AND FORTUNE of a single man or a single family, and the episodes conform to the pattern of introduction, conflict, climax, revenge, reconciliation and aftermath (Andersson 1967, 5). Some sagas, either instead of, or in addition to, this format, have a Christian–pagan structure, with contrasting episodes arranged around the pivot of the Conversion or another incident of religious significance (McCreesh 1978–79). *Vatnsdæla saga* corresponds to neither of these types. Although it recounts the exploits of five generations of one family, it is a rambling and episodic story with no obvious climax; in addition, most of the saga is set in pre-Conversion times.

*Vatnsdæla saga*'s lack of structure has often been commented on. For example, according to Theodore Andersson (1967, 221),

*Vatnsdæla saga*, like *Eyrbyggja saga*, fails to conform to the structural pattern common to most sagas . . . The saga is a veritable rogues gallery and the bringing to account of these rogues, usually made doubly objectionable by their dabbling in the black arts, is the backbone of the story.

Vésteinn Ólason's comments are similar (1993):

*Vatnsdæla saga* has a looser composition than most *Íslendingasögur*. Its numerous episodes are mostly connected only through the actors, and there are no prolonged feuds to bind them together . . . the dominant type of conflict is the cleansing of land of alien and disruptive elements: robbers, thieves, sorcerers, witches.

Other critics see a uniting principle in the idea of the family's *hamingja* or good fortune. According to Knut Liestøl, 'An entire saga may be subordinated to a destiny-motif or a luck-motif (*hamingja*). This will give a definite colour to the whole narrative, maintaining the continuity from first to last, as in *Glúma* and *Vatnsd.*' (Liestøl 1930, 96). Craigie had already expressed similar views—'The power of fate is in fact the connecting thread which runs all through the saga'—although he admits that after the death of the founder of the dynasty, 'the connexion between the various parts of the saga becomes much looser' (Craigie 1913, 45). Jónas Kristjánsson, on the other hand, thinks that the family's luck is

simply a *Leitmotif*, and finds the construction ‘rather loose’ with the work falling into ‘a series of tenuously linked sections’ (1988, 234).

There is, however, a much stronger structural principle in *Vatnsdæla* than the luck/destiny motif put forward by Liestøl and Craigie: the whole saga is arranged in fives. Besides the five generations of *Vatnsdælir* whose lives are described in the saga, the middle generation is made up of five sons who take on five sets of opponents. In addition, the narrative is adorned with five male and five female practitioners of magic. Of these, five try to harm the *Vatnsdælir* and five do not. Five of the episodes (shown in italics below) are essential to the plot of the saga, and five are not.

#### Episodes involving magic in *Vatnsdæla* saga

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Lapp woman makes prediction</i> (ch. 10)  | 2. <i>Lapps' out-of-body journey to Iceland</i> (ch. 12)            |
| 3. <i>Ljót gives son magic garment and tries to turn land upside down</i> (chs 18–26) | 4. Þórólfr sleggja makes cats bigger (ch. 28)                       |
| 5. Þorgrímr skinnhúfa blunts weapons (ch. 29)   | 6. Helga conjures up a snowstorm (ch. 34)                           |
| 7. Gróa causes a landslide (ch. 36)   | 8. <i>The shape-changer Þorkell silfri influences lots</i> (ch. 42) |
| 9. <i>Þórdís of Spákonufell makes a man lose his memory</i> (ch. 44)                  | 10. Barðr stirfinn stops a storm (ch. 47)                           |

Why has the author included so many magic incidents? One reason is that they illustrate the passing of time. The first two episodes take place in Norway and depict magical practices which are not found in Iceland (*Vatnsdæla* saga 1939, 28–30, 34–36). The episodes are also found in *Landnámabók*, although whether the author of *Vatnsdæla* expanded the story from *Landnámabók*, or whether the compiler of *Landnámabók* condensed the story from *Vatnsdæla* is not certain. Both versions explain how Ingimundr Þorsteinsson of Hof came to emigrate to Iceland, and they differ only in minor details. Ingjaldr, Ingimundr’s foster-father, holds a splendid feast, to which he invites a fortune-teller described simply as a Finn in *Vatnsdæla* saga but given the name of Heiðr vqlva in *Landnámabók*. Ingimundr and his foster-brother are sceptical about her abilities and refuse to consult her, but she makes predictions about them anyway. The *Landnámabók* version runs thus (1968, 217):

Heiðr vqlva spáði þeim qlllum at byggja á því landi, er þá var ófundit vestr í haf, en Ingimundr kvezk við því skyldu gera. Vqlvan sagði hann þat eigi

mundu mega ok sagði þat til jartegna, at þá mundi horfinn hlutr ór þússi hans ok mundi þá finnask, er hann græfi fyrir ǫndvegissúlum sínum á landinu.

The seeress Heid made the prophecy that all three would settle in a still undiscovered country, west in the ocean. Ingimund said he would make sure that would never happen. The seeress told him he couldn't prevent it, and as a proof she said that something had vanished from his purse and wouldn't be found till he started digging for his high-seat pillars in the new country. (Pálsson and Edwards 1972, 83)

It is not clear what exactly *vǫlur* were; however, with the exception of some blackened bones said to be those of a long-dead *vǫlva* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 224), they are not found in Iceland.<sup>1</sup>

The next episode, which takes place several years later and follows on from the earlier one, is again very similar in both versions, the main difference being that there are two rather than three Lapps (Saami) in *Landnámabók* (1968, 218).

En þó sendi hann [Ingimundr] þá Finna tvá í hamförum til Íslands eptir hlut sínum. Þat var Freyr ok górr af silfri. Finnar kómu aptr ok hófðu fundit hlutinn ok nát eigi; vísuðu þeir Ingimundi til í dal einum milli holta tveggja ok sǫgðu Ingimundi allt landsleg, hvé háttat var þar er hann skyldi byggja.

He [Ingimundr] sent two Lapps on a magic ride to Iceland to look for the object he'd lost. It was an image of Frey made of silver. The Lapps came back—they'd found the image but couldn't get it—and told Ingimund that it was in a certain valley between two hillocks. They described to him in detail how the land lay, and all about where he was to make his home. (Pálsson and Edwards 1972, 83)

It is generally assumed that the out-of-body journey of these Lapps was inspired by accounts of the shamanistic practices of the Saami people, who, like *vǫlur*, belong to mainland Scandinavia.<sup>2</sup> There are some examples in the sagas of out-of-body journeys in Iceland, but they take place over a short space of time and in the dreamer's immediate neighbourhood, not for three days and across intervening oceans.

<sup>1</sup>According to Neil S. Price, seven Scandinavian Viking-Age graves which have been found containing the remains of women of a certain social standing each with a long staff among her grave-goods 'can be reasonably claimed to be those of *vǫlur* or similar practitioners of sorcery' (Price 2002, 127); of the seven, none is located in Iceland. John McKinnell, reviewing the literary evidence, comes to a similar conclusion: 'In Iceland, most stories about *vǫlur* probably reflect a literary type rather than a social fact. In Norway there is better evidence for historical *vǫlur*' (McKinnell 2005, 108).

<sup>2</sup> On shamanism in Iceland in general, and on this incident in particular, see Tolley (2009, 197).

The next incident, which is set in Iceland and tells how Ingimundr is killed, is also found in both *Vatnsdæla saga* (50–71) and *Landnámabók*. Hrolleifr and his mother Ljót come to Iceland and claim kin with one of the early settlers. They are of an unpleasant disposition, and, after Hrolleifr kills a man and is outlawed from the district, their kinsman sends them to Ingimundr. Hrolleifr eventually kills the now aged but still greatly respected Ingimundr, whereupon the dead man's sons, led by the oldest brother Þorsteinn, set out to avenge their father. In the meantime, Ljót is performing a sacrifice, which she does not have time to finish before Hrolleifr is killed.

Women who perform sacrifices are peculiar to the area around Vatnsdalr. In another saga from the same valley, Þórdís of Spákonufell sacrifices geese, and she also suggests that an injured man should offer a slaughtered bull to the elves to speed his healing (*Kormaks saga* 1939, 282–83, 288). When Bishop Friðrekr is preaching Christianity in this part of Iceland, a woman is shown sacrificing within earshot of him (*Kristni saga* 2003, 9). It is rare in the Sagas of Icelanders to find a connection between pagan religion and magic; magical powers are usually innate or learned from another practitioner. Barði Guðmundsson suggests that families like these, in which women held a high position and were responsible for cult practices, were of Swedish extraction and had originally been worshippers of Freyr (1967, 54–58). It seems equally likely, however, that Ljót's sacrifice is to the *landvættir*, the guardian spirits of the country which were thought to have been in Iceland before the first settlers arrived.<sup>3</sup> Although the purpose of Ljót's sacrifice in *Landnámabók* is to ensure a long life for Hrolleifr, according to Ljót herself in *Vatnsdæla* it is to turn the land upside down, which suggests a connection with the *landvættir*.

The next five episodes, four of which are connected with magic, do not advance the action of the saga. Van Hamel's suggestion—that they arose as 'smaller independent popular *frásagnir* referring to a particular locality'—is undoubtedly correct, since the author in four of the five cases either explains how a place got its name or gives some local lore concerning the spot (van Hamel 1934, 22).

The first of these cases is the tale of Þórólfr sleggja 'Sledgehammer', who is a thief and has twenty enormous magical black cats which he

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Egill's curse on Queen Gunnhildr and her family (*Egils saga* 1933, 171), *landvættir* are not mentioned by name in the Sagas of Icelanders. They do, however, appear in *Landnámabók* (1968, 330, 358), in which they bring prosperity to those whom they have taken under their protection.

makes even more ferocious by his sorcery (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 72–75). These cats do not actually do anything in the story except frighten those who wish to attack their master, and their origin is something of a mystery. By the late twelfth century, on the European mainland, Satan was reputed to appear to heretics as a black cat, usually oversized (Russell 1972, 131), but this belief is unlikely to underlie Þórólfr sleggja's feline troop. In post-Conversion Iceland, black was associated with paganism and white with Christianity. An enormous coal-black she-cat which is really a female troll is found in a late *pátr* (*Orms pátr Stórólfssonar* 1991, 415–17). In this case, the black cats of *Vatnsdæla* may have provided the inspiration for the troll-cat, since *Orms pátr Stórólfssonar* also has a fortune-telling scene with a *völva* and a young man who is unwilling to consult her, suggesting that the author of the *pátr* was acquainted with *Vatnsdæla*. Elsewhere in the Sagas of Icelanders Þorbjörg litlevölva, the Greenland prophetess, wears a hood and gloves lined with white catskin. Cats also appear in Snorri's *Edda*: Freyja's chariot is drawn by two of them, and Þórr takes on the *Miðgarðsormr* in the form of a huge grey cat (Faulkes 1982, 25, 41). However, despite the frequency with which cats figure in Icelandic literature and mythology, the most likely origin of these particular creatures seems to be, as van Hamel suggests, a local tale to explain why there were so many cats in a place called Sleggjustaðir, down the valley from Helgavatn.

Shortly after the cat incident we are introduced to Þorgrímr skinnhúfa 'Skin-hood', who gave his name to Húfuhylr (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 76–80). Although he is described as very good at magic but bad in other ways, his magical abilities seem to be limited to knowing in advance when men are approaching him with hostile intentions, and to protecting those on his side from weapon-strokes, abilities which are not uncommon in the sagas. Þorgrímr's magic stops working after Jökull Ingimundarson slices off his buttocks. The same wound is inflicted on a Norwegian Viking (*Hallfreðar saga* 1939, 140) and Holmgöngu-Bersi (*Kormaks saga* 1939, 254); in the latter saga, the disgrace of the blow gives Steingerðr, who has married Bersi reluctantly, grounds for divorce. Since these three sagas are closely linked—*Kormaks saga* is situated in Vatnsdalr and *Hallfreðar saga*, which is mentioned in *Vatnsdæla*, is situated in an adjacent valley—the motif is likely to be a literary borrowing, probably from *Kormaks saga*.

The next tale explains another local place-name (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 82–84). The villainous Þórólfr heljarskinn 'Dark skin' is not a magician but a thief and a sacrificer. He is said to have wept (*grét*)

before he was killed, giving Grátsmyrr its name. To make him more reprehensible, the author claims that he used to sacrifice both men and beasts. This also makes him into a pagan—for which the Old Norse term is *blótmaðr* ‘sacrifice-man’—unlike this generation of Vatnsdælir, who, although not Christians, believe in the One who created the sun.

The next magic episode occurs in the tale of Bergr inn raki (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 84–95). The tale of Bergr is also found in *Finnboga saga*, in which it is told from the point of view of the opposing side. Bergr inn raki is Finnbogi’s nephew and an arrogant and insulting man. After an altercation, he challenges Jökull, the hot-tempered second brother of the middle generation of the men of Vatnsdalr, to a duel. A woman, who is called Dalla and said to be Bergr’s wife (*Finnboga saga* 1959, 311), but called Helga and said to be his mistress in *Vatnsdæla*, warns Bergr that he will lose the duel, and announces that she will make sure that it never takes place. On the appointed day, there is such a terrible blizzard that Bergr expects nobody to venture out. The Vatnsdælir, however, fight their way through the snow to the appointed place and erect a *níðstong* ‘scorn-pole’; as a result, Bergr is disgraced, a fitting punishment for a man who is arrogant rather than evil. Storms conjured up by witches are not uncommon in parts of sagas set in pagan times; however, this storm is unusual in that it is used not to harm enemies but to save a friend’s life.

The next story, which is also a piece of topographical lore to explain why a certain stretch of land is uninhabited, tells of Gróa, who comes to Iceland with her sister (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 95–96). Þorsteinn Ingimundarson, much to his wife’s annoyance, is attracted to Gróa, ostensibly because of her magic. When Gróa invites all the men of the district to a feast, the family’s protective spirit appears three times to Þorsteinn in a dream telling him not to go; faced with his continuing obstinacy, she finally afflicts him with sore eyes.<sup>4</sup> When his brothers and the others who were to accompany him to the feast arrive at his farm, he sends them home again, saying he is ill. That evening, Gróa and her household—and presumably those who did go to the feast—perish when rocks fall on her house. Even though Gróa is killed, people still put the blame for the landslide on her and not on Þorsteinn’s

<sup>4</sup> The female protective spirit is peculiar to this part of Iceland; she also appears in *Hallfreðar saga* (1939, 198), in which she is called a *fylgjukona*, and *Víga-Glúms saga* (1956, 31), in which she is called a *hamingja*.



aggrieved wife. The wife is a member of the community; Gróa and her sister are outsiders.<sup>5</sup>

The next magician is Þorkell silfri 'Silver' from Helgavatn, who is described as being both a shape-shifter and a magician (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 110–13). In spite of this description, no concrete examples are given of his magical abilities; he is, in fact, unable to interpret correctly his dream of himself on a red horse, believing it to mean success rather than death.<sup>6</sup> Like other men in the area, he covets the local *godðorð* when it becomes free on the untimely death of Ingólfr Þorsteinsson. Since the men cannot agree among themselves who will be the next *goði*, they decide to draw lots. When Þorkell's lot comes up, the Vatnsdælir, who want to keep the *godðorð* in the family, attribute his good luck to magic and find a way to have him killed. Their instrument is the illegitimate Þorkell krafla 'Scratcher', who was ordered to be exposed at birth by his father, was rescued, and now wants the kinship to be acknowledged. The Vatnsdælir instruct him to bump into Þorkell silfri and to kill the man when he not unexpectedly insults him. After the deed is done, Þorgrímr Kárnsárgoði, Þorkell krafla's natural father and Ingimundr's nephew, gets the *godðorð* and acknowledges his son. In this episode, an accusation of shapeshifting and of using magic to influence the lots is used to justify a killing.<sup>7</sup>

Later, Þorkell krafla kills another man after being strongly provoked. After the man's uncle refuses financial compensation for the dead man and demands Þorkell krafla's banishment, the Vatnsdælir call on Þórdís of Spákonufell to help defend him at the *Alþing* (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 119–22). This Þórdís is no longer the pagan witch of *Kormaks saga* but a woman versed in the law. She tells Þorkell to dress in her black cloak, take her staff and hit the uncle three times on the left cheek. The uncle then hesitates so long that the case cannot be prosecuted in law, giving him no choice but to accept monetary compensation, whereupon Þorkell taps him on the right cheek and his memory immediately returns. What happens in this story is a little ambiguous. Does Þórdís's cloak make its wearer invisible? Or do people simply assume that it is Þórdís wearing

<sup>5</sup> 'The witch does not exist in his own right; it is the judgement of society that creates him.' (Mayer 1982, 61)

<sup>6</sup> Turville-Petre suggests that the motif of men interpreting dreams incorrectly and women correctly may have been suggested by competing Continental and native schools of dream-interpretation (Turville-Petre 1966, 351).

<sup>7</sup> In the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, a number of the king's opponents are also accused of being sorcerers. Simpson (1973, 182) regards these accusations as 'political propaganda' used to discredit those who opposed the king.

it? Is the staff with which Þorkell krafla hits the uncle's cheek related to the *vǫlur*, the staff of the *vǫlur*? It is also worth noting that, although wise men can win law-suits by their knowledge of the law and the support of friends and relatives, women seem to need a little supernatural assistance.

The final magic incident takes place after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, and once again does not further the action; it is, in fact, quite pointless (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 127–28). A certain Barðr stirfinn 'the Peevish' is asked to bring about an improvement in the weather, so he tells everybody to join hands and they circle three times *andsælis* 'anti-clockwise'. Meanwhile Barðr says something in Irish and waves a cloth at the mountain; the weather promptly changes for the better. The whole scene is an odd mixture of pagan and Christian elements. Since the Irish had been Christians since the fifth or sixth century, using Irish presumably implies that this is a Christian spell. Because pagan witches conjure up storms, an improvement in the weather is usually regarded as a Christian miracle. Waving a cloth seems to have been an integral part of many spells, from bringing down darkness to causing landslides, but this is the only example of it being used in Christian times to put an end to a storm. Equally pagan is the direction in which everybody walks: Gróa has also been seen walking *andsælis* around the house before the landslide. In Christian times, when Bishop Jón wants to restore life to a man who has been hanged, he walks *réttsælis* 'clockwise' around the gallows (*Gísls þáttur Illugasonar* 2003, 329). What the author seems to be implying is not so much that magic stopped at the Conversion as that it changed and was, at first, neither totally Christian nor totally pagan.

Although some writers use supernatural motifs to show how Iceland changed after the conversion to Christianity, the author of *Vatnsdæla* uses various types of magical practices to illustrate different periods in Icelandic history. At the start of the saga, when the hero is still in Norway, the type of magic used is that of fortune-telling *vǫlur*, who, from the evidence of both archaeology and literature, are not found in Iceland, and of Saami shamans, of whom there are no traces in Iceland either. The next type of magic we encounter is that of a pagan witch who seems to be calling upon pagan deities, probably *landvættir*, to help her achieve her ends. After that, magic and paganism part company. Þórólfr heljarskinn, who performs sacrifices, is no magician, and Þórólfr sleggja, who bewitches his black cats, does not sacrifice. As the saga progresses, the magicians' abilities correspond more closely to those found elsewhere in the Sagas of Icelanders. Þorgrímr skinnhúfa's ability to blunt weapons is traditional, as are the weather-magic of Helga and the

landslide conjured up by Gróa. In the case of Þorkell silfri, an accusation of shape-shifting and of influencing lots by magic is used to help legitimise a killing. Þórdís of Spákonufell is portrayed as a wise woman in several sagas, although the spell she casts—making a man lose his memory—is peculiar to *Vatnsdæla*. Finally, Barðr's weather-magic is a strange mixture of Christian and pagan elements, presumably meant to illustrate the practices of the years shortly after the Conversion as Iceland makes the transition from a pagan to a Christian country.

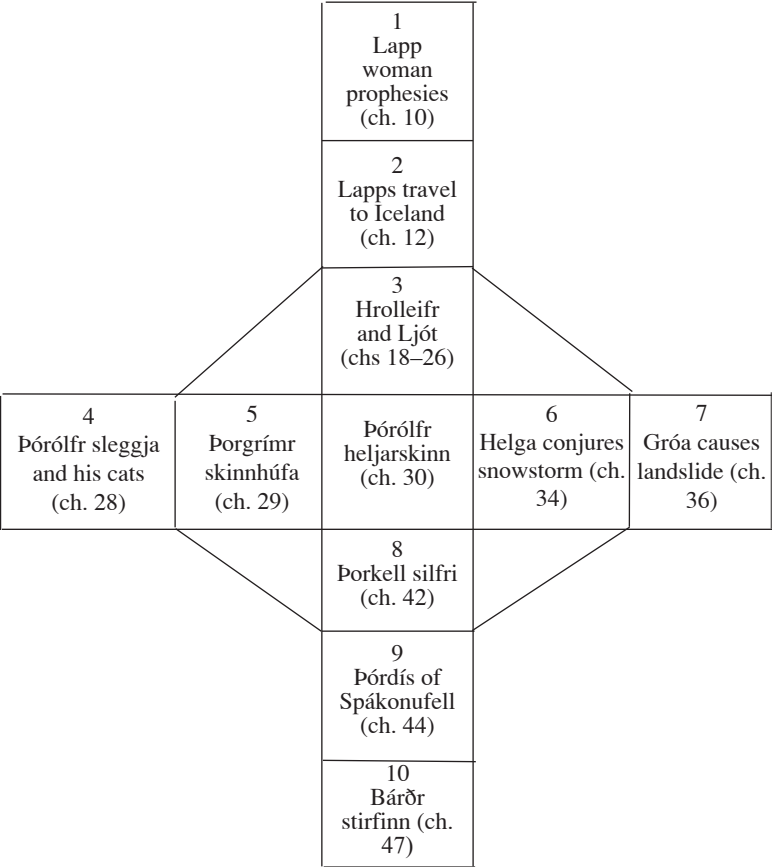
Even though the author of *Vatnsdæla* seems to be well acquainted with the different types of magic that were practised before and after the settlement of Iceland, he avoids specific terms with pagan connotations. Tolley has commented on how, in the case of the Saami who are said in *Landnámabók* to have gone to Iceland *í hamförum* 'travelling in a changed shape', the author of *Vatnsdæla* merely states that they spent three days in a shed without mentioning how they travelled, thus 'avoid[ing] the use of *hamr*', the word used for the animal-form of shape-shifters (Tolley 2009, 197). Similarly, the fortune-teller who is called a *volva* in *Landnámabók* is generally referred to in *Vatnsdæla* as *Finna ein fjölkunnig* 'a Finnish woman with magical knowledge'. We are not told to what Ljót and Þórólfr heljarskinn sacrificed, whether it was to the *landvættir* or the *æsir*, but reticence on the topic of sacrifice is usual in the Sagas of Icelanders. A family's protective spirit is called a *fylgja* or *fylgjukona* in other sagas, but in *Vatnsdæla* she is said to be *kona sú, er fylgt hafði þeim frændum* 'the woman who had followed the kinsmen', a simple description of her function (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 95). The word *hamrammr* 'able to change shape' is, it is true, used of Þorkell silfri, but no examples are given of his ability (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 110). Although the author of *Vatnsdæla* gives so many accounts of pre-Christian magic, his attitude towards it seems somewhat ambivalent.

