

## ON THE SOURCES AND COMPOSITION OF *RÓMVERJA SAGA*

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### I *Rómverja saga*

THIS WORK IS an early Icelandic version of matter drawn from a number of Latin sources. The most important and substantial of these were Sallust's *Jugurtha* and *Catiline* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*. The saga exists in two redactions, customarily referred to as the older and younger versions. The older is preserved with large lacunas in AM 595 a–b 4to, written in the second quarter of the fourteenth century and printed *44 Prøver*, 253–380, 385–86; Meissner 1910, 4–131. (Manuscript datings follow those given in *ONP Registre*.) The younger is known in two forms. One is the entire text preserved in AM 226 fol., from the end of the fourteenth century, and in copies derived from it; it is printed *44 Prøver*, 108–252. The other is the fragmentary text found in a sixteenth-century manuscript, Perg. 4:o nr 24 in the Royal Library, Stockholm. The younger redaction is much abridged and often reworked, especially in the Sallust sections. On the other hand, it also supplies matter which does not exist in the older redaction because of the defective state of AM 595 4to. This is the case, for instance, with the whole of the conclusion to the *Pharsalia* translation, part 6 in the synopsis below, where we have no option but to accept the younger version's text more or less as it stands.

The saga can be conveniently divided into six parts:

1. A translation of the *Jugurtha*, though with omission of Sallust's introduction, chs 1,1–4,9: *44 Prøver*, 253–326/6; 108–156/19.

2. A bridging passage, giving a brief account of Jugurtha's death, followed by a longer section on Marius and Sulla and the war between them, ending with a brief enumeration of the outstanding men of the next generation, Pompey, Caesar, Crassus and Cato: *44 Prøver*, 326/8–330/20; 156/19–160/14.

3. A translation of the *Catiline*, again with omission of Sallust's introduction, chs 1,1–4,5, and also of his long lament over Rome's moral decline, chs 5,9–13,5: *44 Prøver*, 330/21–354/28; 160/15–179/2.

4. A prelude to the *Pharsalia*, on the forms of Roman government from the foundation of the city down to the struggle between Pompey

and Caesar, in effect a very summary account of Roman history within those limits. It is imperfectly preserved; see *44 Prøver*, 385/9–386/27; 179/3–181/21; and the Appendix, pp. 216–19 below.

5. An abridged prose translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*: *44 Prøver*, 355/2–380/29; 181/22–246/5.

6. A conclusion to the *Pharsalia*, on the aftermath of the battle, Caesar's death, Octavian's victories over Mark Antony, Octavian's reign as Augustus, and finally the birth of Christ: *44 Prøver*, 246/6–252/9.

In connection with part 3 it may be noted that the translator is manifestly willing to disregard Sallust's philosophical and moral reflections; he obviously wants to get on with the story. The same may be said of part 5, the *Pharsalia*, where the translator is primarily interested in the events, and most of Lucan's poetry gets lost on the way. This is especially true of passages where Lucan expands on mythological and astronomical themes; but other features of his high epic style, the luxuriant introduction of proper names, for instance, also go by the board.

The following discussion aims to identify rather more closely the forms of the Latin originals used by the saga-maker. It leads to a brief consideration of the way in which the saga may have been composed.

## II *The Sallust translation*

No remains of Sallust manuscripts exist in Iceland, and in their absence we can only approach the problem of source identification by studying the Icelandic alongside the Latin to see whether it shows departures from the *textus receptus* which can be matched elsewhere in the Sallust transmission. I discussed this comparison in some detail a few years ago (Þorbjörg Helgadóttir 1987–88), so here I shall merely summarise the main points, though with some brief additional comment.

Sallust texts are extant in 500-odd copies. The early manuscripts, from the ninth to the twelfth century, fall into two main groups. The first group comprises copies which all had the same original lacuna in the *Jugurtha* text, chs 103,2–112,3. In most of them, however, this missing matter was subsequently supplied, commonly by a hand different from that of the main text. The copies of the second group do not have that lacuna and thus appear without the intervention of a second scribe. Otherwise the two groups have a number of smaller omissions in common. Editors of Sallust have arrived at a classification of sorts, with division into three major families of manuscripts, and it appears

that the Latin text followed by the Icelandic translator was a member of the so-called ‘gamma’ family. A noteworthy feature of this set is that all its members are of German provenance. One of them, a late eleventh-century codex now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Codex Parisinus 10195, has a special status in relation to the Icelandic translation. In four cases it offers a variant which agrees with the saga reading but is at odds with the other available witnesses. This Paris manuscript was in the library of the famous monastery at Echternach, founded by St Willibrord, in present-day Luxembourg but only a few miles from Trier and the Mosel.