This ambivalence may explain why the author of *Vatnsdæla* has arranged the magic episodes in fives or multiples of five. Five was a popular number for a time in Iceland, especially in religious circles (Boyer 1973, 403). St Þorlákr tended to give the Our Father in multiples of five as a penance (McNeill and Gamer 1965, 355), and in the *jarteinabáttir* 'list of miracles' of Bishop Jón of Hólar, the dead bishop is recorded as telling a certain Kálfr in a dream that fives were pleasing to him and Þorlákr (*Jóns saga helga* 2003, 284).

The popularity of five among early Icelandic bishops probably originated in medieval number symbolism, in which five stood for the five wounds of Christ and for the Cross (Hopper 1938, 123–24). The magical

episodes in *Vatnsdæla* do, in fact, form a cross-like structure, with the story of Ingimundr (the founder of the dynasty) forming the top, the story of Þorkell krafla (the chief character in the final part of the saga) forming the bottom, and the stories of the five brothers of the middle generation forming the crosspiece.<sup>8</sup> The third episode concerns Ingimundr and his five sons, and the eighth links Þorkell krafla and the sons.

Episodes involving magic in *Vatnsdæla* saga



<sup>8</sup> Embedded cross-structures are not unknown in medieval literature. The most famous exponent of the genre is Rabanus Maurus (780–856), who wrote a series of twenty-eight poems entitled *De laudibus sanctae crucis*. For an illustration and discussion of one of the embedded crosses, see Zumthor (1975, 28–35). It is, however, unlikely that the author of *Vatnsdæla* knew of these particular poems.

This way of constructing a saga actually fits in with Andersson's theory of how the Sagas of Icelanders came about (Andersson 2006, 17):

The selection of narrative material was quite free; the author could not only pick and choose among the narrative incidents and details but could also determine the main thrust of the story to be told.

In this case, the author decided to tell five tales of local lore, probably because there were five brothers in the middle generation. He then extended the pattern of five into all the magic incidents, deliberately choosing or inventing stories to fit the pattern. Since five was also connected to Christianity and the Cross, the author seems to have deliberately positioned the magic incidents so as to structure his work like a cross, possibly as a talisman to counteract the evil influence of the pagan tales he is retelling.<sup>9</sup>

Although the author of *Vatnsdæla saga* has avoided terms with pagan connotations, such as *völva*, *landvættir* and *fylgja* / *fylgjukona*, his overall portrayal of the evolution of witchcraft in Iceland corresponds to what is known from other sources and shows a strong antiquarian interest in the topic on the part of an author who is generally thought to have been a monk.

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<sup>9</sup> Crucifixes were considered effective antidotes to pagan magic. In *Kristni saga*, for example, a berserkr, who is normally impervious to iron, dies after falling on a sword over which the missionary Pangbrandr has made the sign of the cross (2003, 25).

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## PETER GODFREY FOOTE

For those of us whose careers in Old Norse studies began in the 1970s, Professor Peter G. Foote was more or less synonymous with the Viking Society. By then, he had already put in substantial service, for he was Honorary Assistant Secretary 1952–58, Joint Honorary Secretary 1958–83, and an editor of *Saga-Book* 1952–76. He also had two periods as President, in 1974–76 and—overseeing the Society’s Centenary celebrations—1990–92.

Peter Foote belonged to a generation of outstanding scholars who came from a relatively humble background, and whose education and experiences were shaped by grammar school, service in the Second World War and scholarship-aided study at a provincial university. He was born on the 26th of May 1924, the fourth of five sons of a butcher in Swanage, Dorset. He attended the local grammar school and was awarded a scholarship to the University College of the South-West (later the University of Exeter). In 1943 he was called up into the Royal Navy, serving for three and a half years, mostly in the Far East. His naval experience was to be put to good use in his later scholarship on Viking ships and sailing. In 1947 he resumed his studies, gaining a BA in English with first-class honours in 1948. A Norwegian government scholarship enabled him to spend a year at the University of Oslo in 1948–49, where he was strongly inspired by the scholarship and personality of Anne Holtsmark. On returning to Britain, he enrolled in the English Department at University College London, gaining an MA in 1951. He was to spend the rest of his career at UCL.

Peter Foote’s teaching career began in 1950, as an assistant lecturer in the Department of Scandinavian Studies, founded already in 1918 but then a sub-department of English. He was supported and encouraged by the Head of English, A. H. (Hugh) Smith, who also served the Viking Society in many roles, including two stints as its President (see Peter Foote’s obituary of him in *Saga-Book* 17, 99–101). Peter was promoted to Lecturer in Old Icelandic, Reader in Old Scandinavian and eventually Professor of Old Scandinavian and Director of Scandinavian Studies in 1963. He set out his vision for the newly independent Department in his inaugural lecture given in 1964. In English departments, Old Icelandic inevitably had only an ‘ancillary status’, but in a department of Scandinavian Studies it

now opens a wide window on the early civilization of the Scandinavian peoples, and . . . becomes an essential tool for the historical study of the languages spoken by the Scandinavians of today. The great literature of medieval Iceland becomes the earliest classical literature of the Scandinavian world as a whole. The poetry preserved and composed in early times by Icelanders and the sagas

they created are now to be studied . . . because they have been a source of inspiration and renewal for the Scandinavian nations . . . their study . . . has been potent in the development of great imaginative writers in Scandinavia from the Romantic Age to our own day. Finally and especially, . . . that literature now demands to be seen against its living Icelandic background (*On the Saga of the Faroe Islanders* 1965, 5).

He went on to call for the study of both modern Icelandic and Faroese, and the 'history old or new of the Scandinavian countries', all of which was achieved during his Headship of the department. He also went on to deplore 'the absence of Celtic studies here in London' and to note that 'the great Norse settlements in the British Isles . . . must loom large in our interests' (7). However, Celtic studies were never introduced at UCL, and the British Isles never loomed particularly large in the Department of Scandinavian Studies. Demonstrating the coherence of this field of study, Peter's inaugural lecture goes on to deal with the 'Saga of the Faroe Islanders', or, as he described it, 'an Icelandic text concerning Atlantic islanders of Norwegian origin whose descendants have now for some centuries technically owed allegiance to the Danish crown' (8).

By the time Peter Foote took early retirement in 1983, he had, almost single-handedly, built up his department into a major force in Scandinavian Studies, both early and modern, securing established posts in Scandinavian philology, Norse studies and Nordic history, as well as a teaching assistantship in Modern Icelandic. Much of this was achieved through cunning diplomacy, with Peter calling on his extensive academic contacts in Scandinavia and assiduously cultivating embassies and governments. His inaugural lecture graciously acknowledges 'the generosity of Scandinavian individuals and governments' to his department in the past, and it is largely thanks to him that this generosity continued throughout his headship and beyond. Almost everything that happened in the department was stamped with his personality and his particular vision of scholarship. Before master's degrees became common, and long before the days of 'skills training' for postgraduates, Peter made sure that new PhD students got the training appropriate to their needs: they were encouraged to spend time in Scandinavia or Iceland if they had not already done so, they were given the run of the department's undergraduate courses to ensure that their linguistic skills were up to scratch, visiting Icelanders were corralled into giving lessons in reading modern Icelandic, and Peter himself undertook basic training in palaeography. Students were commanded to join the Viking Society and encouraged to submit articles to *Saga-Book* before they had even considered that this might be a possibility. Most



frighteningly, students could be given a topic, a bibliography of items mainly in modern Icelandic rattled off at them, and the instruction to present a paper at the Postgraduate Seminar within a couple of months, as happened to me during my first year at UCL. At the seminar, green students rubbed shoulders with some of the biggest names in Norse studies, many of whom dropped in when passing through London, and Peter invariably insisted that everyone contribute to the dialogue with the speaker, going remorselessly around the room to make sure no one escaped. For a student, the intellectual stimulation of the seminar was considerably eased by the provision of diverse alcoholic and even some non-alcoholic drinks, and the prospect of dinner with the speaker and senior staff afterwards.

Peter Foote's academic publications range as broadly as his vision of 'Old Scandinavian' studies. His early work was mostly on sagas, not only *Færeyinga saga*, but also *Gísla saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*, his essays on these still well worth reading. He collaborated with his then UCL colleague (and subsequently Director of the British Museum) David M. Wilson on *The Viking Achievement* (1970), a work in which the two hands and minds can clearly be discerned and yet which adds up to a harmonious whole, still full of detail and insights not to be found in more up-to-date works about the period. Another important collaborative effort was his translation with Andrew Dennis, and UCL colleague Richard Perkins, of the Icelandic law-code known as *Grágás*, the first part appearing in 1980, the second not until two decades later. In the meantime, Peter published several important articles on early Scandinavian and Icelandic law, and was one of the few non-Scandinavian scholars acknowledged as an authority in this complex and contentious field. As in all his other work, his detailed studies of legal vocabulary and provisions not only explained them with great clarity, but also successfully used the minutiae to illuminate larger questions about society and literacy. Having defined his occupation as seeking 'to illumine old texts by any searchlight that can be brought to bear, and so by their study to penetrate the past' (*The Saga of the Faroe Islanders*, p. 8), he later memorably trained his searchlight on skaldic verse to illuminate the material and maritime culture of the Viking Age, having also made the important literary-historical point that the verse of the skalds was relatively reliable contemporary evidence for the Viking Age. Notwithstanding his enthusiasm for all things Scandinavian and North Atlantic, Peter was well versed in the European Middle Ages in their broadest sense, and promoted the study of the Latin and European sources of Old Norse literary culture both in his own writings and in several PhD theses he supervised. And his interests ranged beyond the Middle Ages,

one notable publication being his three-volume edited translation of the sixteenth-century *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* by Olaus Magnus (1996–98). Other significant publications followed during Peter's long retirement, notably his editions of *Jóns saga helga*, both the diplomatic Arnamagnæan edition in 2003, and the normalised *Íslenzk fornrit* edition in 1998. The inclusion of a non-Icelander in such an iconic Icelandic series was in itself an indication of the high esteem in which Peter was held in the homeland of the sagas. One of Peter's less-acknowledged benefits to scholarship was the fact that two Festschriften dedicated to him (in 1984 and 2004) contained reprints of his own papers, often with very useful postscripts bringing them up to date, rather than the more usual collection of hastily thrown-together thoughts of colleagues and students. Somehow, Peter also found the time to translate many Scandinavian works of scholarship into English, to the benefit of the linguistically-challenged, for example the surveys of Danish and Swedish runic inscriptions by, respectively, Erik Moltke and Sven B. F. Jansson.

It is hard to think of another twentieth-century scholar who had the range of Peter Foote, with his deep knowledge of the language, literature, history and archaeology of early Scandinavia and the North Atlantic world, his skill in both editing and translating the original sources, and his ability to render works written in academic *skandinaviska* into readable English, an essential activity but one for which he would receive little credit in today's research-measurement culture. These, together with his care for the careers of several generations of postgraduate students, his advice given freely to scholars of all ages and abilities, his enormous efforts on behalf of his department, and his dedication to the Viking Society, all add up to a man who was the most influential figure in 'Old Scandinavian' studies in the twentieth century, in Scandinavia and the North Atlantic as well as the English-speaking world. Peter Foote's achievements were recognised through the award of honorary doctorates from the Universities of Uppsala (1972) and Iceland (1987). He was made a Knight of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon in 1963, and then Commander in 1973, and Commander with Star in 1984. He was also made Knight, Order of the Dannebrog (Denmark 1973), Commander, Royal Order of the North Star (Sweden, 1977) and Commander, Royal Order of Merit (Norway, 1993). He was also a member of a number of learned societies in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Although he was in many ways a very private man, Peter Foote's personality shone through, not only in his conviviality at Viking Society dinners, but in his obvious love for his native Dorset, for walking and for

campanology. In 1951, he had married Eleanor McCaig, a Scottish nursing sister he had met during the war; they had two daughters and a son, and subsequently several grandchildren. Eleanor, who was an accomplished bookbinder, died in 2006, and Peter suffered poor health for some years before his own death on the 29th of September 2009. During his long and productive life, he had built up an impressive library of Scandinavica, which under the terms of his will is to be auctioned off through the Viking Society. This generous gesture, so typical of the man himself, will benefit the subjects dear to his heart in two ways. Not only will it ensure that other scholars and less well-endowed libraries can build up their own collections, but the proceeds will augment a fund set up by his family to support the work of postgraduate students, enabling scholars of the future to follow in his footsteps.

J. J.

## REVIEWS

INITIATION BETWEEN TWO WORLDS. STRUCTURE AND SYMBOLISM IN PRE-CHRISTIAN SCANDINAVIAN RELIGION. By JENS PETER SCHJØDT. Translated by VICTOR HANSEN. *The Viking Collection 17. The University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2008. 525 pp. ISBN 978-87-7674-327-7.

This book looks for patterns in Old Norse literature, which, being found, are presented as structures derived from long-ingrained sequences which may have influenced initiation rituals in the pre-Christian Scandinavian religion. After an introduction (ch. 1), with a long induction into the history of ideas on this subject (ch. 2), the author sets out his 'definition of the category of initiation' which consists of four criteria for identifying the pattern. These are (a) irreversibility of transition, often from upper to lower worlds and back again, (b) a three-part (later known as 'triadic') sequence of separation, transition and incorporation, (c) oppositional pairs, or binary opposites, which are analogues to the liminal versus non-liminal phases around the line which must be crossed, and (d) the status of the object to be acquired by initiation as 'numinous knowledge' (ch. 3). Armed with this list of things to look for, Schjødt discusses the sources, most of which are texts from the Poetic *Edda* and Snorri Sturluson's mythography of the early thirteenth century, as well as the methodology of using these in the study of religion (ch. 4). The analysis of materials then begins. There are two chapters on myths of Óðinn: one concerning Mímir and Kvasir (ch. 5); the other, Óðinn's self-hanging in *Hávamál* and his other forays into magic with Loki and the *völur* (ch. 6). Óðinn is followed by one chapter on the 'Other Mythical Figures' Þórr, Óttarr and Svipdagr (ch. 7), and by another on the 'Human Heroes' Hadingus, Sigurðr, Sigmundur with Sinfjötli, Bøðvarr with Hǫttr and 'Other Initiation Scenarios' (ch. 8). From here, the book moves on to real 'Rituals' as they are described in literary sources, to do with birth, puberty and weddings, death and burial (Ibn Fadlan's funeral reportage), warrior initiation and blood-brotherhood, and finally the 'Initiations of Kings' (ch. 9). These chapters lead to Schjødt's number-coding of his seventeen earlier narratives (p. 397) into fourteen myths (p. 411), and to his analysis of the Norse 'Other World' as a place with multiple venues for the initiation of supernatural subjects (ch. 10). Schjødt's main conclusion is that 'there existed in the period before Christianity entered into the consciousness of the Scandinavian people an initiation structure and initiation symbolism which, in all likelihood, had an impact on their ritual performances' (p. 462). He also finds that sequences in mythic narrative may support arguments for ritual structure, whatever period the texts seem to be from, and that different versions of a myth should be treated as 'a group of narratives that are transformations of one another' (462), rather than as relics of the same story from diverse places and times (ch. 11). All quotations from scholars in languages other than English are translated. The author illustrates his argument at intervals, mostly in ch. 10, with ten schematic diagrams of increasing complexity, and provides lists of abbreviations and primary texts as well as a bibliography and index.

Schjødt's four test criteria are drawn from the work of many anthropologists and folklorists. His three-part structure is from Arnold van Gennep (*Les Rites de*

*Passage*, 1909), the binary opposites from Victor Turner (*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1969), the irreversibility from (among others) Terence Turner (apparently no relation) ('Transformation, Hierarchy and Transcendence: A Reformulation of van Gennep's Model of the Structure of Rites de Passage', in *Secular Ritual*, ed. Myerhoff, 1977), and the numinous knowledge from Jean La Fontaine (*Initiation: Ritual Drama and Secret Knowledge across the World*, 1985). Schjødt vindicates his use of symbolism with the works of Mircea Eliade (particularly *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 1975), refocusing the ideas of all these scholars, and more, on the Norse and related Germanic material. Much of the time he qualifies what has been said in the latter wide area by Lily Weiser (*Altgermanische Jünglingsweißen und Männerbünde*, 1927) and by Otto Höfler (starting with *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, 1934: a good year for initiations). In a work of this kind, historical philologists such as Karl Helm are the spectres at the feast, but Schjødt's reading outside their area is solid and his section on methodology in ch. 4 has much common sense. With all this background in the history of ideas, his synthetic approach is well founded. It cannot be 'scientific', because this kind of work is not an exact science, but this book could be said to set a new conceptual standard for anyone in the future who wants to extract initiation sequences from the texts of a literature as varied and problematic as Old Icelandic.

Where the analysis of materials is concerned, there are some interdisciplinary strains and also some straining. The author is an expert in the structuralist study of religions rather than a literary critic. He is reluctant to go into textual dating or the evaluation of literary quality. In a way this does not matter, for just as a novel reader looking for entertainment on a wet afternoon would not expect to find it in five hundred pages on transformational generative grammar, so students of Eddic poetry or Snorri's prose would be wrong to be disappointed by Schjødt's lack of literary interest in the works he refers to. Anthropologists might also find a shortage of critical commentary to be reasonable in a book which sets out to identify patterns and beneath them structures related to ritual. On the other hand, there are places where a text-critical awareness does matter. As analysed here, Óðinn's incoherent tale of self-hanging in *Hávamál* is quite plausibly an expression of initiation. Schjødt carries out this and other analyses efficiently, but it is worth noting that the relevant Norse literature, where quoted with indent, is usually given in someone else's translation in the main text and with the original text supplied in smaller type in the footnotes, and then sometimes with misprints. Specialists need to check the primary evidence, so this should always come first, and rarely is the meaning of any Norse text so clear that one scholar's translation supports the argument of another.

Schjødt's first materials for study are the two discrepant myths of Óðinn and Mímir. One is Snorri's 1220s tale in *Gylfaginning* of Óðinn's consulting dead Mímir's revived head for knowledge, the other a c.1000 allusion to Óðinn's drinking from *Mímis brunnr* 'Mímir's well' (i.e. the fountain of wisdom) in *Völuspá* 28. These two texts are hardly similar in anything but their country of origin. Snorri (if it is he) is unevenly discursive, whereas *Völuspá* is richly allusive, as Ursula Dronke shows when she reads the poem as a late heathen harmonisation

of variant myths into a system (ed., *The Poetic Edda* II, 1997: not referred to in this book). It is hard enough to compare such texts, or to reconcile one such myth with another, let alone to read a submerged pattern of initiation which is common to both. Schjødtt's second group of materials concerns the mead of poetry. Here the focus is on the long tale in Snorri's *Edda* which begins with the truce between Æsir and Vanir. When both sides are reconciled by blending their spittle in a vat, Snorri says they *spýttu í hráka sínum* 'gobbed their spittle into it' (my translation, *Skáldskaparmál*, G. ch. 57). Later the gods make this substance into Kvasir, a wise man. The dwarfs kill Kvasir, mix his blood with honey and thereby create the mead of poetry. In a further episode the dwarfs sell the mead to the giants to buy their lives. When Óðinn, stealing the mead from the giants, spews it into two or more vats which the gods have prepared, *spýtti hann upp miðinum í ker* 'he threw up the mead into the vats' (G. ch. 58). The mead becomes his gift to men, to make them poets. Quite possibly, given the discrepancy with Kvasir's role in Snorri's *Ynglinga saga*, it is Snorri who joined two or more of these stories together to make sense of skaldic kennings for poetry. As Fjalarr, one of the dwarfs who makes Kvasir into the mead, has a name formally cognate with *at fela* 'conceal' (pace Schjødtt and Rudolf Simek, p. 158), it could be claimed that dwarf and giant are variant hoarders of the mead away from gods and men. Rather than go into kennings to discuss this, however, Schjødtt assumes Snorri's *Edda* narrative to be faithful to a long previous tradition. This helps him read all four test criteria into the story in order to claim the whole thing as an initiation. We might say that part of the story, Óðinn's drinking of the giantess Gunnlǫð's mead in the mountain, looks like an initiation myth, and fulfils the criteria. It does look as if the myth in *Hávamál*, stanzas 104–110, is a variant in which Óðinn goes into a wedding with Gunnlǫð, just as Schjødtt says (p. 154). But to claim the entirety of Snorri's story for this pattern is complicated, unnecessarily dogmatic, and about as charming as a business take-over. What other things could these stories be saying? Part of Schjødtt's case here (pp. 134–72) is that Óðinn appropriates the feminine initiator's role, whereby his 'manner of voiding the mead can be seen as an inverted birth: he spits the mead from his mouth' (p. 166). Nonetheless, Snorri says that he also voids some from his rear end to make *skáldfífla hlut* 'the poetasters' portion', and in any case he spews the mead. The verb is *at spýta* in both cases, but the addition of *upp* in the second makes a phrasal verb which approximates to *at spýja* 'to spew'. As the plural of *ker* 'vats' in the second case testifies, the mead is greater in volume than the spittle with which the gods make the body of Kvasir. Spittle and vomit are two different things, as anyone knows who has read *Egils saga*, or been through Charing Cross on a Friday night, and this myth's great vomiting moment might tell us that poetry is a form of catharsis. This possible meaning, however, has nothing to do with initiation and so is lost in the author's drive to match up the whole myth complex to his four criteria of initiation.

With varying degrees of plausibility, Schjødtt reshapes his other stories into the same pattern. Longer stories have been chosen, as he says, 'because the accounts are sufficiently copious to make it possible to apply the four fundamental criteria' (p. 326). To this end, there is a tendency to harmonise details and unify stories so as to make bigger myths, as when *Grógaldur* is made out to be one poem with

*Fjölsvinnsmál*, despite the poor fit of their content (pp. 262–69), or when Saxo's tale of Hadingus and Harthgrepa is treated as one myth with (in fact as the prelude to) this hero's meeting with Othinus (p. 280). On the level of symbols, some things can be made to look like others. Schjødt argues that the werewolf part of *Völsunga saga*, for example, when Sigmundr bites his son Sinfjötli in the windpipe for having reneged on an agreement, and Sinfjötli's wound later heals through a leaf brought to him by a raven, is Sinfjötli's initiation into Óðinn's war-band; that Sinfjötli 'dies while he is in the shape of a wolf (we must understand his condition as such after Sigmundr has bitten him) and is later restored to life' (p. 308). But Sinfjötli cannot be reborn, because the saga does not say that he is dead (ch. 8). Even if it is accepted that the raven-god sends him some medicine, there are first two weasels whose behaviour gives Sigmundr the idea of healing his companion with a leaf: do they come from Óðinn too? Presumably the weasels also count as 'elements . . . which can only be explained if they are viewed as elements in an initiation sequence' (p. 326). Later, when father and son outlaws are walled up in a burial mound by King Siggeirr after failing to kill him, Schjødt suggests that this is an element in a more complex initiation structure 'where the stay in the mound is a secondary liminal phase between the actual liminal phase (life in the forest) and the final condition' (p. 309), by which he learns something numinous. Anyone who can follow this reasoning must allow that initiation was not uppermost in the mind of the compiler of *Völsunga saga*, even if there is a structure embedded here, nor particularly in the thoughts of the poets who composed the heroic lays on which this part of the saga is based.

All this may have been different in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Few would doubt that the process of Hǫttr's transformation into Hjalti at least mimics a young warrior's initiation. On the ritual level, we might see Hǫttr's drinking the monster's blood, then appearing to slay it, as part of an initiation into a brotherhood to which Bǫðvarr belongs. This fulfils criteria (d) and (a). The movement from hall to moor and back again could probably fulfil (b). Q. E. D., one might say. Only (c) remains, the category of binary opposites: the moor opposes the hall of Lejre as an analogy of lower and upper worlds, for the bog into which Bǫðvarr throws Hǫttr when they reach the moor becomes part of the threshold, 'a watery area, and as such it probably symbolised that which is amorphous and that which is chaotic, both often characteristics of The Other World' (p. 323). The trouble with test (c) is that it is too easy to pass, however. The 'binary' category is open to any opposites (life and death, high and low, male and female, sacred and secular, state and transition, etc.) that can be found nearby (an all-purpose list of 26 pairs is given on pp. 39–40). Since Hǫttr's journey with Bǫðvarr to kill the monster may be read as a contrast between chatterer and strong silent type, a vocal versus non-vocal binary may as well go in too. When all this symbolism is identified, just as in *Völsunga saga*, the story is nowhere to be seen. With no limit to the permutations, Schjødt might yet do for the legendary sagas what Jessie Weston did to Arthurian literature in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920).

Most ambitious of all initiation structures discussed here is that located in Ibn Fadlan's allegedly eye-witness account of a funeral by the river Volga in 921 or 922 (pp. 344–52). According to him, a Rus' chieftain's body was publicly burned

on a pyre after the man had been buried provisionally for ten days (effectively nine nights). During this interval a female slave was trained to become his companion in the hereafter. She was attended by two other slaves who, by washing her feet while she sang of paradise, treated her apparently as a substitute wife. She was made drunk with liquor and had sex with the dead man's kinsmen as a sign of their love for him. On the tenth day she was lifted over a doorframe in order for her to see paradise, then gang-raped, stabbed and strangled in a tent on the ship and laid there next to the chieftain. The man who lit the pyre approached it naked and by walking backwards, returning also with his back turned to the ship. In Schjødtt's interpretation, this ghastly tale reflects three intertwined sequences of initiation, that of the chieftain (from earth to paradise, from lower status to higher), the slave (the same) and the naked man (just the change in status, if it is true that he was the next chieftain). Criteria (a), (b) and (c) are thus satisfied, though (d), the acquisition of numinous knowledge, remains elusive unless the slave-girl's liquor and her own songs be treated as such; like Óðinn with Gunnlōð, it seems, the man's rapist kinsmen may have learned something from their victim; and who knows, the dead man may have had something whispered into his ear to bring him to Valhøll. If Ibn Fadlan did not come through on the category of numinous knowledge, this must be because he lacked the necessary information (p. 351).

Finally, Schjødtt goes into the *jarðarmen* 'earth-necklace' ritual, the one saga motif which might count as an active initiation (pp. 355–72). In *Gísla saga* and elsewhere, we read of an elevated strip of turf beneath which potential bloodbrothers may crawl, mingle their blood with that of each other and also with the soil, then come out. Jan de Vries wisely defined this as a symbolic death and rebirth into a new family ('Der altnordische Rasengang', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 3 (1929), 106–35). However, since the ritual is used in *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 33 by one partaker as a means of humiliating the other as he bends down to enter, Schjødtt adds *ergi* 'perversity' into the mix. This is in harmony with Margaret Clunies Ross, who sees the turf strip, not only here but in the earliest conception of the ritual, as a ring symbolising the anus ('Hildir's Ring: a Problem in the *Ragnarsdrápa*, strophes 8–12', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 6 (1973), 75–92). *Ergi*, however, adds nothing to this argument except confusion, and here, as elsewhere, a reader might ask whether the book would have gained by being shorter.

That is no joke. For most readers of Norse literature the length of this study will make the book itself into an initiation. Schjødtt makes a long, over-directed and occasionally strained, but eventually mostly successful case for the existence of initiation sequences in heathen ritual through their generally Christian afterlife as structures deeply submerged in various texts. Although there are some over-complicated sections which can be challenged on textual grounds, as well as by common sense, Schjødtt's argument is both thorough and well orchestrated. From now on the metaphor must be Norse mythology as Health and Safety: some will question the purpose, but everyone will have to read the manual, and most will follow the recommendations.

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GALDRAMENN: GALDRAR OG SAMFÉLAG Á MIÐÖLDUM. Edited by TORFI H. TULINIUS. *Hugvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands*. Reykjavík, 2008. 195 pp. ISBN 978-9979-9877-1-0.

As Torfi Tulinius emphasises in his introduction to this volume, magic is important—or rather the range of cultural phenomena which we clumsily label ‘magic’ is important. In Tulinius’s words, these phenomena lie *á vegamótum í menningarsögunni, þar sem mætast klassískar menntir, alþýðuspeki með rætur í forkristnum trúarviðhorfum, hugmyndir um samfélagsskipan og tengsl hennar við handanheiminn* ‘at a crossroads in cultural history where Classical learning meets both folklore rooted in pre-Christian belief-systems, and ideas about social structure and its connections with the world beyond’ (p. 17). The volume is the proceedings of a conference, *Galdur og samfélag á miðöldum* ‘magic and society in the Middle Ages’, held in 2006; it contains nine fairly short articles, all in Icelandic with brief English summaries (from which the English article titles in this review are taken). Some of the articles are more fully developed than others, but they are consistently stimulating.

The collection is nicely focused on medieval and early modern Iceland, and this scope is significant. Beliefs about practitioners of magic become prominent in the European textual record only with the early modern witchcraft trials; the unique character of medieval Icelandic literature makes Iceland a leading case-study for situating early modern evidence in a fuller historical context, but this opportunity has too seldom been seized. The simple fact that articles on both medieval and early modern Iceland are juxtaposed in this volume is an important step forward.

The contributors who actually combine medieval and early modern sources are Stephen Mitchell, Már Jónsson and Magnús Rafnsson. Augmenting a string of important earlier articles, Mitchell examines ‘The *Pactum Diabolo* and Nordic Witchcraft’, focusing on the burning of a nun (or perhaps two) at Kirkjubær in 1343 *er gefiz hafð pukanum með brefi* ‘who had given herself to the Devil in writing’. He elucidates her fleeting appearance in the Icelandic annals with a detailed discussion of earlier medieval sources for the idea of the diabolical pact, and with reference to later Scandinavian witchcraft trials. Amongst other things, Mitchell’s discussion indicates the degree to which the fourteenth-century Icelandic Church was in touch with emergent mainstream thought on witchcraft. This sits well alongside Már’s argument in *Jónsbók* on Sorcery and Witchcraft: Origins and Influence’ that the provision against the rather distinctively named *fordæðuskapr* ‘witchcraft’ in the 1281 law-code *Jónsbók* drew on earlier Norwegian law, and influenced the terminology of early modern discourses. Már does also argue that Christian IV’s witchcraft ordinance of 1617 was more influential, which chimes with the account given by Magnús Rafnsson in ‘Different Attitudes towards Magic among Authorities and Commoners’. Magnús emphasises the influence of European learning on prosecutions for witchcraft in early modern Iceland, but is also able to show that people were sometimes prosecuted for possessing grimoires which seem to belong to literary traditions dating back to the fifteenth century.

These contributions are a useful counterpoint to Ólína Þorvarðardóttir’s article ‘For Better or Worse? The Meaning of Icelandic Magic’. Ólína provides a

convenient introduction to early modern witchcraft trials in the West Fjords through three case-studies, and, like Magnús, makes a sensible case that their outbreak is partly to be explained by cultural clashes associated with the Reformation. However, our studies of witchcraft are often still confined by a post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment intellectual heritage, and Ólína accordingly presents Iceland's Reformation as a response to the fact that *hinn kaþólski, kristni siður var ekki orðinn mjög rótfastur hér á landi* 'the Catholic Christian tradition had not grown very deep-rooted in Iceland' (p. 173). This accepts too readily the post-Reformation narrative of a medieval Icelandic Christianity which was imperfect rather than simply one of Christianity's many variants. Mitchell's work in particular shows the value of studying medieval Christianity on its own terms, and of looking for continuities across the Reformation.

A different sort of rethinking comes from Rune Blix Hagen, who examines the seventeenth-century Norwegian witchcraft trials of two Sami men, Quiwe Baarsen and Anders Poulsen, to question how far ecstatic states were really central to their magic practice. He suggests a need to redefine the term which comes through in the Icelandic as *andatrú* 'spirit-belief', but behind which is the term 'shamanism'. He is convincing, though scrapping the overburdened term 'shamanism' altogether—perhaps indeed in favour of the more neutral Icelandic *andatrú*—would be an attractive alternative.

The Middle Ages are central to two contributions by Ármann Jakobsson, 'How "Argr" is Óðinn? Magic, Sexuality and Hvamm-Sturla' and 'What is a Tröll? Magic, "Tröllskapr" and Social Enemies', most of the content of which will be familiar to *Saga-Book* readers from his article 'The Trollish Acts of Þorgrímr the Witch: The Meanings of *Troll* and *Ergi* in Medieval Iceland' (*Saga-Book* XXXII (2008), 39–68). I find the discussion of *ergi* a little hung up on what may be another inheritance from the Judaeo-Christian heritage of Western scholarship, the idea that gods should be above criticism—either by being paragons of virtue, or by some special cultural dispensation for divinities (esp. pp. 61–63)—when perhaps we should read the *Æsir* as being as fallible as the rest of us. But both pieces are important contributions, reaching well beyond the *Íslendingasögur* on which scholars have tended to focus, and complicating our understanding of *ergi* and magic, particularly around the thirteenth century. Ármann's thorough survey of different usages of *tröll* will hopefully open the way to studies deploying linguistic, semantic theory to refine his findings.

Important, and complementary, new angles on medieval magic and social status are offered by Sverrir Jakobsson's 'Magic and Prescience in a Stateless Society' and Helga Kress's '"Unhelpful, these Women of Yours": On the Relationship between Masculinity, Witchcraft and Womanizing in the Sagas of Icelanders'. *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga* loom large here, but Kress also analyses the less widely studied *Fóstbræðra saga*. Sverrir's key suggestion is that accounts of men with foresight—such as Njáll—might suggest the existence of a kind of *menntaelíta* 'scientific elite' in Conversion-period Iceland, while Kress discusses how women's use of magic is often only implicit, and how the use of magic tends to be left implicit when it is associated with high-status women.

This is, then, a lively collection, offering a range of new ideas about and approaches to medieval and early modern magic-workers. The material cries out for comparison with wider European evidence, and it is to be hoped that the volume will stimulate further work on these lines.

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GAND, SEID OG ÅNDEVIND. By ELDAR HEIDE. *Universitetet i Bergen*. Bergen, 2006. 341 pp. ISBN 82-308-0196-7.

The aim of this doctoral dissertation is to provide a better understanding of what *gandr* meant, both in the Middle Ages and in later folk tradition. To do so, Heide uses Old Norse sources, early accounts of sami practices, and folklore from Iceland to Estonia. He anticipates criticism because of his wide-ranging sources, and realises that he has sometimes not always been able to go into the detail they deserve. However, had he not ranged so widely, he might well have missed a number of interesting parallels among the materials he examines.

The primary sources are presented in chapter 2, their interpretations by earlier scholars in chapter 3, and Heide's evaluation of both sources and interpretations in chapter 4. His conclusions are summarised in chapter 5. His analysis finds common features in concepts as similar and diverse as *gandr*, *seiðr*, *hug*, *fylgja*, *gandreið*, wolves, troll-women, shape-shifting, magic flies, spinning, weather, gods, valkyries, elves and the dead. His close readings yield new insights into the interpretation of a number of passages in Old Norse and several skaldic kennings, whether one takes those passages and kennings as literal or metaphorical presentations of supernatural beliefs. Well-chosen illustrations of archaeological finds are used to support his arguments.

An index is not to be expected in a dissertation. The lack is almost supplied by a detailed table of contents and extensive cross-referencing; however, there are blind spots. The source on which Heide's definition of *gandr* is ultimately based—*Historia Norwegiae*—proved hard to find when I wanted to check it (it is cited on p. 22). Oddly, only one of its two sections on the magic of the *Finni* is included. The second section is admittedly difficult to interpret (perhaps because of scribal error, as suggested by Mortensen in *Historia Norwegie*, Ed. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen (Copenhagen, 2003), p. 124); however, it does appear to deal with a sort of attracting magic, apparently involving a hook or hooked stick, which would support arguments made elsewhere in the book.

Heide's definition of *gandr* is

a spirit-being that goes out from a ritual specialist when he is in a trance or sleep. It can be his/her soul or a helping spirit, and the distinction between the two is unclear. The spirit-being can take many forms, especially of animals. The one who controls the spirit can use it for prophecy, to obtain or find desired or lost objects, and to fight with, or harm, other spirit being or humans . . . The *gandr* can be something sharp, and can resemble a penis. To the extent that the ritual specialist's soul is itself the *gandr*, the owner can travel with it. (pp. 142–43)

Heide further argues for the idea that the *gandr*, which is closely related to the breath, enters (attacks) its victim through the mouth or nose, as witnessed by the phrase *það sækir að mér* accompanying a yawn in modern Iceland, and the use of the term *gander* in Shetlandic for nausea or stomach ache. Flies (Icelandic *gandflugur* or *galdraflugur*) that want to go down into (*ofan í*) the victim can be incarnations of the *gandr*, as can wolves that appear in dreams, or nightmares that ride their victims. *Fylgjur* of individuals in the sagas and folklore are another form of the *gandr*, as is wind, whether caused by sorcerers or the god Þórr.

If there is a weakness in Heide's methodology, it results from his desire to define the original form of the concept he is studying; he wants each idea or association to have been there from the beginning. He represents living or dead human spirits, elves, trolls and gods as sharing the same basic characteristics, such as the ability of their spirit to do harm at a distance, consciously or not. While I have no argument with the idea that the breath of a god (or the negative thoughts or the helping-spirit of a magician) could be or cause a storm, the various categories of beings come perilously near to becoming indistinguishable from each other, as do their breaths and spirits.

The strength of this work lies in Heide's presentation of likely paths by which many later beliefs could derive from his proposed common original. Its weakness is that at times he makes insufficient allowance for the possibility that originally distinct concepts may have been borrowed or influenced each other during the lengthy period under consideration. His discussion of the associations of both *seiðr* and *gandr* with spinning/turning/twisting are fascinating, although readers may not be willing to accept all of his conclusions (such as the conflation of *seiðr*, characteristically associated with the female and the effeminate, with the phallic associations of *gandr*). As a scholarly exercise, however, carrying ideas to their farthest possible extent is worth doing; new insights may be obtained on the journey. Heide has done a service to scholars of mythology, folklore and religion by collecting all this material in a single place.

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SHAMANISM IN NORSE MYTH AND MAGIC. By CLIVE TOLLEY. *FF Communciations* CXLIV 296, 297. *Academia Scientiarum Fennica*. Helsinki, 2009. xxv + 589, 286 pp. 3 maps, 3 colour and black-and-white figures. ISBN 978-951-41-1027-6 and 978-951-41-1029-0 (hardcover), 978-951-41-1028-3 and 978-951-41-1030-6 (paperback).

Those who have made 'shamanism' into their shorthand for magic had better read this book. Its two volumes run to more than 900 pages. Ultimately Clive Tolley builds a description of magic in Old Norse myths and history, but the picture he gives first, of shamanism in its many past varieties in Eurasia, is monumentally bigger. In passing we learn that the word 'shaman' comes to us through Russian from *sama:n*, possibly meaning 'know', in the language of the Ewenki, a tribe from eastern Siberia (I 66, n. 1, and II Map 5). Yet Tolley's book, a matured and updated

version of his 1993 DPhil thesis, is not about shamanism *per se*. If the Ewenki have been so well described that their word for a witch-doctor has trounced the alternatives, this is not an observation to detain the author. Tolley presents the rarer linguistic and cultural details without fanfare because he directs them to an entirely Norse conclusion. In Volume I, he sets out a detailed list of contents, in six parts. Further into the book, he is careful to define shamanism slowly and cumulatively with texts from a galaxy of languages including any and all Scandinavian and Latin, Old English, Old Irish, Ancient Greek and Sanskrit, Lappish, Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Russian and Japanese, with the more northerly Asian examples flowing in from all circumpolar territories between Norway and Greenland. In Volume II, 'Reference Materials', Tolley gives a *Who's Who* of Eurasian tribes, then a comprehensive list, quotation and translation of Norse and other texts which will long be useful not only to shamanists, but also to all scholars of Norse mythology and archaeology. Volume II also contains a bibliography and two indices and is lavishly illustrated with five colour maps and thirteen plates, all but four in colour. All this serves Vol. I, in which Tolley begins by judging the reliability of all relevant Norse texts (chs. 1–3); then tells us what shamanism looked like in both classic (i.e. undiluted Arctic, ch. 4) and general (i.e. diluted more southerly Eurasian, ch. 5) forms, how it fitted into the societies that used it (chs 6–7), what its spiritual mechanisms (chs 8–9) and cosmography (chs 10–15) were, including cosmic pillar (ch. 10) and World Tree (ch. 13), the shaman's vocation (ch. 16), how the rituals proceeded (ch. 17), what props such as hats and drums, might be found around them (ch. 18), about other things such as the smith (ch. 19) and the bear (ch. 20), and lastly what classic shamanism was not (ch. 22).

Some readers will be disappointed to find that it was not Old Norse. Tolley demonstrates, instead, that if there was shamanism in Norse magic, it was so diluted as to be indistinguishable from wider European witchcraft; that the shamanism the Vikings thought they knew was really what they had seen with the Sámi next door; that if 'battle-magic' was ever performed for a Viking *Männerbund* on an outing to Lindisfarne or elsewhere, this cannot have been shamanism, or even their own *seiðr*, which appears to have differed from Sámi magic; lastly, that the *seiðr* described in so many Icelandic sagas owes more to bookish fantasy than to Norse magic as practised in the Viking Age.

It will quickly be seen that these conclusions undermine the case presented in another big work on the subject, Neil Price's *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala, 2002). Tolley gently admits to some disagreement in various places, notably in his conclusion in which, after complimenting Price for the stimulus of his new graveyard evidence, he states that 'archaeological artefacts are dependent on input from intellectual monuments for their interpretation'; adding, with characteristic understatement, that 'as we have seen, these sources are far from accommodating in the clarity of their meaning' (I 582). His own monograph, which could be said both to rival Asia in size and to fight for its meaning across a matching wilderness of semantic cruces and ambiguities, with many an acknowledgement of impasse, supplants Price on the question of how to evaluate literary sources. Price claims on p. 393 of *The Viking Way* that Viking-Age shamanism, a kind of battle magic,

was 'nothing less than a view of the nature of reality itself'. That was exciting, but now looks beside the point. The lesson to learn from Tolley is that the necessary details are lost. Whatever magic was like in the Viking Age, we are now in the position of having to guess at it through the stylisations of a few difficult Icelandic sentences in the piecemeal texts of a much later and problematic literature. The late Iron-Age Norse mindset must be glimpsed through these prisms before it can be used either to draw from, or to build on, other scholars' interpretations of Viking-Age artefacts. It is the same with the lost ritual behind the archaeology of the Sámi: East Siberian rituals are better documented than anything from among the Lapps, heathen or otherwise. At the same time, it seems that the Sámi and Norse pre-Christian religions, which were first properly compared in Thomas DuBois's *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (1999), were never the same or even all that similar, despite sharing land in the northern Scandinavian peninsula. The same is more narrowly argued by François-Xavier Dillmann in work which includes his *Les magiciens dans l'Islande ancienne* (2006, reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXXIII (2009), 103–05). Tolley's doctoral thesis, which was in any case a source for these other scholars, pointed out the differences in 1993. His scepticism dates back further, to Åke Ohlmarks (1939, 1941), whose view he supports with now-richer documentation.

A good place to start with Tolley's argument is his discussion of a vexed passage in the *Historia Norwegiae* (4.13–23), a Norwegian work from the early thirteenth century. This is the Latin record of a Norse witness of two Sámi shamans retrieving the soul of their hostess when she was suddenly robbed of it, at a dinner of all places, by the underwater shaman of an enemy tribe. Tolley argues that the author here uses the language of *seiðr*, which was familiar to him, to describe a type of magic which was not. Looking for a term for the wandering free soul of a shaman, the Norwegian author found the nearest thing in *gandus* (Old Norse *gandr*), a Norse word for an independent helping spirit such as those consulted by *völur* 'sibyls' for knowledge and prophecy (I 246–71, esp. 258–68; cf. 513). A *völva* is usually more dead than alive, like a working shaman, but nobody would want to confuse the two after reading this book. Whereas shamans lived at the heart of their tribes, Norse literature casts the *völur* as social rejects who send rather than travel to the spirit world, and then only to fulfil individual rather than communal wishes. The subtlety of Tolley's extensive analysis here well repays the time it takes to absorb the detail. To acknowledge the Norwegian author's appropriation of sibylline *gandar* into the ritual he describes in *Historia Norwegiae* is to see that the *kamlanie* (the free-soul journey in which the shaman heals a person by freeing his soul from the clutches of other shamans in the spirit world) was alien in this case, and probably in most others, to the culture of *seiðr*.

Not that Norse myths relating to *seiðr* are totally dissimilar. They do include at least one underwater contest in quasi-shamanic form, namely the mysterious stanza in Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* ('2') in which Heimdalr appears to rescue Freyja's precious jewel from Loki in a sea duel for which both change into seals. Out of the mythologems at work (and there seem to be several) in these pre-Christian lines, this one resembles a Sámi shaman's retrieval of the souls of the sick from

the underworld through a struggle with its inhabitants. He may even be identified with the animal spirits who help him; Heimdallr here also appears to be a guardian father, as he is in *Völuspá* and *Rígsþula*, in that he saves mankind's well-being from Loki's malign attempt to steal it. The name *Heimdallr* (meaning something like 'world's burgeoning'), which associates this god with the protective role of the World Tree, particularly at three moments in *Völuspá* (I 369–74, esp. 370), points to layer upon layer of rituals subsumed into time and virtually forgotten by the late heathen Norse poets who used him in various stylised ways. Although Tolley's analysis of Heimdallr speaks for certain shamanic elements native to Old Norse heathendom at one time, he is careful here, as everywhere, to point out that 'without a ritual engagement by practitioners, the shamanic aspect of the god remains unfulfilled . . . If any such engagement existed, it has left no trace' (I 393–405, esp. 405). This is also the case with Óðinn, the Norse god usually appointed shaman to the Æsir. Óðinn's leading claim to this title is the nine-night self-sacrifice in *Hávamál* 138–41, which is apparently the heathen Norwegian core of a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Icelandic ensemble. In these stanzas it appears that Óðinn dies, gathers ancestral knowledge for the communal as well as his own good, and then returns, all while being hanged on the World Tree. A shaman's journey would be similar. Tolley remains cautious, however, for he concludes that, while it seems just about reasonable to classify Óðinn's self-immolation as being parallel to a shamanic initiation, it would be 'wrong to describe it as an example of such without being able to place it into a wider context of shamanic practice' (I 427–34, esp. 434).