The evidence makes it plausible to assume that it was a copy of this Echternach manuscript, or of a text closely related to it, which came early to Iceland. Ways and means are easy to contemplate, impossible to confirm. As students and pilgrims, perhaps as men on clerical or commercial business, Icelanders came to Frisia, Saxony, Franconia, Lotharingia; they travelled by the Rhine and Mosel on their way south to Rome and beyond. On these routes, as on others, monasteries provided lodgings for a longer or shorter stay. Some visitors with time and money, of studious bent and with the right recommendations, might be allowed access to the book-cupboards and scriptoria of their host-communities; they could commission copies or buy them ready-made; they might even be permitted to make them for themselves. There was traffic in the opposite direction as well. English and Continental clerics came to Iceland, missionary bishops in the eleventh century, for instance, though what texts they may have had with them other than their essential service-books is beyond our ken. As first bishop of Hólar, Iceland’s northern diocese, Jón Qgmundarson was in office from 1106 to 1121. He is reliably reported to have brought two foreign clerics to teach in his cathedral school. One of them is described as *franzeis*, which may suggest ‘French’ but in the early twelfth-century context is more likely to mean ‘Frankish’, not least because the name of this priest was Rikini, a Germanic name, Ricwine, well attested in the region between Köln and Mainz and west into Lotharingia—the region, in fact, where Echternach lies.

A further possibility is that a copy of the Echternach manuscript, or of a sister or a cousin, came straight from that Benedictine house to one of the Benedictine communities in Iceland. Two were established in the twelfth century, both in the Hólar diocese, one at Þingeyrar in 1133, one at Þverá in 1155; both became notable centres of literary activity, Þingeyrar by the end of that century, Þverá rather later. Bishop Jón had

connections, direct or indirect, with the Köln–Trier–Mainz triangle, and it was he who took the initiative in founding Iceland’s first Benedictine monastery. The first abbot, Vilmundr, had been educated by Bishop Jón’s foreign teachers at the cathedral school of Hólar. He must have subsequently gone abroad, more likely to the mainland than to Scandinavia where monasticism was still in its infancy, and become a novice and in time a professed monk in some abbey which one would guess was in the Gorze rather than the Cluny tradition. There was nothing novel about such an excursion from Iceland; after all, the two boys, Ísleifr and Gizurr, who were to become the first native bishops of the Icelanders, had been sent to school in Westphalia some decades earlier. That Abbot Vilmundr had been in a house of black monks in Mosel or Rhine territory cannot be substantiated, but it is by no means an out-of-the-way conjecture.

I may mention as a coda that AM 595 4to, our sole source for the older redaction of *Rómverja saga*, is of North Icelandic provenance. The scribe shared with another writer the copying of the *Jónsbók* manuscript, AM 127 4to. This rather younger collaborator of his is familiar to us as the scribe of nine or ten other manuscripts, written about the middle of the fourteenth century (Jakob Benediktsson 1980, 10–11), and both men were evidently at work in a cathedral or monastic scriptorium. It is the milieu in which we should expect to find such a work as *Rómverja saga* not just preserved but also made in the first place. If the translations on which it is based are from about 1200 or earlier (Jakob Benediktsson 1980, 23; Þorbjörg Helgadóttir 1987–88, 274–76), we have few centres to choose from in the Northern diocese: Hólar with its cathedral school and the Benedictine houses at Þingeyrar and Þverá. That historians and latinists thrived at Þingeyrar in that period is something we can say for certain.

### III *The Lucan translation*

The *Pharsalia* was another extremely popular work, known today in a good 400 manuscripts, whole or fragmentary. The textual problems are many and complex because Lucan’s enforced suicide left the poem unfinished and the ten books he had composed by no means finally revised. It must often be left in doubt whether this or that reading among a multitude of variants represents the word of the poet or a later contribution (Tarrant 1983). Editors have analysed a number of the oldest manuscripts, from the ninth and tenth centuries, and arrived at what passes for a *textus receptus* on the basis of their classified variants.

Affinities among these manuscript texts certainly exist, but a plain demonstration of relatively clearcut family groups, as in the case of the histories by Sallust, is out of the question.

It is not only these circumstances of textual history that complicate the comparison of the Icelandic translation with Lucan's Latin. Another prime difficulty is the distortion which inevitably results when a grand epic poem, highly coloured and studded with rhetorical gems, is put into prose by a translator whose interest lies much more in the history than in the poetry. We have to contend with sharp reduction, by abridgment and omission, and with ready paraphrase. Nevertheless, the comparative study I have so far undertaken suggests that we need not utterly despair of coming closer to the source of the translation, tentative though any conclusion must inevitably be. At present it appears safe to isolate three Lucan manuscripts as having particular relevance to the *Rómverja saga* text: Codex Leidensis Vossianus, Lat. XIX F.63; Codex Leidensis Vossianus, Lat. XIX Q.51 (= V); and Codex Bruxellensis, Bibl. Burgund. 5330–32.

Although the translator did his best to pare Lucan's text down while still giving an intelligible narrative, he was not averse to adding bits here and there, usually by way of explanation. We have to decide whether such comment came out of his own head or was drawn from a written source. It is not difficult to give a verdict in favour of the latter derivation. Many manuscript texts of the *Pharsalia* are glossed in one way or another, and various commentaries on Lucan also exist independently, in so-called *scholia*. Commentaries of both kinds were published by Weber (1831), and an examination of these Latin texts soon makes it clear that the additions in *Rómverja saga* have much in common with them, too much to be accidental. Two commentaries show a more particular affinity with the Icelandic. One is that of the Leyden manuscript designated V (see above); the other is a twelfth-century *scholia* collection in Codex Berolinensis, nr 34 (= X). The provenance of the Leyden manuscript is assigned, rather vaguely, to western Germany (Tarrant 1983, 216); that of the Berlin manuscript is pinpointed to Xanten, on the Rhine, not far from the present German–Dutch border (Rose 1905, 1304–05).

#### IV *The bridging passage between the Jugurtha and Catiline translations*

Meissner (1910, 305–06) saw that the *scholia* of X, the Berlin codex of Xanten origin just mentioned, contain items which correspond rather closely to matter found in this bridging passage in the saga, part 2 in the

synopsis above. The longest of the pieces of commentary relevant to the bridging passage is the *scholion* associated with Lucan's long retrospective digression on the civil war between Marius and Sulla and its atrocities, *Pharsalia*, II 68–232.

The bridging section in the saga begins with these lines, 44 *Prøver*, 326/8–14; cf. 156/19–25:

En þó er það sagt á bókum Rómverja að Jugurtha konungur var bundinn læidri í Rómaborg ok að dómi öldunga var hann lengi kvaldur ok marga vega ok það var gört að við hann að hvarmarnir allir voru klippðir af augunum til þess að hann mætti æigi svefn fá sem manns eðli er til en að lyktum var hann svá dæyddr að honum var stæypt í forað.

(I would translate *honum var stæypt í forað* as 'He was thrown into an abyss, or over a cliff.' The sense of *forað* as 'a dangerous, precipitous place' is well attested in early Icelandic, see Cleasby–Vigfússon and Fritzner, s. v., and add *Postola sögur* 1874, 724/11–15, where *þú steyptir í forað* translates *tu in præcipitio misisti*, cf. e. g. Mombricitus 1910, II 612/53–57. In later Icelandic it commonly means 'a dangerous, swampy place', and it was so paraphrased, *í hit fúlasta fen*, in the younger redaction of *Rómverja saga*, 44 *Prøver*, 156/24.)

Jugurtha's capture and end are commonly recorded by early historians, but only Plutarch (*Life of Marius*, XII 3) reports that he suffered from the violence of his captors (and was starved to death), and Plutarch's details bear no relation to those given in the saga. On the other hand, Meissner (1910, 305) noticed that the detail of denying Jugurtha sleep by removing his eyelids is reminiscent of a passage in Orosius (IV, 10) telling of the torment of Atilius Regulus, *quem . . . resectis palpebris, illigatum in machina, vigilando necaverunt*.

It must seem unlikely, however, that the Icelandic author/editor pieced together his few lines on Jugurtha's fate from a variety of sources; much more likely that he was following a commentary of *scholion* kind. It cannot in this case have been a commentary of the kind represented by the Berlin X codex, which contains nothing on Jugurtha's end, and none of the other available commentaries has a text fully comparable to the Icelandic. Noteworthy parallels are however to be found in Lucan *scholia* compiled by Arnulf of Orléans at the end of the twelfth century. He too begins a corresponding section on the war between Marius and Sulla with a note on Jugurtha's overthrow. He does not describe his torture but he does say that he was brought to Rome and there thrown off the Tarpeian Rock (*Arnulfi Aurelianensis Glosule* 1958, II 67). The narrative sequence and the manner of Jugurtha's

execution are thus in harmony with the saga passage, and it seems not unlikely that the commentary on which the Icelandic author/editor based his Jugurtha–Marius–Sulla bridging section began like Arnulf's *scholion* and had a related account of Jugurtha's end.