The lack of this wider context in Old Norse literature inevitably becomes a refrain. This is especially so wherever Tolley considers the Icelandic prose of the thirteenth century or later in which most accounts of *seiðr* survive. The risk of taking *seiðr* material at face value is well illustrated in the analysis of Þorbjörg *lítillvölva* 'little sibyl'. This woman, last in a line of nine sisters, is consulted for harvest prophecy in a Greenland séance in chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga rauða*, a work of the later thirteenth century (I 487–507). Her accoutrements are so vividly described as to foster an illusion of past reality, and no more. As Tolley succeeds in showing, not only is the gap between narrative setting and authorial present too wide for authenticity, at more than two hundred years, but Þorbjörg's stately costume, staff and visitation, as it were, make her look more like an episcopal travesty than a seeress such as the two or three in *Völuspá*. The *varðlokur* 'songs that entice the spirits' which Guðríðr, unwillingly as a Christian, is made to sing appear more Norwegian than Icelandic; and yet, if they were ever cited with knowledge of the Sámi *juoigis* 'yoiks' that enable a shaman to make his trance journey, her chants are comparable only in the broadest terms. The impression from *Eiríks saga* is that a few traditional terms were sprinkled over this scene 'to evoke an air of antiquity' (I 506), by an author more than usually clerical in his views. Moreover, it seems that Snorri, a mythographer who was not, tries for a similarly historicising effect when he describes the god Óðinn as a spiritual traveller and shape-shifter in *Ynglinga saga* (ch. 7). On the one hand, it appears that Snorri makes partial use of a shaman's trance to describe Óðinn's journeys, possibly using (a source for) the shamanic passage in the *Historia*



*Norwegiae*, because he knows that Óðinn can ride to the world of the dead. On the other hand, shamans were held to be not gods but human, could go anywhere in spiritual fashion, and did not transform themselves into animals so much as get help from spirits who were themselves in animal form (I 507–13). So once again there is a mismatch. This one tells us that Snorri used Sámi magic to adumbrate Norse *seiðr* precisely because he found the Sámi ways exotic, i.e. different from the myths he grew up with.

To sum up, this book is an outstanding achievement. It lays solid new foundations for the study of magic in Norse mythology, particularly with regard to the recent extension of this into Lapland. The subject is now wider, but henceforth the burden of proof will lie on those who continue to identify the Sámi *noaide* ‘shaman’, or even the Siberian varieties, with Olce *seiðmaðr* ‘wizard’, *seiðkona* ‘witch’, or *völva* ‘sibyl’. I think that few if any scholars who try this will be able to match Tolley in the depth and detail of their philology. Readers will find him to be constantly judicious and remarkably well organised in the face of an almost unnatural immensity of subject. It is abundantly clear that Tolley inhabits this subject from the roots up. His book seems to be all properly checked. There were no errors that I could find, in typography or anything else. In the circumstances, his use of the *wynn* character for ‘w’ in Old English quotations is a forgivable eccentricity. Tolley always argues fairly, admitting lack of evidence where necessary and keeping the prose circumspect, as if aware that not everybody will agree with everything he says. I find it nearly all convincing, although it is hard for me to believe that the poet of *Völundarkviða* characterises his Sámi smith hero with Odinic motifs rather than with the outward forms of shamanic culture which this *Deor*-related poem seems to hold in its store (I 556–57). Another quibble for me concerns the name ‘Beowulf’, which Tolley, despite identifying this hero with the Sámi-linked Bǫðvarr bjarki and noting such bearlike features as collude with ‘wolf of bees’ as a derivation, takes to mean ‘wolf of Beow (barley)’ (I 566). One inference to be drawn from these equally well-presented parts of the analysis, however, is that Sámi culture was known to the West Germanic tribes from the earliest times, long before even the oldest surviving records. Another insight from Tolley’s book came to me from surviving his many fact-finding shamanic tours through Siberia. This is that the divine cults that lay behind Snorri’s Icelandic mythography and behind even earlier poetic syncretisms, such as *Völuspá* and the Norse poems for Earl Hákon, should themselves be regarded not as coherent, but as loose systematisations of religious clutter: something Tolley calls ‘a fragmentary kaleidoscope of notions . . . the ad hoc’ (I 410). This or that Norse mythologem, should it resemble another in the extant Old Norse poetry or Icelandic prose, has usually been identified with it so as to make a clearer construct of old Scandinavian religion. Now, however, seeing so many varieties of shamanism among Eurasian tribes who are closely related, or even the same, it seems more advisable to treat ‘Norse mythology’ as a repository of religious differences in the Viking Age.

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FERÐ UM FORNAR SÖGUR. NOREGSFERÐ Í FÓTSPOR SNORRA STURLUSONAR. By ÞORGRÍMUR GESTSSON. *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*. Reykjavík, 2003. 232 pp. ISBN 9979-66-140-2.

I SNORRE STURLASON'S FOTEFAR. By ÞORGRÍMUR GESTSSON. *Vigmostad & Bjørke*. Bergen, 2007. 232 pp. ISBN 978-82-419 0428-8.

In academic study of Old Norse literature and history the tendency, or perhaps the requirement, is to focus on the problems of history: Is the story of the power struggle between Erling Skjalgsson and Olav Tryggvason a written fiction or an oral tale from the past? What motive did Snorri Sturluson have for including the story? Is it possible to detect an influence from the Bible or European literature in the story? How is it possible to distinguish between Snorri's contribution and the sources he used? Such questions, ubiquitous as they are in academic circles, are not hurdles for most people simply interested in history. And it is for this audience that Þorgrímur Gestsson wrote his book. The *raison d'être* of the work is the *remembrance* of Old Norse history; to collect stories from the Icelandic sagas set in Norway and provide them with topological information, sometimes a photograph or a comment of his own or a local specialist. Thus the author, playing on the famous line of Ari the Wise, states in the beginning: 'Let's make use of that which is more fun' (*Hafa skal það sem skemmtilegra reynist*).

This said, it must be emphasised that the book possesses clear academic value. This stems partly from the character of the project which is informed by the insights and detailed studies of local historians whom Þorgrímur has consulted on his way from eastern Norway up to Lofoten, and down again along the great fjords of the west coast. With his exceptional and wide-ranging case studies the author himself also provides valuable insights. On page 194 in the Icelandic version, for example, he mentions that he is no longer in doubt that the settlers of Iceland brought with them place-names from Norway. This he states while driving in the vicinity of Herdabreid, a peak which in the old days had marked the borders of the counties of Hardanger and Voss near the West coast. This is the same mountain name as Herðubreið in Iceland. A book of this nature does not, of course, leave much space for lengthy and detailed arguments or digressions. Further reflection is left to the reader who is supplied with a wealth of empirical data. Thus we can ask whether the name Herdabreid, meaning 'wide-shouldered', could allude to that shape, shared by both mountains? Or has it to do with landmark tradition: just as Herdabreid in Norway marks the passage from Hardanger to Voss on the old route, Herðubreið marks the passing point from the northern to the eastern quarter of Iceland (*Austfirðingaffjórðungur*). This is just one of the speculations that came to my mind while reading the book and this is one of the qualities of this project: by remembering the old stories, texts and place-names and supplementing them with further information, the book provides a setting for further study and discussion. The book marks a beginning for further reflection, without demanding it. It is an igniter of interest.

The amount of information in this book is vast, and I would not recommend reading it in one sitting (as I did for this review). It is indeed a perfect handbook for studying different parts of Norway or places significant in its history. For this purpose the maps at the beginning of each chapter or section (Icelandic: *áfangi*)

are of great aid to the reader. During my travels in Western Norway I have derived great pleasure from using this book as a handbook of Old Norse history.

What strikes one is the kindness and curiosity encountered by this traveller from Iceland in the land of his forefathers (since most people take for granted the origin of Icelanders in Norway). Wherever the author arrives and introduces his project he is embraced as a lost son who has returned. So, for example, when he is searching for the homestead of the saga figure Gísli Súrsson he knocks on the door of a nearby farm and the lady of the house shouts out: 'Finally an Icelandic!' When the Icelandic Þorgrímur, well acquainted with the Old Norse language and texts, meets the various Norwegians along his way, many of whom are well versed in topography and local tradition, and they pool their resources, the deeply inter-related history of Norway and Iceland comes into a fruitful dialogue.

The author also provides insights, written in journalistic style, into modern Norway, describing the local food and architecture and giving an account of the open-air historical drama (*Saga-spel*) he happens to come across. The tone of his comments is kind and humorous. When the author sets up his tent in Haugesund by the grave mound of Haraldr hárfagri he is kept awake all night by some beer-drinking men attending a jazz-festival, which of course reminds him of King Haraldr's mead-drinking berserks (pp. 215–16).

The subtitle of the Icelandic version, translated into English, is: 'Travelling in Norway in the footsteps of Snorri Sturluson', which has also become the main title of the Norwegian translation: *I Snorre Sturlasons fotefar*. This is somewhat mysterious. When beginning the book this reviewer expected an overview of Snorri's own travels in Norway. But Snorri's travelling is only mentioned occasionally: that he was in Tunsberg in 1218 (p. 24) and in Trondheim in 1219 (p. 64), while no attempt is made to reconstruct his travel route during his visits to Norway. Even understanding 'Snorri' metonymically as 'the works of Snorri' is problematic: while Snorri is accepted as the author of *Heimskringla*, the book also uses motifs from the Sagas of Icelanders, the Legendary Sagas and the Contemporary Sagas.

The translation into Norwegian *bokmål* must have been demanding, since many of the texts cited had to be translated specifically for this publication. The translation displays outstanding knowledge of both Old Norse and Icelandic. The Norwegian of Gro-Tove Sandmark is stylistically independent while at the same time loyal to the Icelandic text, even though an Icelandic place name such as *Nýja Jórvík* is difficult to translate into Norwegian in any other form than 'New York'.

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THE HAMMER AND THE CROSS. A NEW HISTORY OF THE VIKINGS. By ROBERT FERGUSON. *Allen Lane*. London, 2009. 451 pp. ISBN 978-0-713-99788-0.

In this wide-ranging book Robert Ferguson covers a period roughly from the 800s to 1066 and a geographical area stretching from L'Anse Aux Meadows to the Volga. He makes forays into more modern times with vignettes such as the uncovering of the Oseberg ship and its journey from its 'eternal' resting place to

its ethnographic resting place in the Bygdoy museum. Thirty-five pages of notes offer a compendium of up-to-date information, including reference to internet sites, and the text is complemented by two sections of black-and-white photographs.

The book is divided into eighteen chapters, organised on generally chronological principles—with some odd juxtapositions, such as the insertion into the second of two chapters on the Danelaw in England of a discussion of the (mostly Icelandic, as it turns out) workings of the law against the usually sexual slander known as *níð*. One might have expected such a subject to have featured in a chapter on Norse law, but there is no such chapter. Ferguson's chosen terminus of 1066, defended in the Introduction (pp. 2–3), is questioned by the inclusion of the complete history of the Greenland settlement which, though covered in a single chapter, extends far beyond the putative terminal date; Ferguson also summarises the later history of the Icelandic Commonwealth up to the loss of independence in 1263, and would perhaps have done better to have taken this as his terminal date. The period of the Gallowglass bands in western Britain and the final throw of the dice by the Norwegian royal house in the battle of Largs of 1263 seem to me to be no less pertinent to a study of the Viking Age than royal attempts to impose rule on England in the 1000s.

The book's subtitle could more accurately have called it a 'popular' rather than a 'new' history. This is a massive dossier of information and details of the Norse world and its environs in the given time period, but it lacks substantial analysis. The two runic alphabets, younger and older, are depicted (p. 25), but without any useful information about their history and development. The Norse gods are also mentioned throughout the book but no analysis is provided of what we know of Viking-Age beliefs. Viking-Age art is represented only in several unexplained references to the Jellinge, Borre and Mammen styles and to 'tiny dragon-like creatures with intricately twined limbs' (pp. 80, 260) (otherwise known as 'the gripping beast'); there is no mention of the Ringerike and Urnes styles. Ferguson is sometimes over-reliant on secondary sources, not always relevant to an anglophone readership. In his chapter 'Across The Baltic', he cites Constantine VII and the *De Administrando Imperio* (p. 124), but without any reference to this text in his notes; in detailing the occurrence of Norse names for the rapids on the portage down the Dnieper, Ferguson gives the names 'in modern Swedish', even where this bears no relation to the original Old East Norse words, e.g. modern Swedish *ringande* for *Gelandri* (ON *gællandi*). What use is this in a book in English? (English meanings are, however, given in parentheses.) Absent also from the account of this fascinating material is any reference to or discussion of the 'monoxyla which come down from outer Russia to Constantinople . . . from Novgorod' alluded to in *De Administrando Imperio*.

Other modern Scandinavian word forms intrude into this book; *Midgardsormen* (p. 306) has the suffixed definite article attached, a construction never found in modern English. On the next page Ferguson refers to the *Fimbulvinter*, where the original ON, *Fimbulvetr*, or an English rendition such as 'Fimbul-winter' would be preferable.

There are several references to the Russian *Povest' Vremennykh Let* 'Chronicles of Past Times', for which the source cited is *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, trans.

Samuel Cross, 1930. It is not made clear that this is in fact the original edition of Cross's translation, published in *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology* XII (1930), rather than that completed by O P Sherbowitz-Wetzor and reissued in book form in 1953.

Ferguson's continuing story of the Norse penetration of the Slavic lands and to the east makes no mention of the various treaties and hangings of shields attributed to the Rus' in and around Constantinople, despite his novel speculation that 'Scandinavian traders and warriors . . . may have penetrated as far south as the capital of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad' (p. 127). The two chief Arabic accounts, Ibn Rustah and Ibn Fadlan, are offered, but there is no deeper analysis. Where, for example, is the geographer Ibn Khurdādbih, and what could have been made of his assertion that merchants 'make their way round the back of Rome and travel through the lands of the Slavs to the capital of the Khazars and also across the Caspian Sea to Balkh'? (Abu'l Qasim Ubaid' Allah ibn Khurdādbih, *al-Kitāb al-masālik w' al-mamālik* [The Book of Roads and Provinces] ed. & trans. M. J. de Goeje, 1889, p. 115). And what of Ibn Hawkal, who discusses the routes of the fur and slave trades and states that beaver pelts come from the territory of the Rus' and that the majority of trade in Slav and Khazar slaves is funnelled through Khwarizm—that is, via the trade routes of the Rus'? One minor error, a reference to Ibn Fadlan as 'Ibn' (nothing more than the patronymic 'son of') (p. 257) may be a typographical omission.

A perhaps more serious flaw is Ferguson's sometimes anachronistic interpretation of historical evidence. There is no justification in Ibn Fadlan's text for the assertion on p. 257 of 'an almost homoerotic quality' in his description of the Rus, nor is it argued for in scholarly commentaries. Later Ferguson assumes that the Vikings, as a 'primitive' people, would be naturally inclined to tattoo themselves (pp. 257–58), quoting *Sigrdrífumál* 7, line 4: *á horni skal þær rísta oc á handar baki* and 9, line 4: *á lófa þær skal rísta oc of liðo spennu* (Neckel / Kuhn, *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius* (1962), 191), which he believes refer to tattooing, an interpretation of *rísta* 'carve', 'cut' unsupported elsewhere. Conceivably the lines refer to the ritual spilling of blood. Needless to say, the tattoos of the '5,000-year-old hunter' mentioned in the following paragraph have little or nothing to do with practices of the Viking Age. Finally, Ferguson wonders why the everyday working practices of 'foresters, carpenters, blacksmiths, sail-makers, rope-makers and labourers' have no place in the sagas (p. 61), as if the sagas were modern sociological documents rather than medieval literature. Some may have reservations about Ferguson's occasional indulgence in purple prose, such as his description of the interment of the Oseberg ship: 'the blood-spattered ship with its cargo of dead women seeming to lurch forward across the field in a last attempt to shake off the engulfing wave of dark earth rising behind it' (p. 17), or the account of how Charlemagne's empire 'slowly disappeared, lashing and plunging like some great leviathan as it sank beneath the waves' (p. 86). But the tone is generally more sober, despite the publisher's attempts—reflected in the book's title—to set the narrative up as an epic struggle between heathendom and Christianity. Ferguson, after fleetingly attempting to set just such a scene in the chapter on 'The Causes of the Viking Age' (pp. 54–57), sensibly appears

to drop the unsustainable premise in favour of a more general, though exciting, narrative. Despite its flaws, this is a detailed and well related account of Norse expansion in the period in question and offers an invigorating introduction to the Viking Age for the general reader.

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THE VIKINGS IN IRELAND: SETTLEMENT, TRADE AND URBANIZATION. By MARY A. VALANTE. *Four Courts Press*. Dublin, 2008. 222pp. ISBN: 978-1-84682-093-9.

In *The Vikings in Ireland* Mary A. Valante has sought to investigate the economy and urbanisation of Viking-Age Ireland, by using historical, literary and archaeological sources. It is commendable that the author has attempted to bridge the gulf that exists between the general lip-service paid to the need for interdisciplinarity in archaeological and historical studies and the concomitant reluctance to put it into practice. Commendable approaches, however, should not be allowed to distract us from serious defects in this book.

Two years after this book was published, sections of it already appear in need of substantial revision. For example, the author begins with a questionable interpretation of Frankish sources to suggest a mid-ninth-century Norwegian takeover of Vestfold (60–64), which in turn leads to theories about supposedly Norwegian-controlled Kaupang as a market for Irish goods, which encouraged the setting up of permanent bases in Ireland. In addition to the problematic interpretations of the written sources, factors beyond the author's control also weaken this line of argument, namely the recent publication of the archaeological reports on excavations at Kaupang, too late to be taken account of in this book. In the published reports Dagfinn Skre, the project leader of the Kaupang excavations, has argued convincingly for Danish control of Vestfold for the period in which the author has suggested Norwegian control (Dagfinn Skre, 'Towns and Markets, Kings and Central Places in South-western Scandinavia c.AD 800–950', in Skre, ed., *Kaupang in Skiringssal* (2007), 445–69 (particularly pp. 463–69)). The ninth-century burial finds do not support the theory of a market for Irish goods (though admittedly such finds are only part of the picture). Indeed, Frans-Arne Stylegar has concluded that objects from the Continent predominate over Insular and Eastern objects in the ninth-century Kaupang burials, while Insular, Eastern and Continental imports are all of equal importance in the tenth-century burials (Frans-Arne Stylegar, 'The Kaupang Cemeteries Revisited', in Skre, ed., *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, 65, 84–85).

The lack of political contextualisation offered in *The Vikings in Ireland* means that the Irish often seem largely absent from events. For example, in considering early Viking successes in the territory of the Southern Uí Néill during the 820s–40s it is reasonable to expect some mention of the fact that the overkings of the Southern Uí Néill faced just as many attacks from the king of Munster, Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (d. 847). Thus the early Viking settlements at Dublin and Annagassan were founded on the coast of an overkingdom that was facing

considerable problems and probably considered Munster as big a threat as the Vikings. In general, the reader will probably find it necessary to refer to other works, such as Clare Downham's *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (2007), to fill out the larger political picture.

Factual inaccuracies and misreading of sources further detract from the author's arguments. For example, the partial genealogies of the descendants of Ivar and the major participants in the battle of Clontarf (figure 12, p. 178) are erroneous in places. The death of Olaf Cuarán is placed 89 years too early (at 891 rather than 980), while the obit of Murchad, king of Laigin (970 as opposed to 972), probably derives from frequent over-reliance on the testimony of the seventeenth-century *Annals of the Four Masters* (though, of course, this source undoubtedly draws on earlier materials). Similarly, statements such as 'In the end, Dublin's importance was such that the last "King of all Ireland", Ruaidhrí ua Conchobair, was crowned *ard rí* (high king) at Dublin, rather than at the traditional site of Tara' (p. 14, no source cited) suggest a superficial reading of the annals and/or an unfamiliarity with twelfth-century Irish political history. Only the early modern *Annals of the Four Masters* (*sub anno* 1166) may be (loosely) interpreted to suggest that Ruaidrí was made king of Ireland at Dublin. The other (largely contemporary) annals that mention his activities at Dublin suggest that he took hostages/pledges from the Dubliners and assumed the kingship of Dublin. Furthermore, with regard to Tara, none of the Uí Chonchobair, Meic Lochlainn or Dál Cais claimants to the kingship of Ireland during the previous one hundred and fifty years had used Tara for the purpose of being 'crowned' *ard rí*. Other problematic readings may be found in statements such as 'In 857, Olaf and Ivar of Dublin defeated Cathal Finn, king of Munster, and his *Gall-Gaedhil* allies' (p. 92). There is no record of a king of Munster named Cathal Finn, and the *Annals of Ulster* (which often display early linguistic and orthographic forms) actually name this individual as Caittil Find, which was probably a rendering of the Norse name Ketill (with the Irish adjective *Find/Finn* 'fair').

*The Vikings in Ireland* is regrettably deficient in other aspects too. The preference for citing in translation is unfortunate, especially in sections where much of the argument hinges on the interpretation of terms used in the primary sources, for example in the discussion of settlements (pp. 38–40) or the identity of the ninth-century rulers of Vestfold (pp. 61–62). The practice of using modern names for medieval locations, such as Leinster for Laigin and Meath for Mide, presupposes that the reader is aware of the enormous differences between the extent of the modern province of Leinster and the medieval kingdom of Laigin and that Mide was largely centred on modern County Westmeath and not modern County Meath. The potential for confusion is obvious in statements like 'Most early raiders attacked the Irish coastline, especially Brega and Meath' (82), as Mide had no coastline. It may, however, also reflect a questionable grasp of the geography of medieval Ireland, as also suggested by statements such as 'the Uí Bairrche territory was in Leinster, near Dublin' (p. 93), as the Uí Bairrche branch in question (Uí Bairrche Tíre) were most likely located in the north of modern Co. Carlow.

There are a number of aspects of the presentation of this book that are irksome, such as the publisher's practice of restarting the footnote numbering process in chapters that possess more than ninety-nine footnotes. Some footnotes are

misleading, for example, a reference to a non-existent page 570 of *Cogad Gáedhel re Gallaibh* (p. 25, n. 46), while some works mentioned in the footnotes, such as Keynes and Lapidge's translation of Asser's *Life of King Alfred* (pp. 35–36, n. 14—which is really footnote 113 of that chapter), are missing from the bibliography. The index is also far from comprehensive. Individuals (such as Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, p. 14), peoples (such as Uí Bairrche, p. 93) and texts (such as *Vita Tripartita*, p. 19) are all absent from the index, while some index entries are misspelled (e.g. *mruiger*), though spelled correctly in the text. Typographical errors are not infrequent, for example 'Siobháan' for 'Siobhán' (41, n. 24), '941' for '841' (71) and 'see figure 5' for 'see figure 6' (78). This is not an exhaustive list and while it might be argued that each of these individual complaints is not of great import, cumulatively they do a disservice to both the author and the reader, as they detract from the author's arguments and the reading experience itself.