Most of the bridging passage is on the struggle of Marius and Sulla. Without going into detail, we may safely say that comparison of this matter with the commentary of the Leyden V and the Berlin X manuscripts confirms that the Icelandic writer otherwise had a source similar to them at his disposal.

In *Rómverja saga* the matter of *Pharsalia*, II 68–232, the digression on the times of Marius and Sulla just discussed, appears where it chronologically belongs, in the bridging passage between the *Jugurtha* and *Catiline* sections, while, not unnaturally, it is omitted in the translation of the *Pharsalia* itself. The bridging passage does not, of course, give us straight Lucan: the writer mingles information gleaned from *Pharsalia*, II 68–232, with material of *scholia* kind and he also refers to other parts of Lucan's epic. A similar approach is evident in an interesting fragment of a Lucan commentary in the Beales Collection in Olympia, Washington. The fragment is just a couple of paper leaves in poor shape, written in the fourteenth century but obviously a copy of an older text (Wilson 1933). The first leaf begins with notes on *Pharsalia*, I 691–95. Then comes an *Accessus ad secundum librum*, followed by a kind of division of this book into ten 'chapters'. The third 'chapter' covers *Pharsalia*, II 68–232, the digression on the times of Marius and Sulla. The text the fragment represents was evidently designed as a book for the classroom. The Magister shows that he knew his Lucan thoroughly, referring to appropriate passages back and forth in the *Pharsalia*, and interspersing his own comment. It is a natural conclusion that the source followed by the author/editor of *Rómverja saga* in putting together his bridging passage was akin to the Beales text-book fragment. Admittedly, a good deal of the information in the Icelandic cannot be paralleled in the available *scholia* collections, though most of the extra details can be traced in fourth- and fifth-century historians like Eutropius, Orosius and Exuperantius. We may doubt whether any twelfth-century Icelander had direct access to such authorities, and it seems a better solution to assume that these diverse facts were owed to a Lucan commentary pieced together by a compiler in some centre of learning on the Continent. We should perhaps not entirely ignore the words with which the Icelandic writer begins his bridging passage, *en þó er það sagt á bókum Rómverja*, but it would be rash to conclude that

such a plural, used in citing authority, necessarily implies that he had more sources than one—viz. the postulated Lucan commentary—at his disposal.

#### V *The prelude and conclusion to the Pharsalia translation*

Twelfth-century scholars and teachers more and more turned their hands to providing introductory guides to the works of classical authors, so-called *accessus*, ‘approaches’. Collections of such pieces were made, often accompanied by more immediately utilitarian glosses and annotation on the text selected for study. In most medieval circles Lucan the historian was esteemed at least as highly as Lucan the poet, and the commentaries usually pay ample attention to the historical aspects of his work. An *accessus ad Lucanum* would typically include a section called *summa historiae*, a basic sketch of Roman history intended to give a student the background he needed to understand the events described in the *Pharsalia*. When commentators put such compendia together, they naturally turned to the historians ordinarily used in the schools, and although they do not name their sources, it is often possible to identify the books they relied on. On occasion their information cannot be traced to a known source; and sometimes it is evident that they offer an account which reflects contemporary, twelfth-century, views of the past and which, in the nature of things, is not likely to be without mistakes and anachronisms.

The author of a *summa historiae* in a Lucan *accessus* usually puts the Triumvirate at the centre of interest, commonly paying most attention to the activities of the allies and rivals, Crassus, Caesar and Pompey, as *dictatores*. He treats their characters and careers more or less thoroughly, usually ending with Pompey’s death and so keeping within the chronological bounds of the *Pharsalia* itself. But this scheme is not invariable: sometimes an author would make the foundation of Rome his starting-point; sometimes he would not end his summary before the reign of Nero, thus bringing the history down to Lucan’s own day. And it must have been a *summa* of this extended scope that the Icelandic author/editor had on his desk when he furnished the *Pharsalia* translation with its prelude and conclusion.

At this point other Icelandic sources must be drawn into the discussion. Jakob Benediktsson (1980, 20–22) referred to a text in the late fourteenth-century miscellany manuscript, AM 764 4to, fols 13–14, which parallels substantial parts of the prelude and conclusion to the *Pharsalia* translation in *Rómverja saga*, 4 and 6 in the synopsis given in

I above. (Reference to 764 in what follows is to the text in the Appendix, pp. 216–19 below, where the passage is printed *in extenso* for the first time.) Comparison led Jakob to decide that the saga was the source of the matter in 764. He also discussed similarities which exist between the saga text and some short passages in *Veraldar saga*. In this case, he decided that *Veraldar saga* was the donor, *Rómverja saga* the recipient.