In addition to its admirable interdisciplinary focus *The Vikings in Ireland* contains some useful features, especially the surveys found in chapters one and four (on early Irish economics and the impact of the Vikings on aspects of ninth-century Ireland respectively) and the bibliography (though it is sometimes reliant on older editions) is impressively full. Nonetheless, this remains a problematic work.

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THE CHURCHES DEDICATED TO ST CLEMENT IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND. A HAGIO-GEOGRAPHY OF THE SEAFARER'S SAINT IN ELEVENTH-CENTURY NORTHERN EUROPE. By Barbara Crawford. *Scripta Ecclesiastica* 1. *Axioma*. St Petersburg, 2008. xiii + 238 pp. ISBN 978-5-90141-06-7.

This review is written on 23rd November after my return from Matins in Southwell Cathedral, where St Clement was commemorated on his feast day with a resumé of his life and appropriate prayers and antiphons—a reminder that the saint this book deals with is a universal saint of the Christian church. The heart of Professor Crawford's book (chapters 2–6, pp. 58–200) is an invaluable examination of the evidence for all the churches in England which were, or might have been, dedicated to St Clement in medieval times.

The first sections, Introduction and Chapter 1 'The Cult', reveal a more particular interest. Crawford's project stems from an article by Erik Cinthio in 1968, on the churches of St Clement in Scandinavia. The usefulness of starting with Scandinavian dedications is that there is greater certainty about the probable foundation dates there, since hardly any were constructed before the end of the tenth century and most during the eleventh and twelfth. Cinthio's article revealed an early Clement church in every major trading post in Norway and Denmark but none in Sweden. Accepting the text of the sagas (written much later) rather more confidently than is usual in current Scandinavian scholarship, Crawford notes the two foundations in Trondheim in 996 and 1016; this was followed by Cnut's conquest of Norway in 1028 and possible adoption of Clement churches for his own home power bases of Lund, Roskilde, Ribe, Aarhus, Schleswig and some



twenty-three other centres, adding up to an impressive number. Yet a caveat is necessary even here. Adam of Bremen reports that in his time (1070s) Skåne had 300 churches, Zealand 150 and Fyn 100, leaving out mainland Jutland where the number must at least have equalled that of Skåne; these numbers are no doubt rounded up and probably exaggerated, but they suggest that the proportion of Danish churches dedicated to Clement may have been quite small.

Cnut was of course very active in England during his reign here; could it be that the reasons that seem to have caused a flurry of Clement churches in Denmark's towns apply also to England and, if so, in which direction did the influence flow? How many of the English Clement churches can possibly be dated to Cnut's activities and what were his and the founders' motives in locating them where they did? This is the origin of the enquiry of this book; the result is inconclusive, because of the uncertainty about the foundation dates of the majority of these English churches, and so words and phrases such as 'might', 'probably', 'could well be' and 'it may have been' occur frequently in the text.

The strength and importance of this book lie in its not arguing for a theory but examining the evidence for one, and although it succeeds in suggesting that some of the Clement churches could well have been founded in the 'Second Viking Age' (St Clement Danes is the flagship case) the author also clearly indicates where the available evidence does not lead in that direction—after all there were many churches in parts of England long before the first Danish attacks, while the first documentary evidence for many of the Clement churches is from the thirteenth or fourteenth century, existing structures even later. Archaeology helps, however, by showing that several churches had earlier predecessors.

Another question is *why* churches were dedicated to Clement. Relevant here are the fourth-century legends about Clement, his missionary activity in Rome and the Crimea, his martyrdom by drowning and his miracles (a source of water revealed by a lamb and saving a boy after a year under water). Clement became associated with water in all its aspects: sailing, fishing, crossing seas, saving from drowning. Most of the evidence shows large numbers of Clement churches at ports, river wharfs and fishing places, clearly establishing his popularity as a protector from all dangers from water. But Crawford also considers other reasons why Clement might be chosen: Cinthio's theory about the saint being used to establish royal military power, and the opposite theory, advanced for some locations, of Clement's appeal to merchants leading to the dedication of churches to him outside the gates of many towns. The acquisition of relics may also have played some part.

The location of the Clement churches and their distribution throughout England is another issue considered. Here the notable concentration in East Anglia is the major feature, and a boost to the case for Danish influence, although there is an almost total absence of Clement churches in Yorkshire, the heart of the Danish presence in England. All this is carefully and fairly recorded and gives a sense of firm reliability to the book.

Chapter I is headed 'The Cult', and the usual items are dealt with: the *vitae*, the 'discovery' and distribution of 'relics', and the saint's appearance in early martyrologies, calendars and iconography. But I find it strange that many who approach hagiography from the literary starting-point show little interest in the liturgical



aspect of the cult. The three collects, the antiphons and, even more significant, the portions of the *vita* used to form the lections in the breviary (used by every parish priest on the saint's feast day and therefore influential on what he would preach to his flock about the saint) are at the heart of the cult.

A few items I find odd, as, for example, the significance given to a Scandinavian king attending mass in a Clement church: surely every Christian medieval king would attend mass, if not daily, then whenever possible, and choose the nearest church for the purpose? The choice of a Clement church for burial can be granted to be of more significance. Although the book has an extensive bibliography and indices of names, places and all churches named, I miss the provision of a table listing all the fifty-two Clement churches of England with perhaps an indication of location and possible foundation date. At present this information has to be sought throughout the text. I would also have welcomed more comparison with Arnold-Foster's list of 1899 (F. Arnold-Foster, *Studies in Church Dedications of England's Patron Saints* (London, 1899)). Obviously Crawford's list is more extensive and up-to-date—thirty-five of her fifty-two are in Arnold-Foster, but the other seventeen are new. But Arnold-Foster does list one I cannot find in Crawford: Lyng in Norfolk, the parish of St Clement or St Michael.

The book is well produced, bound and on good paper, a pleasure to read and well worthy to be the first publication in this new series. It will provide authentic guidance on medieval Clement churches for decades to come, and an added advantage is that it also covers these churches in Scotland, Ireland, Brittany and Normandy, which all naturally have a bearing on England. Yet on her final pages, in view of the Danish inquiry behind the work, Crawford gives her honest conclusion: 'The possibility that some of the urban churches were founded in the Danish period of rule has to remain a possibility, but only in the case of Oxford has it seemed to me that it is a real possibility'. Whether or not the foundation had anything to do with the Second Viking Age, however, she believes these churches would have been used particularly by local Danes in military, sea-going or commercial locations.

I have found only five misprints: 'King James III' in 1685 (p. 53), 'Norfolk' and 'St Cement' (!) (both on p. 102), 'Suffok' (p. 220) and 'Nottinghamshire' (p. 234).

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YOUTH AND AGE IN THE MEDIEVAL NORTH. Edited by SHANNON LEWIS-SIMPSON. *The Northern World* 42. Brill, Leiden, 2008. ix + 308 pp. ISBN 978-90-0417073-5.

The articles contained in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North* stem from papers given in various sessions at the Leeds International Medieval Congress of 2005 (which had the theme 'Youth and Age'). Some have been reworked more than others, but the collection as a whole represents an invaluable resource for any scholar or student working on medieval attitudes to the young and old, and to the ageing process. After an introductory chapter by the editor on 'The Challenges of Quantifying Youth and Age in the Medieval North' which summarises well the themes and concerns of the volume, the collection is broadly structured in terms

of the human lifecycle. That is to say, the articles progress from considerations of children and childhood through adolescents and adolescence to the elderly and old age. Within this schema the collection's themes are examined variously from the standpoints of archaeology, sociohistorical and literary studies. The editor has done a good job of ordering the individual items, enabling the reader to see the connections between the articles, and it is evident from the various cross-references throughout the volume that the contributors, too, have taken the time to read and take account of each other's work.

The first three articles, from the archaeologists Christina Lee, Lotta Mejsholm and Berit J. Sellevold, concern child burials: Lee focusing on the special treatment accorded to children in Anglo-Saxon England, Mejsholm providing a case study on the complexities of the 'syncretic' cemetery at Fjälkinge in southern Sweden and Sellevold investigating the status of children as shown by graves in Selja in Norway. All three pieces contain a large amount of useful data and, in the case of the latter two, beautifully produced plates. Indeed, it may be appropriate to remark at this point on the consistently high production values of Brill—this and the other volumes of their 'Northern World' series make handsome additions to any bookshelf, and they are clearly edited with a great deal of care.

Anna Hansen's article reviews parenting practices in medieval Iceland, and the legal provisions of *Grágás*, with a particular focus on what this can tell us about the dynamic found in *Gísla saga*. A pair of articles on the *biskupasögur* follows: Bernadine McCreesh surveys the representation of the birth, childhood and adolescence of the early Icelandic bishops and Continental influences on the native tradition, and Joanna A. Skórzewska looks at healing miracles for children and medieval authors' concern for the young and vulnerable. Another pair of articles deals with teenagers and issues of adolescence in Norse literature, with Nic Percivall's anthropological analysis of the structures and boundaries of adolescence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries complemented by Carolyn Larrington's application of psychological models to the 'awkward adolescents' of Norse literature (focusing on *Egils saga* and *Grettis saga* and comparing their depictions with those in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*). Both scholars explore images of adolescence that are recognisable to contemporary readers.

Philadelphia Ricketts's article moves the collection into the area of the elderly, investigating the subject of grandmothers and familial identity, again in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Both she and Percivall naturally make extensive use of the *samtíðarsögur*, but, like Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (especially pp. 228–29), perhaps too readily assume the reliability of written sources. Ricketts's is also by far the longest article in the volume at thirty-eight pages (most of the others are in the region of twenty pages), and could profitably have been trimmed.

Jordi Sánchez-Martí's piece is also an exception in both focus and approach, with its (beautifully done) close readings of representations of the male ageing process in a range of Old English literary texts. He might have taken more account of the gendered aspects of ageing in these texts, especially *Beowulf*, on which a fair amount of critical literature exists. However, he argues persuasively that it is the middle age, the period intervening between youth and age, that is idealised by Anglo-Saxon writers.

Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's article looks at the definitions of old age, societal attitudes to it and care for the elderly in some of the *Íslendingasögur* and *samtíðarsögur*, and this is complemented by Shannon Lewis-Simpson's piece on the same issues in Viking-Age Britain, drawing on both archaeological and literary sources. Ármann Jakobsson's study of the patriarch in a range of sagas investigates both the 'myth' and the 'reality' of this figure and Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir Yershova concludes the collection with a focus on the most famous old man of Icelandic literature, Egill Skalla-Grímsson, comparing the verses he is said to have composed as a child with those belonging to his old age.

One can only welcome this collection, containing as it does such a rich array of data on medieval youth and age and their representation. It is sure to provide much useful material for subsequent students and scholars working in what is, judging from the footnotes in this collection, a rapidly growing area. I note in passing that the index assumes a fair amount of knowledge on the part of the reader, in that individual sagas must be looked up under their putative genre. However, I have only one substantial criticism, which is about the editing of several of the essays. Since several of the authors do not have English as their first language, it is not surprising that some essays contain stylistic infelicities or unidiomatic expressions (e.g. pages 18, 20, 55, 56, 227 and 235). Although the editor should have picked these up it has to be said that her own introductory article contains the most numerous problems of style, and even grammatical errors (pages 8 and 10). The frequent references in several of the pieces to 'this paper' also grate. Nevertheless, these are minor irritations in what is a stimulating and well-constructed volume. It is noteworthy that several of the contributors are early-career scholars (indeed two are still doctoral students), whose work more than holds its own with that of the more established researchers. It is a shame that the price will mean the book is primarily purchased for University libraries rather than by the individual scholar. It deserves to get a wide audience.

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PEOPLE AND SPACE IN THE MIDDLE AGES 300–1300. Edited by WENDY DAVIES, GUY HALSALL and ANDREW REYNOLDS with illustrations by ALEX LANGLANDS. *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 15. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2007. xv + 366 pp. 50 black-and-white illustrations. 1 colour plate. ISBN 978-2-503-51526-7.

In this volume 'space' and 'place' are discussed taking examples from central Europe, Iceland, Anglo-Saxon England and northern Spain. A main theme is how social groupings were formed and how they functioned, and how space became territorialised and divided. The ambition is commendable, but unfortunately the cases presented are not always compatible since, although the terminology and concepts used are the same, their semantic content differs in various ways, depending on natural preconditions in the environment and the underlying political and social organisations. Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the volume, apart from some excellent case studies, are the introductory and concluding remarks

by the historian Wendy Davies. This volume definitely represents a new direction in research, or a return to a field of research much cherished in, for instance, Scandinavia several decades ago, and which I believe will have a bright future. This is the analysis of the social and political organisation of space, thus bringing substance into the study of landscape, and with this interest comes naturally an interest in central places, the foci of these territories. This research takes its nourishment from the intensive landscape studies of the 1990s and 2000s (more than the spatial analyses of the 1970s, especially in archaeology and geography), and the study of the central place, which also attracted a lot of interest in the 1990s and 2000s. To this is added the new aspect of toponymy, the inclusion of how social groups were formed, where an ethnic component is always lurking around the corner making life difficult for the researcher. Other new, or newly revived, questions are how the state formation process developed, a long-neglected subject, and how the territories were divided into settlement and administrative districts. In the words of Wendy Davies, 'Territoriality has therefore in a sense returned' (p. 5). Personally—taking as starting-points landscape studies and central-place analyses, and writing a history, based not on the actions and deeds of individuals, recorded (normally with a lot of bias) in written documents, but on the actual landscape and the 'history' we can read from it—I have called this kind of research 'Spatial History'.

Andrew Reynolds and Alex Langlands present us with an in-depth analysis of a major Anglo-Saxon earthwork, the Wansdyke in southern England. In the course of their exploration they deal with several important aspects of early Anglo-Saxon society, such as the forging of England, administrative districts, potential divisions older than the hundreds and shires, naming structures and the inclination to use the name of a divine progenitor ('Wodan'). Their analysis shows that Wansdyke can be understood as a boundary marker between the Mercian and West Saxon kingdoms in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, as the result of territorial disputes. This man-made boundary, they claim, represents older structures, pre-existing early territories older than the hundred, and linking up with structures from the Roman period. Not only space, but also place is discussed, and among other things they focus upon the place name *Wodnesbeorg*, the name, obviously alluding to pagan cult practice, of a large barrow, which they claim to have been a 'hot-spot' in the Anglo-Saxon period. Reynolds and Langlands give us an interesting estimate of the time and effort we have to reckon with for building a dyke like Wansdyke, which is quite remarkable, and leads to the conclusion that the 'construction of the earthwork of the Wansdyke frontier required military organization on a scale equivalent to that of the burghal system of the late ninth and tenth centuries' (p. 41). This is an excellent analysis, of importance in several ways, particularly, for a Scandinavianist, regarding the territorial divisions and the emergence of the hundred (*hundari*, *hærað*).

Birna Lárusdóttir tries in her article to understand the settlement development in a district in northern Iceland especially from boundaries in the landscape, and from place-names and later cadastrals. The survey remains very descriptive, since few archaeological or toponymical analyses seem to have been conducted. A main—although tentative—conclusion is that a farm, Reykir, had farmers with

expansive ambitions and could therefore expand its territory. The argument that they also themselves chose the name *Reykjahverfi* to underline its importance is highly improbable. Naming of places does not work in that way; normally neighbours name. Birna's article shows how important future landscape, historical, toponymical and archaeological investigations will be, to analyse the development of landscape and settlement over time.

Chris Callow analyses *Guðmundar saga dýra*, part of the contemporary *Sturlunga saga*, with respect to socio-political organisation and communities. The area of investigation is Eyjafjörður in northern Iceland. Callow describes, from events in the saga, law cases, settling of disputes and the way farmers were tied to certain chieftains, *goðar*. A special focus is on the *hreppr*, a kind of communal district, distributing tithe to the poor and organising the movement of the landless, those unable to take care of themselves, between farms. The account is descriptive and in the vein of work done earlier by Jesse Byock, William Ian Miller and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (all referred to either randomly or not at all), relying on a literary saga text, and offering little new light on a topic already well covered.

Orri Vésteinsson focuses on a complicated problem seldom discussed with reference to Iceland, the relative importance of single farms as opposed to hamlets and organised settlements, and qualifies the hitherto accepted stance that Iceland only had dispersed single farms, no organised village settlements, and hence no communities. Arguing from several cases, and presenting cadastral and toponymic evidence, he is of the opinion that Iceland was not unlike the rest of Europe. Iceland had cooperative communities which, although geographically dispersed, were seen as communities and described by terms such as *hverfi* and *sveit*. Orri concludes that the Icelandic settlement patterns are far from homogeneous, ranging from dense settlements which he describes as villages, to truly isolated farms. However, most Icelanders lived in one- or two-household farms within one kilometre of the nearest neighbours. 'One kilometre hardly represents isolation' is the conclusion, showing what seems to me a very Icelandic perspective. From a medieval Continental perspective, to those living in a smoky, densely overpopulated town or an agrarian (very often) large village with people, livestock, hens, pigs and dogs crowded on top of each other, one kilometre must have seemed a vast distance and the Icelandic settlement pattern extremely open and 'airy'. Orri could thus have stressed the fact that the distribution of the settlements in Iceland is dispersed, with very few settlement clusters, hence very different from the rest of Europe, and even from the Faroes, with its *bygðir*. It may resemble the situation in early Norway, if the model of mother settlements, which later were split up into secondary farms, sometimes creating hamlet-like clusters, is valid. Orri mentions some exceptions, for example some fishing villages and a few settlements such as Öxnadalur and Pykkvibær, which had a planned shape with a double line of farms on either side of a street. Pykkvibær Orri identifies, obviously correctly, as containing the adjective *þykk* 'thick, dense', and the name links up in an interesting way with the many hamlets found in central Sweden named 'Tibble', deriving from a neuter OSw noun *þykkbýli*, formed on a *bahuvrihi*-composition adjective *þykkbýll* 'provided with a dense settlement' (Hellberg 1985)). The analysis is interesting, as are also the cases discussed. No description is provided, however,

of the basis for the organisation which Orri claims to have been in existence, nor of how it functioned. Were the arable land and hay meadows used collectively, so that the harvest had to be divided between farms, or was it the use of the outland grazing area that was organised collectively? When reading Orri's analysis the difference between Iceland and most of Continental Europe, southern Scandinavia and Britain is obvious. We do not find in Iceland the hamlets and settlements we have there, with housing plots planned and often measured for taxation purposes and an infield-outfield system. Instead the Icelandic structure resembles those of parts of the Alps, in Switzerland and Austria, parts of Norway and especially northern Sweden, which had in practice only free farmers (no tenants), single farmsteads, controlling and cultivating their separate arable land and meadows, but—in earlier periods—obviously using the outland for grazing in common. Orri states that he can identify two settlement structures in Iceland: clustered settlements and planned settlements, the former primary settlements, the latter secondary, planned and settled after the establishment of the former, probably in the late ninth century, which links up with the traditional view of the settlement development in Iceland. What is lacking in this analysis is a discussion of the organisational basis for these settlement communities which Orri describes that would enable them to be compared with settlement structures in the rest of Europe. In what way were they communities? Were the settlements interlinked in respect of agrarian activities, collective hay harvesting, using the outland grazing area communally in some organised and fixed way? The only organisation discussed is that of parishes. As Orri writes, parish organisation resembles not the normal parish formation in central Europe and Britain, where parishes did grow out from manors and their estates, as mentioned by Steven Bassett in his article in this volume (p. 117), but rather, again, the situation found especially in northern Sweden (Brink 1990). That farms and settlements were parts of a tithing district and a judicial organisation—in Iceland a *þing* or a *goðorð*—is expected, and found all over Europe; these are supralocal structures in a society. What is interesting, for me, is a comparison on an agrarian level. Did the Icelandic farm have some cooperation with neighbouring farms regarding agrarian activities, such as cultivation, harvesting meadows and grazing the outland, as in most part of Europe, or did the farms do this independently, as they did in for example northern Sweden? I suspect the latter, which then makes Iceland very different from the rest of medieval Europe regarding settlement and everyday life.

Steven Bassett takes up the very interesting, although controversial, thread of the assumed minster parish hypothesis, also called the 'Blair Minster Model' after John Blair, who first put forward the idea of an early large parish with pastoral care conducted by a *collegium* of priests attached to a minster. This suggests that the well-known parish pattern was preceded by a system of mother churches, minsters, serving large *parochiae*. The academic disagreement is whether these 'Old Minsters' gained their pastoral role in the eighth and ninth centuries, losing the function of serving a large parish in the tenth and eleventh centuries, or whether they gained this function in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Bassett uses a case from Wootton Waven in Warwickshire, south of Birmingham, within the former territory (*regio*) of the famous *Stoppingas*. What Bassett's analysis is able

to show, in my opinion convincingly, is that Wooton Waven was already a mother church serving a large parish from the mid-ninth century, and that this *parochia* seems to have natural borders, hence must be looked upon as a primary unit from the early Anglo-Saxon period. A disturbing slip is the usage of the term 'suffix' for the second element, Lindsey, in the juxtaposition Norton Lindsey (132). The adoption of Margaret Gelling's suggestion that the first element in the place-name *Stoppingas* derives from an unknown word (\**stoppa*) for a topographical feature, a depression in the landscape, should be discussed in a broader context. Are we to identify words denoting topographical features in the landscape as the first element in *-inga* names in England, as we do in Scandinavia, or should we reckon exclusively with personal names as first elements, which is the common view for English and Continental *-inga* names? Here we have an excellent topic for some comparative toponymic research, waiting for a competent scholar to pursue, because the *-ingans* are certainly to be seen in a pan-Germanic context.