Dietrich Hofmann (1986) then published a fresh study of the relations between these three texts and came to a different conclusion. In his opinion *Rómverja saga* was the source used in both *Veraldar saga* and 764.

I have poached on their preserves, made yet another comparison, and would now advance yet another hypothesis, briefly as follows. Before *Veraldar saga* was composed (at some time after 1152 and before 1190, very likely well before; Jakob Benediktsson 1944, liii–liv), a translation of an *accessus ad Lucanum* was made in Iceland, with a *summa historiae* which stretched *ab urbe condita* to the reign of Augustus and the birth of Christ. The author of *Veraldar saga*, whose own book is only a sort of universal *summa historiae*, used this *accessus* translation on the rare occasions when it suited his purpose, so here only the merest fragments are preserved. The author/editor of *Rómverja saga* also used it, not without some modification, for his prelude and conclusion to the *Pharsalia* translation. Finally, the same *accessus* translation found its place in the epitome of universal history that fills the first twenty-three folios of AM 764 4to. This epitome is divided into eight ages, from the Creation to Doomsday, and the *accessus* translation was introduced to cover the end of the fifth age. The *accessus* matter here is selectively lopped; see the omission after 764, line 16, of a passage to parallel 44 *Prøver*, 385/24–386/23, and evident gaps in or after 764, lines 74, 79, 80, 84, 88, 109. On the other hand, it does not appear to have been seriously altered in the parts remaining.

This hypothesis is formulated on the basis of the demonstration in III and IV above that texts of *scholia* and *accessus* type certainly contributed to the matter of the Icelandic *Rómverja saga*. Detailed examination of all the evidence and every debatable point would be out of place, but a couple of examples may give some idea of the kind of further problem to which this explanation may offer a simple and harmonious solution.

As one would expect, Latin *summa* texts introduce events described in the *Pharsalia* at points where they belong in their chronological order. The author/editor of *Rómverja saga* was adapting his *summa*

merely in order to provide a prelude and conclusion to the Icelandic version of the *Pharsalia* itself. In these framing parts he had no place for any matter in the *summa* which in one way or another depended on the epic. But in the condensed texts of 764 and *Veraldar saga* we find vestiges of matter ultimately drawn from Lucan's poem.

*Pharsalia*, VIII 612–21, is the source of the description of the death of Pompey which comes in its proper place in the translation in *Rómverja saga* (44 *Prøver*, 231/20–26). His death is also described in 764, lines 78–84, a passage which clearly represents the same Icelandic text as that of the saga. But some intermediary seems to have existed between them and the *Pharsalia*, since they have details, the reference to Pompey's cloak, *möttullinn*, and the expression, used of Pompey under the sword, *þagði sem sauðr*, which have no warrant in Lucan. These might result from the inference or even the misunderstanding of a translator, but they are also just the kind of thing a scholiast or school-teacher might introduce.

Among the gaps in the 764 text there is one, after line 84, which can be filled, in skeletal but neatly chronological fashion, from *Veraldar saga*, 49/3–9, where the sentences (here normalised) run:

En Pompeius flýði á Egiptaland ok vænti sér þar trausts af Tholomeus konungi, en hann sveik Pompeium í tryggð ok drap hann síðan. Síðan fór Julius til Egiptalands ok vildi Tholomeus ok svíkja hann. Tholomeus drukknaði í á þeirri er Níl heitir, ok var þá áðr yfirkominn í orrostu af Julius.

The first sentence corresponds in essence to the passages on Pompey's death in *Rómverja saga* and 764 just discussed; the second to the last 200 lines or so of Book X of *Pharsalia*, cf. *Rómverja saga*, ch. 90 (44 *Prøver*, 244/11–245/28). The last sentence, on the other hand, reflects a source similar to one followed in lines at the end of the *Pharsalia* translation in *Rómverja saga* (44 *Prøver*, 245/28–246/2):

Síðan reisti hann bardaga í móti Julio ok veitti ymsum betr. enn sá varð hinn síðarsti at Ptolomeus flýði á skip eitt lítit . . . ok sókk skipit niðr ok allir þeir er á váro. enn lík konungsins kenndiz af því at hann var í þeirri brynju sem gör var af brenndu gulli.

The first sentence here depends on Lucan, but his poem ends before Ptolomey's death and the details in *Rómverja saga* and the terse abridgment in *Veraldar saga* seem most easily explained by postulating common use of a source of *accessus* type.