Julio Escalona turns our focus to northern Spain and the County of Castile. The settlement pattern here has been described in a threefold scheme: 1) 'valley communities', scattered farm-type settlements in the northern mountainous lands, with a church as a social focus, and with a network of social ties across the valley based upon common management and access to outfields, forests, water etc.; 2) On a lowland plateau north of the river Duero, a spread of 'village communities' of a non-hierarchical kind, later dominated by an ecclesiastical aristocracy, framed in a parish network; 3) In the southernmost area a pattern of central places and towns, each with a hinterland with dependent settlements. Escalona presents us with a new interpretation of this model, where early Castilian local communities were not only were scattered peer settlements, but also part of a network of supralocal territories, which later were used as units for the formation of administrative districts. During the tenth and eleventh centuries Escalona sees drastic changes, in the form of fissions of earlier territories, similar to the splitting up of early large parishes in the same period in Anglo-Saxon England, discussed by Bassett. For identifying these earlier territories Escalona analyses place-names, where the first element in twofold names such as *Modúbar de San Cebrián* was the name of the larger settlement district, disclosing a two-level settlement system, the village and the supralocal district. This pattern we also find for example in northern Scandinavia, with the farm/hamlet, and the supralocal settlement district, the *bygd* (which normally became the later parish, *sókn*). Escalona here refers to Birna and Orri who use place-name evidence to detect earlier structures, where for example the older settlement *Hvammur* has been split up into *Presthvatn*, *Ystihvatn* etc. Escalona's examples may have similar relevance, but what if a commonly found place-name element does not emanate from an older, larger unit, but from a later introduced district or central place? These cases are very common, for example in Scandinavia and Britain, to differentiate between homonyms found in different (late created) parishes, e.g. *Bro-Bålsta*, *Bro-Ekeby*, *Bro-Vikby* in a parish *Bro*, and *Husby-Sjuhundra*, *Husby-Långhundra* etc. for hamlets *Husby* found in different hundreds. It is however interesting to note that these older village territories in northern Spain were later used as the building blocks of the new parish system, similar to the situation in northern Sweden, where the *bygd* became the building

block of the parish system (see Brink 1990). Perhaps most fascinating in Escalona's analysis of settlements and districts in Castile are the obvious similarities with other peripheral areas of Europe, suggesting an interesting comparative field for future inquiry (in the vein of the comparative research favoured in the first half and the middle of the twentieth century, especially on the *seter*/shieling/transhumance systems of mountainous parts of Europe, by Sigurd Erixon, John Frödin, Lars Reintan and within the Norwegian *Institutt for sammenlignende kulturforskning*).

Itaki Martín Visso describes and analyses hill-top defence works, central places and defence settlements in northern Spain, which differ fundamentally from the Iron Age hill-forts found in Scandinavia in their shape, organisations and functions, and instead show similarities to the Post-Roman hill-top villages and castles found in the western Mediterranean, with names such as *Castella*, *Castillo*, *Castillon*, *Castillar*. Adela Cepas gives us an interesting overview of the Roman administrative structure and the Iberian epigraphic evidence for northern Spain. Guy Halsall has an in-depth, interesting although (in his own words) tentative discussion of the definition and development of the term and concept of *villa*, from Roman to Merovingian times, in the area around Metz in France. Grenville Astill gives us a thorough discussion of urbanisation in later Anglo-Saxon England, especially Wessex, and analyses the development and function of the *burhs*. Astill also discusses the administrative districts, such as hundreds, shires, parishes and even older districts, a discussion of great relevance to for the long and intensive discussion of the background and dating of similar Scandinavian administrative districts.

Poul Fouracre introduces us to a fantastic source in the form of the eleventh-century cartulary 'The Book of the Serfs of Marmoutier' (*Liber de Servis Majoris Monasterii*), on the basis of which he discusses the social, economical and judicial status of serfs (*servi* and *ancillae*) in eleventh-century northern France. This provides a fine example of the huge problem of defining the degree of servility and 'unfreedom' of a serf, owing to semantic developments over time, and regional peculiarities and traditions. The article is significant in a discussion of servility and slavery in early Europe, and links up with the likewise important article 'Serfdom and the beginnings of a "seigneurial system" in the Carolingian period: a survey of the evidence' by Hans-Werner Goetz (1993). Antonio Sennis in his article 'Narrating Places: Memory and Space in Medieval Monasteries' interestingly analyses space and the perception and ordering of landscape, and also discusses how memory is imbedded, mirrored and built into a landscape. He describes how the clergy tried to find the optimal site for a monastery and how they 'reinterpreted' the landscape in a Christian context. Although the account is well argued from this point of view, Sennis goes much too far in attempting to generalise: 'It was indeed western monasticism . . . which really redefined the notion of space'. Space as a kind of discourse and the usage of landscape as a tool for memorisation is found in most cultures, especially pagan. It may actually be argued that the pagan culture of Scandinavia, among others, had a more intimate contact with nature, space and the landscape, and gave many places historical meaning, making them, to allude to Bakhtin, chronotopes, topographical features with a history (Brink 2006, 2008).

This book, then, deals with the construction of social groupings and the defining of social and political space. We are presented with many interesting aspects



and analyses, with those dealing with Spain, probably the most unknown area to students of Scandinavian culture and students of landscape studies, especially welcome for this reason. The north Spanish cases display some striking resemblances with other peripheral regions of Europe, perhaps especially northern Scandinavia, in the division and usage of space. It would have been interesting to have included Scandinavia in this analysis, with its fundamental building-block, the *bygd*, and in contrast, its lack of monasteries in the shaping of the landscape and as a political, social and agrarian driving force in the Middle Ages. For a Continental scholar this must be rather bewildering. Iceland is something of an exception; although Orri Vésteinsson tries to reduce the uniqueness of the country and show its contemporaneity with Europe regarding settlement development and construction, it differed even from the rest of Scandinavia, probably because of its unique natural environment and the way it was colonised and by whom. Orri is however to be credited for his willingness to question apparently firm and evident traditions and to try new perspectives. To sum up, this is a book I can recommend to any one interested in researching early 'spatial history', the history of space and place.

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AUDUN AND THE POLAR BEAR: LUCK, LAW, AND LARGESSE IN A MEDIEVAL TALE OF RISKY BUSINESS. By WILLIAM IAN MILLER. *Medieval Law and Its Practice* 1. Brill. Leiden and Boston, 2008. xii + 156 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-16811-4.

William Ian Miller's *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (1990) was one of the most exciting and talked-about books in my undergraduate days, admired for its dynamic and fresh approach to the medieval Icelandic structure of feuds, settlements and the law. Soon after Miller seemed to disappear from Old Norse studies for a while, and only much later did I find out that he had turned to writing socio-philosophical books on emotions and rules of behaviour: *Humiliation* (1993), *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997), *The Mystery of Courage* (2000), *Faking It* (2003) and *Eye for an Eye* (2006). In all of these

books a continuation from his saga studies can clearly be seen, as he is concerned with the written and unwritten laws of human relationships and the drama of life in general. Even when not at his best, Miller is an engaging writer and some of his books, *Humiliation* and *Faking It* for example, will be fascinating for most people concerned with the humanities.

It thus seems natural that in his return to the saga world Miller should write about the tale of Audun and the polar bear, an exemplary narrative about gift-giving, luck and reciprocity with much wider implications than might at first sight appear. This is a story that has always been very popular in the English-speaking world as a teaching text and is therefore one of the best known of Old Norse texts. Like all good narrative perhaps, the tale of Audun and the bear encapsulates an important aspect of human life and thus it serves Miller well for a discussion about gifts and social standing, following in the footsteps of such giants as Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu. Even though he is well aware of these gentlemen, however, Miller is very much his own man. His reading of the Audun episode is one of the most extensive I have seen of such a small narrative and it is inspiring how confidently he allows himself ample time and space for it, without saying much that is superfluous. As it turns out, a short narrative may engage well with major themes.

The book starts with a short discussion of the origins of the texts. There are three versions, in the manuscripts GKS 1009 fol. or *Morkinskinna* (M), AM 66 fol./GS 1010 fol. or *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (H), and GKS 1005 fol. or *Flateyjarbók* (F). Miller uses the *Flateyjarbók* version, prefers it and would like it to be closest to a supposed original, although he only goes as far as suggesting this as a possibility. I would say this is possible but unlikely, given that all these texts in fact belong to the same text, which we could call *Morkinskinna* (an edition of which is to be published in the *Íslensk fornrit* series in 2010), and the fourteenth-century versions seem to hail from an original not so unlike the text in 1009 (the M-text). This does not really make much difference when it comes to the Audun narrative, as Miller points out himself (p. 5). He has also very sensibly familiarised himself with all three versions.

Almost half of the book (pp. 13–67) consists of Miller's close reading of the Audun episode, a somewhat unusual tale of a stubborn Icelander who wishes to give the King of Denmark a polar bear, at the risk of offending his enemy, King Harald of Norway. The episode rests on Audun's apparently illogical and unexplained decision to put his whole capital into a bear, which Miller discusses intelligently (e.g. pp. 47–49, p. 77 and p. 87) without ever committing himself to an easy explanation. It is a whim and has to be respected as such, and it would detract from the narrative to pin it down too exactly. Miller also includes a discussion on how we know this particular bear is a polar bear (pp. 142–46), and it is almost impossible not to be convinced by his eloquence. He grapples with several other questions often asked by students, such as: how did Audun feed the bear on the way? (p. 17) but still stresses that the story is plausible and the bear is no allegory. As he explains, such a narrative might fit a formula but it must still play by the rules of commerce, etiquette and reciprocity, the rules that he discusses at length in the second part of the book (pp. 71–141).

Miller is much concerned with social rules and tends to demystify concepts such as luck (see pp. 71–77) without ever sounding banal or reductionist. Indeed one of

his main goals seems to be to allow the narrative to keep its charm when treated very thoroughly. And he is extremely thorough, although never unnecessarily so. An example of the important points raised by a close reading such as this is the observation that the first repayment of King Svein to Audun, according to Audun himself, is the fact that he accepted the gift. Accepting a gift from a stranger is not automatic and this reply fuels Miller's elegant discussion (pp. 114–34) of the norms of reciprocity put into the context of inequality and hierarchy in medieval society.

*Audun and the Polar Bear* is an unusual book, for example in the depth of its analysis which in no way makes it inaccessible. Although it will probably not attract as big an audience as Miller's previous books owing to its Old Norse theme, those who are not put off will reap the rewards. And those already involved in Old Norse can welcome Miller's impressive return to a field he never really left.

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BEATUS VIR. STUDIES IN EARLY ENGLISH AND NORSE MANUSCRIPTS IN MEMORY OF PHILLIP PULSIANO. Edited by A. N. DOANE AND KIRSTEN WOLF. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 319. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Tempe, 2006. xiii + 545 pp. ISBN 978-0-86698-364-8.

*Beatus Vir*, the opening words of Psalm 1, is a fitting title for a collection of essays in memory of Phillip Pulsiano: his Ph.D. was on the Old English Blickling Homilies, and in 2001 he completed the first of a three-volume critical edition of the Old English psalters. It cannot have been a simple matter to put together this collection. All the contributors knew Phill, either professionally or personally. His interests were so broad that it might have required two or even three volumes to address them all. In the event, by focusing on manuscripts the editors have succeeded in creating a volume that ranges very widely, yet remains focused on the one central topic that was Phill's constant passion, and addresses many of the specialised topics that he wrote about. The fourteen papers in this collection move easily between various disciplines, and range from Anglo-Saxon England to twentieth-century London. The contributors, moreover, are leading scholars in their respective specialities, and the result is a volume that will require regular consultation and citation, like earlier collections of scholarly essays such as *Tenth-Century Studies*, ed. D. Parsons (London, 1975), or *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England. Essays presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidus and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985).

The volume opens with a brief essay by Kirsten Wolf describing Phill's career as scholar, his life as a father, and his lesser-known life as a chef and poet; and a survey of the papers in the book, and what binds them together (pp. xv–xxi), followed by a bibliography of his published work. There is not enough space in a review to provide a synopsis of each paper; that is, in any case, done competently in A. N. Doane's introduction (pp. xviii–xxi). Ten of the contributions are by scholars working primarily in Anglo-Saxon studies: Gernot Wieland, 'British Library, MS Royal 15.A.v: One Manuscript or Three?' (pp. 1–25); Joyce Hill, 'Identifying "Texts" in Cotton Julius

E.vii: Medieval and Modern Perspectives' (pp. 27–40); A. N. Doane, 'The Werden Glossary: Structure and Sources' (pp. 41–84); Kevin Kiernan, 'Odd Couples in Ælfric's *Julian and Basilissa* in British Library, Cotton MS Otho B.x' (pp. 85–106); Jonathan Wilcox, 'The Audience of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* and the Face of Cotton Caligula A.xiv, fols. 93–130' (pp. 229–64); Elaine Treharne, 'Reading from the Margins: The Uses of Old English Homiletic Manuscripts in the Post-Conquest Period' (pp. 329–58); Joseph P. McGowan, 'Elliptical Glossing and Elliptical Compounds in Old English' (pp. 359–82); Peter J. Lucas, 'Abraham Wheelock and the Presentation of Anglo-Saxon: From Manuscript to Print' (pp. 383–440); J. R. Hall, 'Three Studies on the Manuscript Text of *Beowulf*: Lines 47b, 747b, and 2232a' (pp. 441–70); and Andrew Prescott, 'What's in a Number? The Physical Organization of the Manuscript Collections of the British Library'. And four papers are on Old Norse topics: Ólafur Halldórsson, '*Danakonungatal* in Copenhagen, Royal Library Barth. D. III. Fol.: An Edition' (pp. 107–74); Marianne E. Kalinke, '*Jóhannes saga gullmans*: The Icelandic Legend of the Hairy Anchorite' (pp. 175–228); Kirsten Wolf, 'Female Scribes at Work? A Consideration of *Kirkjubæjarkbók*' (pp. 265–96); and Stefanie Würth, 'The Common Transmission of *Trójumanna Saga* and *Breta Sögur*' (pp. 297–328). This represents a wide range of scholarly topics; the one subject conspicuously absent from this list is the Old English psalter manuscripts, but this apparent oversight will, as Kirsten Wolf reminds us, be remedied when Joseph P. McGowan publishes the second and third volumes of Phill's critical edition.

The arrangement of the papers appears to be largely random: placing Prescott's paper on the British Library manuscripts at the end, and Peter Lucas's contribution on Abraham Wheelock and Jim Hall's paper on *Beowulf* near the end seems fitting, considering that they discuss modern editors or issues more than medieval ones. But Kevin Kiernan's paper on 'odd couples', referring not only to the two saints in Ælfric's homily but also to the odd working relationship between Frederick Madden (Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum during the nineteenth century) and Henry Gough (a conservator in the British Museum in Madden's time, who managed to turn several fragments of the manuscript upside down when he placed them in paper guards) might as easily have been included with the last three. It seems even more curious to sandwich Jonathan Wilcox's paper on the implications of the small sketch of a face on fol. 111v in Cotton Calligula A.xiv between Ólafur Halldórsson and Kalinke on one side, and Wolf and Würth on the other. Such an arrangement, perhaps inevitable in commemorating a scholar with such diverse interests, ensures that a reader will be required to read the essays selectively, and randomly, rather than *seriatim*.

What links the papers together is medieval manuscript culture and its survival into our own time. Manuscripts are subjected to a variety of disciplines: texts can be edited; scribes and scribal practices can be studied; through annotations manuscripts can reveal how they were read and understood in subsequent centuries; manuscript evidence can be misinterpreted with long-lasting consequences; manuscripts can be destroyed by accident (fire) or on purpose (cut up into binding fragments); they can be studied as physical artefacts; and they present storage and survival problems for modern conservators and librarians. *Beatus Vir* addresses these issues and more, often in a witty manner that echoes Phill's own sense of humour.

Studies of manuscripts are generally most effective when accompanied by images, not just because these can be more informative and immediate than verbal descriptions, but also because they allow a reader to confirm or argue with the conclusions being drawn. It is surprising, therefore, that only six of the fourteen essays are accompanied by one or more illustrations. Several other papers would have been greatly enhanced if accompanied by images. Hall's paper, for example, deals with minutiae from the *Beowulf* manuscript and Thorkelin's two transcripts. While his discussion is convincing, it would have been much more effective if supported with several carefully chosen images. His paper need only be compared with Kevin Kiernan's, which includes illustrations, to make this clear. Doan's intricate arguments would also have benefited from some illustrations; all the more so, because not every reader will be familiar with early medieval glossaries such as those he discusses.

But that is the only real weakness of this book. Other features enhance its usefulness: footnotes, for example, are all placed on the page where they belong, not, as is often the case with contemporary scholarly books, at the end of the volume. Every essay is immediately followed by a bibliography, a more useful placement than combining all the individual bibliographies of works cited into one. And the volume concludes with a comprehensive index, and a list of manuscripts mentioned. The editors and the publisher are to be congratulated on the volume: it was produced with care (I noted just one misprint, a missing 'as' after 'such' on p. 503); and although the book is not an easy read from beginning to end, all the individual contributions are very readable and of a consistently high quality.

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KOMMENTAR ZU DEN LIEDERN DER EDDA 6: HELDENLIEDER. By KLAUS VON SEE, BEATRICE LA FARGE, EVE PICARD, KATJA SCHULZ AND MATTHIAS TEICHERT. *Universitätsverlag Winter*. Heidelberg, 2009. 962 pp. ISBN 978-3-8253-5564-7.

Lifting the latest volume in the *Edda Kommentar* series, one might feel grateful for the muscles built up through using the already sizeable previous four volumes to have appeared: at approaching a thousand pages of densely packed commentary, this volume is a weighty tome in all senses. It encompasses the poems following the Great Lacuna of the Codex Regius: *Brot af Sigurðarkviða*, *Guðrúnarkviða I*, *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, *Helreið Brynhildar*, the prose passage *Dráp Niflunga*, *Guðrúnarkviða II*, *Guðrúnarkviða III*, *Oddrúnargrátr* and the fragments of verse (six stanzas, mainly from poems assumed to have existed in the Great Lacuna) from *Völsunga saga*. The volume therefore represents another substantial step towards the completion of the *Kommentar*: one more volume of heroic verse, and one of mythological, are awaited.

It is only right to preface any remarks on the present work with an acknowledgement of the importance of the *Kommentar* overall. It is many decades since

a complete commentary on the Eddic poems has been produced, and the thorough and systematic approach of the *Kommentar* guarantees its place as a major scholarly resource for many years to come. I would stress the word *resource*: it would be wrong (and I surmise not the authors' intention) to view the *Kommentar* as settling all questions of Eddic scholarship. I have heard the fear voiced in some circles that the *Kommentar* may come to be seen in this light by students. Yet actual use of the *Kommentar* confirms that, while indeed solutions to many points are offered, it is useful primarily in providing a sound springboard for further investigation in the many areas of Eddic research. I would like to pick a number of areas, not so much by way of reproof, as to show where the approach adopted by the *Kommentar* leaves the field open for more fully developed investigation and indeed presentation of Eddic poems.

*Irrelevance.* All the material presented in the *Kommentar* is of interest, and the thoroughness is commendable. Yet a consequence of the approach adopted is to present a rather level playing field, where old discarded theories are time and again afforded far greater space than they deserve. An example is the long exposition of Mohr's complex theories of the origins of *Guðrúnarkviða II* on pp. 597–99, which is capped by a pithy remark of Vésteinn Ólason rightly dismissing them, followed—but only in small print—by the *Kommentar* authors' own more detailed refutation. Sometimes the discussion is simply rather over the top: does the long presentation of the wolf as a predator in the commentary to *Brot 4* (*sumir úlf sviðo*) really add greatly to our understanding at this point? At other points, I felt that a lot of learning is a dangerous thing: the detailed philological presentation of whether *Guðrúnarkviða III*'s Herkia could be the same as the Greek historian Priscus's Kreka involves discussion of the wholly irrelevant first Germanic sound shift, but misses the point that as Greek at this stage almost certainly did not have a *h*-sound, a Germanic *h* is likely to have been perceived and rendered as a *k*.

A further irrelevant feature, in my view, is the presentation of modern uses of Eddic poems (by, for instance, the musical group *Sequentia*, or by Wagner). It is an interesting field, of course, but to do it justice requires a far more thorough presentation, and in particular a consideration of the particular cultural currents that evinced a use of these poems in later times. It deserves and needs its own study outside a commentary on the Eddic poems themselves, where its presence scarcely aids in the understanding of the poems being commented on.

*Formality of presentation.* The commentary is throughout and in all its aspects endowed with a formal and mechanical approach. This is a strength in that it ensures the *Kommentar* is a fairly thorough consolidation of earlier research, but also a weakness, in that it does not hugely further Eddic research with any new perspectives, nor does it, in many instances, set out a clear line of interpretation. This is fine for more advanced researchers, but students may perhaps find the approach confusing and daunting. A typical instance would be the introduction to *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, esp. section 5, where the problems of inconsistencies such as the wooings of Brynhildr are set out in considerable detail, but without any real solutions being offered. Another, different sort of case is how aspects of the verse such as metre are analysed in detail, but no particular arguments

are built up from them: the researcher is left with the necessary materials but must construct arguments from them independently. An example is the discussion (p. 214) of the repetition between on-verse and off-verse in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 20/4–5, where for parallels the reader is merely referred to a work of Sijmons, and there are no references to discussions of similar phenomena elsewhere (e.g. in the Middle English *Pearl*).

*Perception of the poetic text.* The formality of the presentation also affects the perception of the poetic text: essentially, in my opinion, the poems are treated more as sequences of words on the page than as creative works. This is a fundamental point, as it determines what is considered worthy of discussion and what is not, and shapes the overall interpretation of the place of the Eddic poems within Norse literature. Many examples could be cited. On a lexical level, for instance, we find that in *Brot* 2, *logna*, in reference to the oath, is translated—or rather paraphrased—as ‘gebrochen’, whereas the commentary correctly notes that it means literally ‘gelogen’; the unusualness of the phrasing is noted, but not that it is an example of heightened poetic expression (the presence of which at this point might hint at particular interpretations of the poem overall, if it were drawn into the argument). The decision to relegate details of parallels in skaldic verse and elsewhere to mere references to (*inter alia*) *Lexicon Poeticum* (e.g. *Guðrúnarkviða I* 26: *ormbeðr* is compared to *linnbeðr*) also seems to me to reflect a downplaying of the importance of the poetic context of the Eddic poems. I would rather the space were given to a more thorough presentation of skaldic parallels than to the libretto of the Ring Cycle.

*Field of reference.* The *Kommentar* draws many comparisons with other literature, at least in the Norse field. It is of great value to have such comparisons pointed out, as in *Brot* 15/3–8, where the poet tells us that few can understand women: Brynhildr spoke, weeping, of what, laughing, she had told the men to do, which is compared to a scene in *Þorsteins þátrr stangarhöggs*. Yet I found myself wishing constantly that striking poetic insights like these could be paralleled from a wider field, including non-Norse material: but to a large extent this is a reflection of the need to conduct further research, which it has not, in the main, been the primary aim of the *Kommentar* team to undertake. Our overall understanding of the Eddic poems would nonetheless be much enhanced if greater emphasis could be placed on opening up the field of reference. Thus we might note how, despite the discussion of the possible origins of *Guðrúnarkviða I* being fairly comprehensive, and the fact that the authors on p. 208 particularly note how all the main characters are women, there is little consideration of the genre of the poem as a women’s lament, or of the many parallels that could be found to this; the excellent presentation (but in small print again!) on p. 240 of the consistency of the poem’s presentation with modern findings of psychologists working on trauma does not lead on to a discussion of any contemporary or comparable literary works against which to assess the Norse poem. Or again, the notes to *Guðrúnarkviða I* 16 do not pursue wider parallels to the motif of the princess with geese, such as the Anglo-Saxon princess St Werburgh (of interest within the wider Norse literary field in that she resurrected a goose in the way Þórr resurrected his goats).



*Dating.* Relative, and to an extent absolute, dates are attempted for all the poems. There are many problems here, related to presentation as much as anything. It is very difficult to form an overall picture, or to assess the reliability of individual datings, without considering the whole dating issue in a discrete study rather than in scattered notices relating to the individual poems. There are particular difficulties with the poems in the present volume, as it is clear that there were many links with the poems of the Great Lacuna, which it is rarely possible to particularise. This problem is dealt with in passing throughout the volume, but not systematically in any one place.