The treatment the original *summa* received when it was put into the vernacular also suggests that the translation was undertaken as an independent exercise. In parts derived from the *accessus* we find a

number of ‘editorial’ additions which offer explanation of Latin terms or other comment specifically intended for the benefit of native readers. See e.g. on Mars, 764, lines 2–3, cf. *44 Prøver*, 385/11–12; on ‘consules’ and ‘dictatores’, 764, lines 16, 24, cf. *44 Prøver*, 386/26–27, *Veraldar saga*, 48/1 v. l.; on Cato, 764, lines 77–78. This schoolmasterly approach is hardly evident elsewhere in *Rómverja saga*, and the contrast is the more striking when we observe that the use of one or two particular words in the *accessus* passages differs from the vocabulary of the main Sallust and Lucan translations as we know them in the older redaction of the saga. Thus, for example, the *accessus* text of *Upphaf II* (see section VI below) uses only Latin ‘senatores’ (*44 Prøver*, 385/25, 386/14, 23), and the only other occurrence of the term in the whole of *Rómverja saga* is in *44 Prøver*, 328/23, cf. 158/25–26, that is in the bridging passage discussed on pp. 207–10 above, also derived from an *accessus* or *scholion* source. (Otherwise the regular term is ‘öldungar’, cf. Meissner 1910, 205–06, and this is the only term used in the 764 text. Here, however, it is reasonable to assume that where the institution of the Senate was described in the primary *accessus* translation, cf. *44 Prøver*, 385/24–25, ‘öldungar’ was introduced as a specific gloss; that whole passage is lost in 764.) It may well be that close reading will show that other parts of the saga were also affected by the author/editor’s knowledge of an *accessus* text.

It thus seems possible to make a plausible case for concluding that, in addition to his principal Sallust and Lucan texts, the author/editor of *Rómverja saga* profited from Lucan *scholia* and from a *summa historiae* of Lucan *accessus* type in a version which was already available in Icelandic and whose use is also evident in *Veraldar saga* and AM 764 4to. He may have referred to other sources as well, but they cannot be identified so readily.

## VI *The composition of Rómverja saga*

From Konráð Gíslason’s time to the present, scholars have had problems in assessing the component parts of *Rómverja saga* and deciding how they are, or should be, combined. In Section IX of *44 Prøver*, Konráð printed the text of AM 595 4to as nine fragments, denoted A–I, but he abstracted the beginning of the prelude to the *Pharsalia* translation and printed it in Section X under the title *Upphaf Rómverja II*. The number distinguishes it from the text he called *Upphaf Rómverja I*, which he printed first in that same section. This is an introductory piece which comes immediately before the *Pharsalia* prelude in AM

595 4to but gives no appearance of being part and parcel of the whole work. Konráð thought that both these ‘beginnings’ were composed later than the saga itself. Meissner (1903) then demonstrated that *Upphaf* II was certainly an older piece than *Upphaf* I but, mainly because of its absence in the younger redaction, he was still inclined to believe that it might have been tacked onto the saga as a later addition, possibly intended to provide an introduction to the whole work (Meissner 1903, 672; 1910, 159).

*Upphaf* I was undoubtedly written later than the rest of the saga. It is even entered in AM 595 4to on pages originally left blank and in a hand-style of rather newer fashion than that of the main scribe (Jakob Benediktsson 1980, 18). It can be safely dismissed from any discussion of the composition of the saga.

It cannot be doubted either that *Upphaf* II, the opening of the prelude to the *Pharsalia* translation, is located in its proper place in the text of the older redaction preserved in AM 595 4to. It has a title which reads, *Hér hefr annan hlut Rómverja sögu ok segir fyrst hversu lengi hvert ríki stóð*. This obviously implies a division into two parts, a Sallust part and a Lucan part, but not necessarily that these parts were separate in origin. It is, on the other hand, quite conceivable that the Sallust histories existed in an independent translation which was later combined with the *accessus* and *Pharsalia* texts to make a larger whole. The bridging passage between the *Jugurtha* and *Catiline* could be used as an argument in favour of this hypothesis. It is clearly an ‘editorial’ piece introduced to forge a chronological link, and at the same time it has connections, both direct and indirect, with the second, Lucan, part of the saga. We may be dealing with a compiling editor who was making one work out of separate texts, a Sallust translation, a Lucan *accessus* translation, and a *Pharsalia* translation.