There are, however, more deep-seated difficulties. In particular, even if the authors would agree that Eddic poems in their extant forms are the result of manipulation of traditions and poetic forms over many centuries, the poems are in fact treated as static entities, not as the end-products of a long (or sometimes short) oral and written tradition. This leads to some vast oversimplifications in terms of the relative chronology of the poems. One of the most obvious aspects to this is the *Kommentar*'s listing of the earliest likely dates of words occurring in the poems (in most of them in this volume, this is the twelfth century), as if this is necessarily a criterion for dating each poem as a whole, when it need show no more than that the poem continued to be adapted up to that point. More complex is the suggestion (pp. 305–06, 317) that *Hamðismál* postdates the late and derivative *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* as it borrows from it. In fact, one of the supposedly borrowed phrases in question, *fljóta í dreyra*, occurs in st. 7 of *Hamðismál*, which is almost certainly from the latest stage of development of a poem whose core antedates 890 (see U. Dronke, *The Poetic Edda I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 214–17). The particular relationship between *Hamðismál* and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* is further complicated by the fact that both use the word *bók* in the sense of 'embroidery, embroidered covering', which, as Dronke points out, is otherwise only found in medieval German sources; in failing to note this, the *Kommentar* does not do justice to the complexity and interplay of traditions which lie behind the poems. The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that to a degree which may be debatable but is not negligible all the Eddic poems rely on oral as well as written tradition; does it really tell us anything about borrowing from one poem to another when both *Atlakviða* and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* happen to describe a hero as *sudrænn*? The *Kommentar* scarcely deals with the question of oral formulae in the Eddic corpus, and the implications this has for dating. Even when borrowing does seem clear, as in the case of *fljóta í dreyra*, the *Kommentar* does not tend to offer strong arguments in many cases for the direction of influence. Over all, therefore, the whole question of dating needs a far more thorough and nuanced approach than the *Kommentar* is able to devote to it in the space available.

*Form of presentation.* As a last point, it is worth commenting on the general usability of the *Kommentar*; there is nothing specific to this volume here, but it affects the use of any volume in the overall series. The organisation is good, and is consistent, which helps the user. The general appearance is very heavy—not helped, for example, by the non-indented paragraphs; it is, however, a boon that at least some important matters are presented as tables, such as the vary-



ing treatments of the death of Sigurðr (pp. 134–37), or the comparison between *Nornagests þáttur* and *Helreið* (pp. 490–95). There is some attempt to distinguish certain matters by printing them in small type; these might perhaps be regarded as to an extent tangential, but, as I have exemplified above, they in fact often seemed some of the most interesting and provocative passages.

I could not help feeling, however, that the overall presentation really is dated. So much more could be achieved with a digital version, and surely this should be the next objective in Eddic studies, building upon the *Kommentar* (among other things). We would not have to look in four places to unearth what a reference means. We could view images of the manuscripts while looking at relevant commentary. We could pick out just the grammatical comments. We could conduct complex searches for particular information. The cross-references could be hyperlinks. The bibliography could be kept updated—for, comprehensive as the *Kommentar*'s treatment is, it is obviously out of date the moment it is printed. And a digital version could be included on one disk, rather than a series of books weighing many kilogrammes, and causing a sizeable hole in the pocket.

The *Kommentar* is an essential tool in Eddic research, and nothing I have said is intended to undermine its position. Rather, I hope I have been able to indicate a few areas (there will be many others) in which other researchers need not fear to build on the work the *Kommentar* has undertaken, and continue to broaden and deepen Eddic studies in the future.

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SKALDIC POETRY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN MIDDLE AGES. VOLUME II: POETRY FROM THE KINGS' SAGAS 2: FROM C. 1035 TO C. 1300. Edited by KARI ELLEN GADE. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2009. cvi + 916 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-51897-8.

The new edition of the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* is without doubt one of the most important scholarly achievements within the field of Old Norse studies we have yet seen in this young millennium. The official home of this mammoth project is the University of Sydney, its publisher is the Belgian Brepols and the members of the editorial board are based in Indiana, Reykjavík, Aberdeen, Newcastle and Kiel, as well as Sydney. The first volume (VII) arrived in two parts in 2007 and now the second volume (II, also in two parts) is out, containing skaldic poetry from the Kings' Sagas, from c. 1035 to c. 1300. The semi-official leader of the project is Margaret Clunies Ross of Sydney but the general editor of volume II is Kari Ellen Gade of Indiana University, in charge of seven other editors but doing the bulk of the work herself. Diana Whaley contributes the second largest share, Judith Jesch comes a distant third and Jayne Carroll, Valgerður Erna Þorvaldsdóttir, Lauren Goetting, Russell Poole and Matthew Townend also contribute. But first and foremost this impressive book is a testament to Kari Ellen Gade's energy and drive.

This new edition aims to replace Finnur Jónsson's *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* as the standard edition of the Old Norse poetic corpus (ex-

cluding Eddic poetry) of the Middle Ages. Indeed it has done so in the areas it already covers, and one hopes that the remaining volumes will now appear in rapid succession. As the editors modestly put it, Finnur's 'Herculean task' of producing his *Skjaldedigting* alone (he is indeed the giant on whose shoulders we all stand) will not be repeated, but on the other hand, this group of six also provides us with much more than the previous standard edition. The new skaldic edition has more detail about the manuscripts in which each particular stanza is found, useful indices, excellent biographies of the kings the poets served and much more information about the context of the poetry. Worthy of mention is the website of the project (<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php>), which has for some years been extremely useful to scholars and students all over the world who wish to augment the knowledge they are able to gain from Finnur. Among the important new things in this edition are extensive biographies of the poets and good reviews of the poetry attributed to them (see, for example, Diana Whaley's substantial account of *Magnússflokk* on pp. 61–64). In some cases, a useful and concise diagram of the preservation of the poetry is provided, the *Bersöglisvísur* of Sigvatr being a good example (p. 12). Unlike Finnur's edition, this one often leads us to fairly recent secondary sources, for example the debate on *Partar* and *Pílavík* (p. 558) that would be unfamiliar to those in possession of previous editions of Einarr Skúlason's *Runhenda*. A lengthy bibliography and an index of first lines and names are also very handy, although a reference to the page numbers of the printed volumes would have made this index even more helpful.

Although the edition is superior to *Skjaldedigting* in almost every way, it is essentially similar in that it does not present the poetry in the way it has come to us, dispersed in Kings' Sagas, Sagas of Icelanders, *Snorra Edda* and other prose texts. Although this volume nods to the Kings' Sagas in its title, it aims rather to reconstruct the original poems composed by royal court poets such as Sigvatr, Þjóðólfr, Arnórr, Einarr Skúlason, Óláfr hvítaskáld and Sturla Þórðarson. The various Kings' Saga (and some other) texts are used as variants by the editor to reconstruct a lost original. Only at the very end of the two volumes do we find ninety pages of anonymous poetry, i.e. skaldic poetry not attributed to anyone—or not convincingly enough, as with Skúli Bárðarson's *Ari sat á steini* stanza that Kari Ellen Gade chooses not to attribute to him, presumably taking his word for it that this is an old ditty; instead she leads us to all the manuscripts and explains the context so we can judge for ourselves.

When poems are categorised according to authors, those attributed to more than one author naturally become problematic. On p. 38, Gade has decided that the *Senn jósum vér, svanni* stanza attributed to King Haraldr harðráði in *Morkinskinna* is his work and not composed by Brennu-Njáll as *Snorra Edda* has it (citing only half of the stanza). The main reason seems to be that no other poetry is attributed to Njáll (p. 35), and indeed it is true that even the *Njáls saga* manuscripts that add a fair amount of skaldic poetry do not attribute these new stanzas to Njáll, preferring Gunnarr of Hlíðarendi and Skarpheðinn as poets. Perhaps Gade is also influenced by the fact that the stanza concerns peril at sea and *Njáls saga* yields no information about Njáll's past as a hardy mariner. In an edition structured in

this way, decisions like this have to be made. A stanza attributed to two authors has to find a place in the *oeuvre* of one of them, even though the medieval sources have left this conundrum unresolved.

The edition is thus essentially a hypothesis. What is being published is not any text preserved in the manuscript sources but hypothetical original poems much older than the texts that yield them to us. That usually means that the text is normalised and in most cases archaised in the process. If we take Sigvatr's *Bersöglisvísur* stanza no. 3 as an unproblematic example, the edition gives us (p. 15):

Fylgðak þeim, es fylgju,  
fémildum gram, vildi,  
—nú eru þegnar frið fegnir—  
feðr þínum vel, mína.  
Vasat á her, með hjörvi,  
hlið, þars stóðk í miðjum  
hröesinn (skal með hrísi)  
hans flokki (við þjökkva).

The regular six syllables of the first line are the result of a contraction not found in any manuscript, and the same applies to line six. The contraction has to be assumed and Gade is not wrong to do so, indeed in my own pending edition of the same stanza (in *Morkinskinna*, for *Íslenzk fornrit*), we make the same assumption, but the example illustrates that what gets published as a skaldic poem in the twenty-first century has usually been reconstructed by the editor. The *her* in line 5 is not found in any manuscript, they all have a form with an *l* (*hal* or *hæl*). This makes no sense, and thus Gade's emendation is perfectly valid and it is hard to edit the stanza any other way. The fact remains that the editor may choose variants from all three manuscripts to get the stanza right and sometimes has to correct all of them, although never without reason.

This is what all editors, and editors of skaldic poetry in particular, tend to do: they archaise, normalise and correct. Gade and her fellow editors pick up the torch from Finnur Jónsson in this: they make emendations, especially when the metre tells them that a syllable is missing or superfluous. Thus the poem that is finally published is far more regular than what is actually preserved in the manuscripts. Although this is indeed standard editorial practice, it is worthy of consideration and those who use editions like this have to realise that they are reading a hypothetical original poem, albeit one that has been reconstructed in a critical and professional way, guided by scholarly principles.

In such a massive book there are bound to be some errors but the only serious one I am yet aware of is on p. 198 where lines 6 and 7 in the *Skjöldungr, lézt við skíra valdit* stanza are the wrong way round, with somewhat chaotic results for the alliteration. The statement (on p. 501) that Ívarr Ingimundarson could have been the son of Ingimundr inn gamli 'the Old' Þorsteinsson is based on a misunderstanding of Finnur Jónsson's comment in his *History of Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*; these two men are actually centuries apart. It is customary to assume that Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's brother Þölverkr was also Arnórsson (as Gade does on p. 286) but in fact both *Fagrskinna* and *Skáldatal* refer to him only as *Þölverkr*,

*bróðir Þjóðólfs skálds* (*Íslenzk fornrit* 29, 245), and there are enough examples of brothers with different fathers in the sagas to warrant at least a question mark after the patronymic.

Although it is perhaps a minor quibble, I am worried that the different layout of the *fornyrðislag* and the *dróttkvætt* stanzas (see e.g. pp. 54–55) will confuse many a hapless student in the future. *Fornyrðislag* stanzas are printed in ‘long lines’, where we are supposed to read from left line to right line and then down, but stanzas in skaldic metres, including *kviðuháttir* (which shares the two-foot alliterative line of *fornyrðislag*), are presented as two half-stanzas, the second to the right of the first. Thus a non-expert reader jumping from Ívarr Ingimundarson’s (*fornyrðislag*) *Sigurðarbálkr* (p. 501) to the (*kviðuháttir*) *Nóregs konungatal* (p. 761) is bound to be confused initially and I suspect that many a teacher’s valuable time will be spent on clearing up misapprehensions in the future.

These minor matters aside, Kari Ellen Gade and her team are to be congratulated on this second volume of the new edition of skaldic poetry. It is an enormously useful book and will serve not only as an important tool for all Old Norse experts, students and enthusiasts but also as a significant yardstick for any future editor of Old Norse poetry.

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SVERRIS SAGA. Edited by ÞORLEIFUR HAUSSON. *Íslenzk fornrit XXX. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag*. Reykjavík, 2007. xc + 337 pp. 8 maps and 16 colour plates. ISBN 978-9979-893-30-1.

*Sverris saga* tells of the birth of Sverrir in Norway, his youth in the Faroe islands, ordination to the priesthood, discovery of his royal paternity, battles to win the Norwegian throne and subsequent conflicts with rival claimants and with the church. The prologue to the saga establishes its historical authority by asserting that the first part was written with the direct input of the king himself, and the remainder with the help of others who witnessed the events recounted. The opening sections of the introduction to this new edition provide overviews of the life and career of King Sverrir Sigurðarson of Norway (r. 1177–1202), the historical and political background to the period and the little that is known of the author of (at least part of) the saga, Abbot Karl Jónsson of Þingeyrar. The saga is the main source for Sverrir’s reign, though it can be supplemented—and balanced—by a number of contemporary Norse and Latin texts. In particular, an alternative perspective is provided by Latin histories composed in England and Denmark, countries to which Archbishops Eysteinn Erlendsson and Eiríkr Ívarsson of Trondheim fled from King Sverrir.

The twenty-four more or less complete manuscripts of the saga are discussed on pp. xxxvi–liii (with a further list of the paper manuscripts, complete or fragmentary, grouped by family in an appendix on pp. 314–15). The four main vellum manuscripts have all been edited separately before, with earlier scholars reaching different conclusions about their relations to each other. AM 327 4to,

the basis of this edition, is the earliest full text of the saga (c.1300); it is well preserved, lacking just a few leaves and containing one chapter (85) not preserved elsewhere. The pioneering saga scholar, Árni Magnússon, referred to this manuscript as the *codex optimus* of *Sverris saga* (p. xxxviii). The other three major manuscripts are the early fourteenth-century AM 47 fol. (Eirspennill), GKS 1005 fol. (Flateyjarbók) copied between 1387 and 1394, and AM 81a fol. (Skálholtsbók yngsta) from the fifteenth century. Part of the saga is preserved in a mid-fourteenth-century manuscript, Stockh. perg. fol. nr. 8 (copied when more complete than now as AM 304 4to); it has never been printed and this new edition is the first to benefit from a full comparison of it with the other four main manuscripts (p. xxxvi).

Differing accounts by Gustav Indrebø and Lárus H. Blöndal of the relationships between the four main manuscripts are visually summarised in stemmata on p. xlii. Taking into account the readings of Stockh. perg. fol. nr. 8 and its copy in AM 304 4to enables Þorleifur Hauksson to construct a new stemma on p. xlvii which confirms the status of AM 327 4to as *codex optimus*. Examples of readings from the five manuscripts further demonstrate the particular value of AM 327 4to (pp. xlvii–liii). Where that manuscript has lacunae this edition is based on Flateyjarbók (p. lxxx); variant readings from other manuscripts are frequently recorded in the notes.

Þorleifur's introduction goes on to consider a series of issues which have been prominent in scholarship on the saga: the prologue, the extent of the part of the saga known as *Grýla*, whether the text is by a single author, the work's structure and models, speeches, style, and related contemporary texts.

The prologue is preserved in all four main manuscripts, but Flateyjarbók has a longer version, sufficiently different and interesting—not least for its lengthy genealogy tracing Sverrir's eclectic ancestry back to Adam through such figures as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, Norse gods, Priam of Troy and Jupiter—to merit its printing in an appendix (pp. 285–87). The prologue makes a two-part division of the saga into *Grýla*, based on Sverrir's own account, and what the Flateyjarbók version refers to as *Perfecta fortitudo*, based on information from other witnesses. Much scholarship has examined whether Abbot Karl was responsible only for *Grýla* or also for (some of) the rest of the saga: on this opinions remain, as Þorleifur states, very divided (p. lv). There is also disagreement on exactly where the division between the two parts of the saga falls: Þorleifur quotes Theodore Andersson's statement (in 'Kings' Sagas (*Konungasögur*)'. In *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*. Ed. Clover and Lindow (Ithaca, 1985), p. 215) that the 'exact parameters of "Grýla" have led to one of the most inconclusive debates in all of kings' saga studies' (p. lvi). After providing a clear account of the debate (lv–lx), Þorleifur argues that Sverrir dictated only part of *Grýla* (roughly the first twenty-two chapters of the saga) and that the division between the two parts of the saga comes at the end of chapter 100 when Sverrir has become king of all Norway (p. lx).

The dating of the composition of *Sverris saga* is related to the question whether Abbot Karl, who spent the years 1185–88 in Norway and died in 1212/13, wrote the whole text. Þorleifur (pp. lx–lxiv, cf. p. xxiv) again presents both sides of the debate but on the grounds of stylistic homogeneity and other evidence he inclines

towards single authorship by Karl over a period of time extending beyond his visit to Norway.

Speeches are prominent in *Sverris saga* and have attracted much attention. There are about sixty, mostly by the king and usually made before battle. Þorleifur's brief example of rhetorical analysis of the speeches leads naturally into a wider discussion of the saga's style. A 'speech' preserved outside the saga also receives attention (pp. lxxv–lxxviii): the so-called *Speech Against the Bishops* preserved in an early fourteenth-century Norwegian manuscript, AM 114a 4to, but composed in the late twelfth century by a supporter of the king. Excerpts from the *Speech* particularly relevant to the saga's account of conflict between Sverrir and the church are printed here in an appendix on pp. 287–99. Another appendix usefully prints, in both Latin and modern Icelandic translation, relevant extracts from Danish and English historical texts: Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, the anonymous English *Gesta Henrici Secundi*, and the histories of Roger of Hoveden and William of Newburgh (pp. 300–13).

The introduction also includes an account of earlier editions and translations of the saga (pp. lxxviii–lxxx), and the text is preceded by a nine-page bibliography, three pages of genealogies and nine pages of clear and very useful maps.

The presentation of the text of the saga will not surprise readers of *Saga-Book* familiar with earlier volumes in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series: the normalised text is supported by notes recording readings from other manuscripts, glossing archaic vocabulary for the benefit of modern Icelandic readers and providing elucidation of the comparatively few skaldic verses adorning the narrative (just eighteen whole or part stanzas spread across 182 chapters). The text is appropriately complemented by several colour photographs of relevant places, buildings and artefacts, including pages of two of the manuscripts.

Throughout this book Þorleifur Hauksson demonstrates a sure command of the scholarly literature devoted to the saga and of the sometimes complex historical contexts (in an Anglophone periodical it is perhaps appropriate to point out that Nicholas Breakspere, the only Englishman to become Pope, reigned as Adrian IV, not Adrian III as stated on p. xiii).

Perhaps because they perceived that the closeness of its author to his subject imparted a unique character to *Sverris saga*, early Icelandic historians clearly felt that this account of the king's life could not be bettered: *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and originally probably also *Ágrip af Noregskonungum* all end their accounts of the kings of Norway in 1177, the year in which Sverrir was acclaimed as king by the Birkibeinar following the Battle of Ré, and refrain from venturing any further into the period covered by *Sverris saga*. Although one could not claim that *Sverris saga* has been ignored by scholars, it has not figured as prominently as one might have expected in the upsurge of interest in Kings' Sagas of recent decades, given its early date and the reverence with which it was regarded by subsequent saga-writers. As Þorleifur says, 'Sverris saga er ein allra elsta konungasagan, ein af elstu samtímasögunum og elsta frumsamda veraldlega ævisagan sem varðveitt er í heild' (p. lxxiv). While valuable work has been done on its stylistic features, ideology and textual relations, there is surely much more to be done (and the only English translation, by John

Sephton, was published as long ago as 1899). Moreover, as Þorleifur notes, *Sverris saga* has received even less attention from readers outside the academy (even in Iceland: the back of the dust-jacket baldly states that ‘*Sverris saga* er mörgum íslenskum lesendum ókunn’). Þorleifur expresses the hope that his new edition will help to make this early thirteenth-century masterpiece better known (p. lxxv). One can only applaud his desire and affirm that his work deserves to succeed in its aim.

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THE ETHICS OF EMPIRE IN THE SAGA OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT. A STUDY BASED ON MS AM 519a 4to. By DAVID ASHURST. *Studia Islandica* 61. Háskólaútgáfan. Reykjavík, 2009. 323 pp. ISBN 978-9979-54-861-4.

David Ashurst’s study examines the ethical thinking on empire inscribed in *Alexanders saga*, the thirteenth-century Old Norse translation of Gauthier de Châtillon’s *Alexandreis*. Ashurst wisely avoids basing the study on the hypothetical historical context of the translation, but concentrates the inquiry on the texts, and thereby elucidates the often implicit literary strategy through detailed and careful analyses. The study addresses the general topic of medieval royal ideology, but it is focused on how this topic is treated in *Alexanders saga*, and this choice is a welcome one: *Alexanders saga* has, despite warm admiration from the learned audience ever since Árni Magnússon, never been the subject of a monograph. The year 2009 was, however, unusually prolific in *Alexander saga* studies, with the publication of Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen’s digital and paper edition of the *Alexander saga* manuscript AM 519a 4to (2009a, b), as well as Ashurst’s book, and my doctoral thesis on the translation method in the saga (Pettersson 2009). Because of the saga’s status as a translation, Ashurst deals extensively with the Latin source text, contributing significantly to the discussion of Gauthier’s epic, but the saga is his main object of research. Clearly, this learned study not only opens up *Alexanders saga* and its source text but also contributes to our understanding of medieval thinking in a wider perspective.

One of the most intriguing features of *Alexandreis* and *Alexanders saga* is the ambiguity of the texts. Alexander is by turns praised and censured in a way which at times might confuse the reader. This ambiguity is mirrored in the diverging interpretations of the texts among scholars. Most, though, have supported the view that Gauthier subscribes to the standard moral critique against Alexander present in most Alexander texts. Ashurst, however, grasps the text on a level below the rhetorical surface, founding his interpretation on the narrative content and logic of the text as a whole. The most important episode then turns out to be that in which Alexander is visited at night by an apparition, just as his Persian campaign is about to begin. This ‘shining visitant’ is a divine messenger promising Alexander world hegemony if he spares Jerusalem—which he does. Even if Alexander does not manage to

identify the messenger as a representative of the God of the Old Testament, it follows from this episode that Alexander's imperial enterprise actually has divine sanction—it is even instigated by God in a moment of hesitation on the part of Alexander. The question then is whether Alexander transgresses this divine mandate in his career through hubris. Ashurst's conclusion is that he does not, pointing out that Alexander's death by assassination a couple of years later is not a divine retribution for hubris or any other sin, but has other complex causes, which Ashurst deals with in detail. Hence, the quite original goal of Gauthier's text would not be to provide a terrible example of an insatiable conqueror, but to illustrate the divinely sanctioned rise of a world empire. It is from this underlying moral structure that Ashurst investigates the ambiguities of the text, shedding light on their meaning and their consequences for an interpretation of the ethics of empire in the saga and its source.