A task that remains, of course, is to make an exhaustive comparison of the Sallust and Lucan parts to see whether it is possible to conclude that different translators were responsible for them. It may be a hopeless task, for wholesale editorial revision might impose such a degree of linguistic and stylistic uniformity on these major narrative parts of the saga that tell-tale signs are obliterated. And even in favourable circumstances, it is not necessarily a straightforward matter to distinguish between translators, especially if they belonged to the same period and background. The methods followed by Icelanders were very much the same as those employed by medieval translators everywhere. They combined word-for-word and sense-for-sense rendering, with

occasional additional comment to make clear the meaning of individual words. They freely introduced other explanation and interpretation, such as we find here and there in *Rómverja saga*. In the Sallust part we can to some extent talk of word-for-word transfer, inasmuch as the translator is often consistent in using the same gloss for the same Latin term; but where his vocabulary or comprehension failed him, he had to make do with attempts at explanatory paraphrase. He can also invent words and compounds and lend old native words a new sense. Some Latin terms he kept—those for Roman officers of state, for example—others he quite misunderstood. He had no very clear notion of how Roman society was stratified, how the constitution was supposed to function, and how the Roman army and navy were organised. It may be that positive and negative characteristics of the Sallust translation like these will provide useful criteria for comparison with the *Pharsalia* translation. I am not sanguine that they will.

We should however not allow the faults and failures of the translated and transmitted texts to diminish our respect for the Icelandic author/editor of *Rómverja saga*. He made a valiant and thoughtful effort to build the materials he had to hand into an orderly chronological account of Roman achievements and Roman conflicts, mighty and momentous as both were.

## APPENDIX

I print here the remnants of a translated *summa historiae* in AM 764 4to, fols 13r–14r22. The text is normalised, with due regard to the forms and date of the manuscript and with editorial punctuation and paragraphing. Proper names are capitalised, with C for K where appropriate and occasional emendation to assist their recognition; otherwise their forms are as in the manuscript. Minor corrections are not noted. Lines 1–74 are given in diplomatic transcript in Jakob Benediktsson 1980, 21–22. I am very grateful to Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, of the Department of Scandinavian Studies, University College London, for checking this transcript from AM 764 4to.

- Romulus ok Remus vóru tveir konungar í Itálandi, ok er svá sagt at þeir væri synir Martis, er Rómverjar kölluðu orrostuguð en vér köllum Týr. Móðir þeira hét Ilia. Hon var konungs dóttir ok at langfeðgum komin frá Enea, mági Priami konungs í Trójuborg. Þeir bræðr gjörðu
- 5 Rómaborg, en er borgin var gjör, vildi hvártveggi gefa nafn borginni af sínu nafni, ok gjörðiz þaðan af svá mikit missætti at hertogi sá er Fabius hét drap Remum með samþykki ok ráði Romuli konungs. Eftir þat gaf hann nafn borginni af sínu nafni ok kallaði Romuleam. Romulus setti fyrst rímtal ok skipti þá fyrst árinu í tíu mánaði ok kallaði hinn fyrsta
- 10 mánuð af nafni föður síns Marcium. Litlu síðar var skipat árinu í tólf mánaði. Kölluðu þeir hinn fyrsta mánuð Januarium af nafni mikils höfðingja ok heiðins, þess er Janus hét. Skyldi hann vera endir ársins en upphaf annars. Kölluðu margir hann sinn guð ok trúðu á hann.
- Öldungar settu þau lög at engi maðr skyldi bera konungs nafn í
- 15 Rómaborg, en tveir menn skyldu vera höfðingjar yfir Rómverjaher ok kölluðu þeir þá menn consules—þat þýðum vér ræðismenn. Þeir skyldu eigi lengr vera í þeiri tign en eina tólf mánuðu hinir sömu nema fyrir nokkur stór verk ok sýndiz öldungunum enn at kjósa hina sömu menn til, ok skyldi þat jafnan gjöra á hinni sömu tíð ákveðinni at skipa ríkinu
- 20 ok velja consules. Consules réðu Rómáríki fjögur hundruð ára tíræð ok fjóra vetr hins fimta tigar. Á þeiri æfi óx Rómáríki mest ok gjörðiz svá mikit at þeir lögðu nálega undir sik öll lönd þau er vér kunnum nöfnum at nefna í veröldinni, ok helt þat mjök til þess at þeir keptuz við consules at hverr skyldi meira ágæti gjöra en annar á sínu ári, svá sem
- 25 ráð var til sett. Þar kom loks at þat þótti of skamt verða ríkit ef þeir skipti höfðingjum á hverjum tólf mánuðum þar sem þeir fóru herferð í fjarlæg ríki. Þá gáfu þeir því nafn þeiri tign, er þá skyldi mest heita, at þeir kölluðu þá dictatores—þat köllum vér dómara—ok skyldi þat vera fim vetra tign ok vera svá margir þeir menn senn sem öldungarnir vildu,
- 30 ok skyldu þó vera consules tveir á hverju ári sem áðr.