In the pursuit of the imperial ethics, Ashurst makes several independent but closely intertwined inquiries into the texts. The study is divided into an introduction and nine well-structured chapters. Quotations from Latin are presented together with translations, those from Old Norse texts are not, which is to be regretted, since Ashurst's study is relevant to a wide range of medievalists whose acquaintance with medieval Scandinavian languages cannot be taken for granted. In the introductory chapter, he argues that previous research on *Alexanders saga* is insufficiently detailed in its analysis of the text and also overemphasises some episodes critical of Alexander. In the following chapters different topics are examined in the saga and the epic as well as other Latin and Old Norse texts. In Chapter One, the plausibility of a world conquest for the medieval audience and its theological implications are discussed. The concepts of Fortuna and fame and their role in Alexander's accession to universal power are discussed in Chapter Two. Aristotle's educational speech to the young Alexander is the theme of Chapter Three. This speech has often been seen as a miniature mirror for princes and is therefore of central concern for the study. In previous research, it has been debated whether or not Alexander follows Aristotle's advice, and Ashurst argues that he does, but the main point is rather that the speech sets up the 'idea of an ethical war of conquest that could extend to universal hegemony' (p. 141), thus legitimising Alexander's enterprise. In Chapter Four, the divine mandate of Alexander's empire granted by the shining visitant is discussed. In Chapter Five, Ashurst examines Alexander's suggested moral decline in the later part of his career, claiming that there is no indication of such increasing immorality in the story. The topic of freedom from imperial domination is brought up in Chapter Six in a discussion of the speech of the Scythian Embassy in book VIII. The Ambassador's protests against Alexander's plan to invade Scythia are not successful and, according to Ashurst, are misguided in view of what happens later in the narrative. Chapter Seven deals with Alexander's last planned campaign to invade 'other worlds', and Ashurst claims that the meaning of the concept 'other world' is deliberately ambiguous, possibly denoting both a continent on the southern hemisphere as well as the next world, that is, the world of the dead. This ambiguity, Ashurst argues in Chapter Eight, is exploited in the last book by the goddess Natura when she urges Satan to have Alexander assassinated, presenting



Alexander as a threat to the underworld. Alexander himself might rather have had the intention to march against a southern continent. In the same chapter, Ashurst also discusses the wide range of comments, allowing different final judgements, on Alexander in the last book. In Chapter Nine the investigations are summarised and an ethical doctrine of empire-building in *Alexanders saga* is outlined. It is clearly a programme that supports imperial quests, given that some guidelines must be followed regarding the behaviour of the king/emperor. The ending of the saga is also discussed and Ashurst stresses its ambiguity, depending on how the reader chooses to understand the concept of the 'other world'. A campaign against a southern continent might be ethically just, but an attack upon Hell would have been a transgression of Alexander's human nature, anticipating Christ. In several parts of his analysis, Ashurst points to the possibility of understanding Alexander as a type of Christ.

As can be understood from the summary above, Ashurst's study is very rich, and each chapter is worthy of much more extensive attention and discussion than this review admits. The analyses are inventive and scrupulous and display a wide knowledge of both Old Norse and Latin literature. The results are furthermore corroborated by the fact that Ashurst's study and a recent study on *Alexandreis* (Wiener 2001) have, independently of each other and with different focuses, reached the same general conclusions. It is clear that Ashurst's study advances our knowledge of *Alexanders saga* to a new level, from which it is possible to ask new questions. His analyses have made sense of the central difficulties of the texts, although one might point at cases where there remains an impression of something unsolved, and I would like to end this review with a discussion of one such problem. This is not a criticism of Ashurst's study, but rather a question that has become visible due to his analysis. The problem concerns the human consequences of the imperial ethics, that is, the victims of the emperor and the imperial enterprise. One such victim is Philotas, the son of one of Alexander's generals, who on very loose grounds is brought to trial, accused of being the leader of a conspiracy against Alexander. After a long speech in his own defence, he is forced to confess under torture and subsequently executed. Ashurst's analysis of this much-discussed episode is concentrated on the question whether Alexander acts in accordance with the ethical scheme of the text, and his conclusion is that he does. I do not object to this conclusion, but it is curious that Gauthier, while presenting Alexander's acts as ethical, at the same time explicitly invites the reader to an uncertainty about the guilt of Philotas, when he comments upon his end (*Alexandreis* VIII.319–22). From the text, it is in my opinion hard to believe that neither Gauthier nor his Old Norse translator was indifferent to the fate of Philotas as well as other victims of the rising empire. Instead, they almost seem to offer reading positions hostile towards the very same ethical scheme that the text advocates. The ambiguity that follows such contradictions has led some scholars to argue that there is no central message in the text, but rather a mix of diverging voices representing different frames of reference. Ashurst's study is pointing in the opposite direction, pursuing a coherent logic in the advanced rhetoric of the texts as a whole. The Philotas episode, however, seem to be a challenge to Ashurst's analysis, as he admits that it might be interpreted

in different ways (194). A solution might, however, be proposed by drawing a parallel with Virgil's treatment of Aeneas's achievements. Aeneas, like Alexander, is fulfilling a divinely inspired plan that the author subscribes to, but at the same time, as scholars have observed, there is an ambiguity towards his achievements in light of their human consequences: the author's literary solutions seem 'to create sympathy for the defeated and dying, and so evoke at least uneasiness over the "success" of the victor' (Thomas 1988, 262). Gauthier appears to use the same strategy, when he on the one hand legitimises the imperial quest as something inevitable and desirable, but on the other hand invites the reader to sympathise with its victims. This double perspective, including both a strict ethical scheme and some kind of compassion for its victims, does not necessarily undermine the coherence of the imperial ethics in the text: state-building simply concerns a higher level than the individual. But it exposes a receptiveness to the complexity of human conditions quite unusual in pre-modern literature. Curiously enough, the Old Norse translator seems to support this tendency towards literary complexity, not least in the portrayal of Alexander, which, as Ashurst notes in his final discussion, avoids single stereotypes and instead creates a multi-dimensional character comparable to the most highly valued literary portraits in Old Norse literature. However, my point with this discussion is that not all the contradictions of the texts need to be solved within the imperial ethic that Ashurst has brought into light. There are other relevant frames of interpretation. But the scheme is clearly a fundamental structure, absolutely necessary for an adequate understanding of exegetical problems in the text. Clearly, Ashurst has shown that *Alexanders saga* deserves much more attention than it has been granted in previous research. Providing convincing solutions to the fundamental problems of the text, he has cleared the way for future discussions, and that is definitely something worth looking forward to.

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TRANSLATING THE SAGAS. TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE. By JOHN KENNEDY. *Making the Middle Ages 5. Brepols*. Turnhout, 2007. ix + 219 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-50772-9.

Kennedy begins and ends his book with the assertion that the work of translating sagas ought not to be viewed as a second-class scholarly activity. If he is right—as I think he is, although the point is sometimes lost on the official assessors of academic output—it is appropriate that the history of saga translation should itself be the subject of an academic study such as the one he offers. The result of Kennedy's labour, covering the whole range of English translations from the beginnings to the year 2002 but compressed into fewer than 200 pages, is not especially deep or detailed but it will long stand as a reference book that can be a starting point for more specific studies, and it is very welcome for its commonsense overview of the subject.

The book offers not close analysis of texts but, in the sections devoted to individual translators, a pithy characterisation of the approach and style of each, along with a representative example of their work. This is probably the best that could be managed given the constraints of space, and often enough Kennedy is able to provide a neat summing-up that gets to the heart of the matter, as when he criticises Ethel Hearn for using Morris-like tags alongside constructions that William Morris himself would have found unacceptable (p. 104). Since the book aims at being an even-handed survey, it is appropriate that Kennedy avoids extreme censoriousness even while saying what has to be said, as when he quotes Ursula Dronke on Vigfússon and Powell's *Corpus poeticum boreale*, a work 'so full of delights, and so unbelievably unreliable' (p. 100), or notes temperately that the works of W. Bryant Bachman Jr have been 'criticized for being often inaccurate' (p. 171). He maintains a dignified reticence even when quoting Milton S. Rose's translation of *Fósthæðra saga* into excruciating verse, concerning which he remarks that this rendering, found among Rose's papers after his death and published by his academic colleagues, was 'neither a wise nor a kind addition' to the corpus of saga literature in English (p. 120). This comment, both wise and kind as well as gently ironic, is typical of Kennedy at his frequent best.

The bibliographical sections of the book, which include complete lists of published translations in specified periods, are deeply and avowedly indebted to earlier listings by D. K. Fry (*Norse Sagas Translated into English: A Bibliography* (New York, 1980)) and Paul Acker ('Norse Sagas Translated into English: A Supplement'. *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993), 66–102), but Kennedy takes the opportunity to make some corrections and additions whilst setting out the items in chronological rather than alphabetical order. There is a dependence on earlier scholarship that goes deeper than this, however, and regularly extends to the judgements on the accuracy of given translations, as can be seen in the references above to comments by Dronke or concerning Bachman. At times the reliance on authorities becomes a distinct limitation in Kennedy's work, as in the case of his account of the suggestion that the translation of *Heimskringla* by Monsen and Smith was not made directly from the Old Icelandic but was in fact rendered from the modern Norwegian version by Storm (pp. 128–29): here a detailed first-hand examination of the three texts would surely have allowed Kennedy to reach a judgement on the contentious issue of the translation's source, but he sits resolutely

on the fence erected by his predecessors. The subject of sources, furthermore, is the area in which the book fails generally and most significantly: we are informed, for example, that Magnus Magnusson's translations of *Fóstbræðra saga* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 'are based on manuscript versions significantly different from those which formed the basis for the work of earlier translators of these sagas' (p. 178) but we are not told what these manuscript versions were; information of this kind, or concerning the published editions that the translators used, is simply not offered in the listings or discussions of the individual translations.

Before turning to trends in particular periods the book presents two introductory chapters, the first of which discusses the ways in which English versions of sagas may be important to historians, to anthropologists and to students of comparative literature; the section also pays due attention to the historical importance of the appeal of saga translations to the many who saw Norse blood and social conventions as the source of 'much of what is manly and vigorous in the British Constitution' (R. M. Ballantyne, he of *The Coral Island*, quoted on p. 13). The second chapter broaches theoretical issues as it proposes seven basic ways of approaching saga translation, and it does so with a calm clarity free of dense theoretical terminology (pp. 21–26); however, it does not quite extricate itself from the trap of the intentionalist fallacy when it discusses the possibility of trying to recreate the effects designed by the original author (pp. 21–23). After dealing with global concerns, the chapter turns its attention to a list of particular topics that includes skaldic verse cheek by jowl with proper nouns, technical terms, genealogies and editorial apparatus (p. 37). The discussion of skaldic verse, when it comes, is quite pithy as an overview of the subject (pp. 44–48), but it is too short to be adequate, and its brevity does drive home the point that this study is concerned overwhelmingly with prose.

All the next four chapters, which comprise the main substance of the book, follow the same outline: a brief introduction to the main issues of the period precedes a chronological list giving the bibliographical details of all translations published; this is followed by a discussion of matters that have become apparent through perusal of the list, and the chapter ends with an extensive section made up of passages devoted to individual translators or collaborations. The first, on the 'pioneering years' (p. 53) but going up to Dasent's publication of his *Njála* translation in 1861, places due emphasis on Samuel Laing in addition to Dasent as the most important contributor to the age, sketches the inevitably fumbling and sometimes eccentric efforts of some other translators, and notes (pp. 66–67) the significant role of Scotland in this period. William Morris and his collaborator Eiríkr Magnússon rightly dominate the treatment of the second period, which goes up to 1913. The discussion of their invariably complex and learned work is necessarily brief but it makes the essential points, and includes several neat formulations such as that Morris was motivated by the belief that 'recorded in the literature of medieval Iceland was a more authentic way of living and thinking than that of nineteenth-century Britain' and that his translations 'were meant to be difficult, to require the reader to engage with them' (both p. 88). The account of the linguistic features of their translations, perhaps because of its brevity, leaves the impression that Morris was something of a Francophobe—which is very far from the truth, as the large corpus of his literary romances shows—but it offers

the valuable insight that whereas Morris reworked vocabulary and syntactical patterns from Chaucer and Malory in prose that partly tries to give an Icelandic flavour to the language but in fact contains 'very few true neologisms' (p. 91), most later translators who have been thought of as school-of-Morris are much more superficial in their linguistic choices, and few followed Morris and Eiríkr 'down this rather sophisticated and demanding archaizing and Icelandicizing path' (p. 91). Of great interest, too, are the observations that however influential Morris and Eiríkr may have been, their work, begun in 1869, was not followed by a major upsurge in saga translations by others until the 1890s, and that whilst it would be hard to argue that their collaboration established a canon (p. 88), equally it would be true to say that in their joint work they did little to sanction efforts by others to move beyond the familiar (pp. 87–88). It is duly noted, however, that Eiríkr working alone produced a translation of the Old Icelandic life of Thomas Becket (p. 88).

In the chapter that deals with 1914–50, Kennedy finds himself confronted with something of a mixed bag: in his concluding remarks on archaism he notes that no very clear pattern in fact emerges (pp. 133–34), although at the start of the chapter he had said that one might expect this period to display a general shift from the prevalent archaism of the Victorian age to the archaism-free preferences of the later twentieth century. He does identify one distinguished translator, Margaret Schlauch, whose work during these years seems to display a progression away from archaism (pp. 125–27), but he also points to R. S. Loomis, for example, whose partial translation of *Tristrams saga*, which appeared in 1923, features determinedly archaic diction based on Romance etymology (p. 116). Trends in the second half of the twentieth century, discussed in the penultimate chapter, seem to be clearer: Kennedy notes, for instance, that the number of new translations of *fornaldarsögur* in this period is roughly equal to that of *ridðarasögur*, and that whilst the former were conspicuously aimed at the general reader the latter were marketed for an academic readership and were produced in response to increased interest in literary influences from outside Scandinavia (p. 155). In connection with stylistic matters he discerns two opposing tendencies represented on the one hand by the looseness and vivacious English idiom of Hermann Pálsson, following the trail of Gwyn Jones in the earlier period, and on the other the accuracy and strangeness cultivated to some extent by George Johnston but more by the Durrenbergers, whose translations are free of archaism but uncomfortably close to the idiom of the Icelandic texts (pp. 157–59). *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* issued by Leifur Eiríksson Publishing near the end of the century, it is suggested, steers a middle course between these extremes (p. 176) by working hard 'to produce readable English language versions which also respected the idioms and the syntax of the original' (p. 159). This is largely correct, no doubt, but the statement makes one long to see detailed analysis of how the thirty contributing translators did it, and what their specific choices were.

The book is brought to a close with a short chapter that considers the future of saga translation: a downbeat view of Old Norse as an academic discipline under threat is contrasted with an optimistic account of the possibilities opened up by the internet, electronic formats and hypertext links. As in so many other parts of the volume, the coverage of topics as a group is good whilst the treatment of each

individual topic is deft but not deep; and the thinking, here as everywhere in the book, is characterised by plain good sense.

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LJÓDMÆLI. By EINAR SIGURÐSSON Í EYDÖLUM. Edited by JÓN SAMSONARSON and KRISTJÁN EIRÍKSSON. *Rit 68. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*. Reykjavík, 2007. xxxvii + 284 pp. ISBN 978-9979-819-97-4.

Einar Sigurðsson (1539–1626) is one of the most striking Icelandic poets of the immediate post-Reformation age. Much less well known within and beyond his native land than Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–74), Einar's work has attracted little discussion, even in recent Icelandic literary histories, though school textbooks have often included extracts from his best known piece, the remarkable Christmas lullaby *Kvæði af stallinum Kristí*. The many extant paper manuscripts for the majority of the 45 poems in this new edition, however, bear witness to the extent of Einar's popularity over some three centuries as a poet of unflinching piety and social concern. Evidence from these manuscripts underpins the presentation and discussion of the edited texts. The editorial project, initiated some twenty years ago by Jón Samsonarson, achieved its final form under the editorial direction of Kristján Eiríksson. The notes and commentary are detailed, insightful and authoritative, and Jón's introductory essay marks out the literary-cultural ground clearly and helpfully.

It is not difficult to understand why Einar's poetry was so much admired in Icelandic households over the post-Reformation centuries. Many contrasting elements animate his poetic vision. The poems can be ceremonially public or intensely private, spiritually intense or politically anxious, biblical or folkloric, and they can seem both medieval and modern. The tone ranges from patient prayerfulness to barely suppressed anxiety, from sustained lyricism to wry reflection. And though the poetry sometimes works on the fringes of personification and allegory its diction finds no place for courtly kennings or conceits—its imagery is frequently drawn from the bible or biblical commentary, its formulae and alliterative doublets are powerful but penny-plain. Einar's prosodic energy is everywhere apparent, as unbending truths about the worlds of God and Caesar are articulated in *fornyrðislag* or in a variety of artful but accessible rhyme schemes and alliterative infrastructures. Even in Einar's Marian verses the elaborate wordscapes of *Lilja* have been left far behind.

The rhetorical and prosodic strategies outlined in the poet's address to his readers in the first printed edition of his works (*Vísnaþók Guðbrands* 1612) reflect Lutheran priorities:

Kvæðin hafa þann kost með sér  
þau kennast betur og lærast gjör,  
en málið laust úr minni fer,  
mörgum að þeim skemmtan er.

(*Til lesarans*, v. 7)

Einar was eager to deploy secular poetic measures and melodies in the service of sacred ends. His apologia reflects sentiments previously voiced by Bishop Guðmundur Þorláksson in the Preface to his *Psalmabók* (1589), by priests and scholars in Denmark, and, ultimately, by Luther himself. The same notions were, of course, not unknown in medieval European vernacular tradition.

Einar experienced both grinding poverty in his youth and relative wealth in later life as the respected father of Oddur, Bishop of Skálholt from 1589, who secured for him the desirable curacy of Eydalir í Breiðdal in Suður-Múlasýsla. Einar was a child of his time: during his formative years Iceland was still a Catholic land—he was just twelve years old when Bishop Jón Arason was executed, and the old faith will have taken its time to retreat thereafter. And yet by 1570 he was in the first group of students to be taught in the new Lutheran college at Hólar, arriving the year before Guðbrandur became bishop. The spiritual tensions of the time find occasional telling expression in his poetry, as in the *Mariúvísur*, in which the *móðir drottins* is celebrated as a figure of exemplary piety rather than venerated immoderately; in this way the Marian element in medieval worship and poesy is recalibrated in line with the new prescriptions of Lutheran theology. Einar is clear that ‘Hin fornu skáldin fóru villt, / það finnst í þeirra óði; / páfans hefur þeim predikun spillt’ (v. 4). He therefore urges poets to redefine their responsibilities, and reconfigure the tradition of poetic praise (v. 10):

Hvörki tröll né heiðnir menn  
hana nú sæla kalla;  
því eigum vér kristnir allir senn  
efunarlaust af huga og raust,  
sem á lausnarann setjum lifanda traust,  
að lofa hana ævi alla.

Einar’s best-known poem in modern Iceland is ‘Nóttin var sú ágæt ein’, a Christmas lullaby much recorded by choirs and soloists, normally though not exclusively in the setting by Sigvaldi Kaldalóns (1881–1946). The first stanzas, at least, are known to many Icelanders by heart, but the whole poem bears witness to Einar’s remarkable recreative imagination. In the twenty-eight balladic quatrains with a simple fifth-line refrain (aaabb), the poem’s vitality derives in part from subtle shifts of narrative perspective, as the initially detached narrator of the manger story gradually becomes a character in his own poem. He longs to journey to Bethlehem, and then suddenly appears by the crib, addressing the Christ child with a naive eloquence worthy of the Wakefield Master’s shepherds:

Örmum sætum eg þig vef,  
ástarkoss eg syninum gef.  
Hvað eg þig mildan móðgað hef,  
minnstu ei á það, kæri.  
Með vísnaðsöng eg vögguna þína hræri.  
(*Vöggukvæði*, v. 8)

The poetic discourse eventually dissolves into allegory ('Skapaðu hjartað hreint í mér / til herbergis sem sómir þér', v. 16), lachrymose reflection, and contemplation of the bleak simplicities of body and soul theology.

A sequence of three poems, *Ævisöguflokkur Einars í Eyðölum*, *Barnatöluflokkur Einars í Eyðölum* and *Pakklætishæn fyrir barnaheill séra Einars Sigurðssonar* reminds us that piety, like charity, begins at home. Einar finds God at work in the spiritual microclimate of his home and family. In the third piece the poet offers thanks for the lives of his children—three (of eight) surviving from his first marriage, and ten from the second. All are named, along with partners, their own children and assorted in-laws; their many blessings are acknowledged, biblical family parallels are drawn, and appeals made for divine protection 'fyrir Satans illu eitri . . . villu og vantrú allri'. The 650-line *Barnatöluflokkur* works more expansively over the same ground. The *Ævisöguflokkur*, 214 8-line *fornyrðislag* stanzas, is a didactic spiritual autobiography, whose very stylistic sparseness seems to reflect the poet's selfless life in Christ. All events, 'bæði súrt og sætt', are shown to reflect the grace of a saviour who 'mig hefur um ævi / borið sem móðir / sitt barn í faðmi' (v. 209). Of the numerous extant manuscripts of this poem, six are used by the editors to compare with the Lbs. 1165 8vo version selected as the base text. This sensibly pragmatic approach is adopted for all the texts in the edition.

Though there is also a strong spiritual dimension to Einar's *Vísnaflökkur um Íslands gæði*, another occasionally anthologised piece, the work is informed by broader socio-economic perspectives. Weary of writers who speak negatively of Iceland ('Heyri eg þar til háð og spott / að hér sé aldrei mikið gott', v. 5), Einar seeks to celebrate all that is good in the land, folk, polity and culture (v. 7):

Því held eg skyldu hvörs þess manns  
sem hér er borinn á landi  
að mæla slíkt hann má til sanns,  
yfir miskunn Guðs fagnandi,  
og gæta þess að heillin hans  
hér yfir lýðnum standi  
svo augljóst verði öllum heim  
að Ísland ber nú langt af þeim  
sem vefjast villublandi.

Though there is no sign of misty-eyed romantic nationalism, Iceland is presented as a sturdy land of 'Jökull, sandur, aur og grjótt' (v. 4) over which God watches lovingly, as the faith, introduced early and now reformed, blossoms and is tended by worthy bishops, nourished by good schools, underpinned by the 1584 *Guðbrandsbiblíá*, and sustained by benevolent Danish kings. The land can supply basic consumer needs, supplemented (perhaps to excess, Einar fears) by foreign merchants; and Iceland has resources to export, notably sulphur (for use in the manufacture of gunpowder)—'Í voru landi er vara sú ein / sem vér höfum kallað brennistein. / Hann finnst í fjöllum inni.' However, the poet cannot hide his anxieties about the fault lines within Icelandic *stjórni* and *stétt*, and his prayers concerning these elements seem all too heartfelt.



The poems of séra Einar Sigurðsson were much admired by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, in the initial part of whose *Vísnaþók* (1612) they were first printed. This handsome new edition, well up to the high scholarly and presentational standards of the series in which it appears, helps modern readers in and beyond Iceland to understand why.

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— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtsmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 154).

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flateyjarbók* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Sylrækiarosi*.

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf.

*Heilagra manna sǫgur*, II 107–08).

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