En er þessi æfi var mjök liðin, þá var skipt öllum Rómverjaher í þriðjunga ok var settr sinn höfðingi yfir hvern þriðjunginn, þeir menn er æztir höfðingjar voru áðr í Rómaborg, ok voru þá allir gjörvir dictatores. Þar var einn sá maðr er hét Marcus ok Crassus öðru nafni. Hann átti konu þá er Cornelia hét. Hon var dóttir þess manns er 35 Marcellus hét ok einn var af hinum æztum höfðingjum í Rómaborg. Annar var sá maðr er hét Julius Cesar, er í þann tíma var hinn ágætasti maðr í borginni. Hinn þriði var sá er kallaðr var Pompeius Magnus ok lengst hafði þó þessarra manna allra ráðit fyrir Rómverjaher. Hann hafði sjau sinnum verit gjörr consul í Róma. Hann átti í þenna tíma 40 konu þá er Julia hét. Hon var dóttir Julii Cesaris ok var Pompeius þó miklu ellri en Julius.

Marcus Crassus var sendr til þeira þjóða er voru í Affrica ok heita Parthi ok Assirii ok Medii. Þær allar þjóðir gengu móti Rómverjum með úvingan. En er Marcus kom þangat meðr sinn her, þá barðiz hann 45 þar margar orrostur ok hafði sigr. En um síðir varð hann sigraðr ok handtekinn af Parthis, svá heitöndum þjóðum, ok deyddr með þeim hætti at þeir steyptu gulli vellanda í munn honum ok mæltu þetta yfir: ‘Til gullsins þyrsti þik, enda drekktu nú gullit svá at þú hafir gnógt.’ 50 Lauk nú svá yfir hans æfi.

Julius fór til Saxlands með lið sitt. Jarlinn af Svavalandi var mestr mótstöðumaðr Julii. Hann hafði lagt undir sik mikinn hluta Saxlands ok Frislands. Julius háði þar margar orrostur ok höfðu ýmsir sigr.

Pompeius Magnus fór með her sinn fyrst með skipaliði um Grikklandshaf ok Grikklandseyjar ok barðiz þar við víkinga margar orrostur er þar 55 höfðu margt illt gjört ok höfðu fjölda liðs. Hann drap þá suma en rak alla af sænum ok af skipum. Síðan helt hann liði sínu út yfir haf ok barðiz þar við Metridatem konung í Ponto ok sigraði hann. Þaðan fór hann í Spánland ok sigraði þar Sertorium konung. Eftir þat fór hann í \*Erminland ok Rabitaland ok Gyðingaland ok vann nefndar þjóðir 60 undir Rómariki. Hann barðiz í austrríki við tvá konunga ok tuttugu ok vann þá alla. Eftir þat kom hann til Rómaborgar ok gengu mót honum öldungar ok óku honum í gullkerru í Þórshof, er þeir kölluðu Capitolium. Þaðan af var hann kallaðr faðir borgarinnar.

Pompeius sendi orð Julio at hann færi heim til Rómaborgar eða sendi 65 honum alla sína menn, þá er hann hafði honum lét til fylgdar, en Julius vildi hvárki gjöra. Voru þá ok þeir fim vetr úti er Julius átti at stríða.

42 Julius] *so in 764, AM 226 fol. and Stock. papp. 4:o 24; Julia would make better sense.*

60 Ermin-] *eirin- or errin- in 764.*

Varð þetta upphaf til ósamþykkis þeira mága. Síðan fór Julius um allt Saxland, Frakkland ok Frísland, Valland ok England, ok lagði þau ríki  
 70 öll undir sik er vóru fyrir norðan Mundiufjall. Þá dæmdu öldungar í Rómaborg með ráði Pompei at Julius skyldi einkis sóma eiga vón fyrir þann sigr er hann ynni þaðan í frá, er hann hlýddi eigi boðorði þeira. Óx þá fjánskapr þeira í milli. Svá segir Lucanus at Julius vildi engan mann vita sér hærra, en Pompeius engan sér jafnan.

75 Þá er Julius hafði sigrat Yspaniam ok Yberium ferr hann út yfir haft eftir Pompeio, ok áttu þeir tvær orrostur. Var hin síðari í Thessalíalandi. Fellu þar flestir kappar Pompei, en hann sjálfr flýði ok með honum Cato spekingr er gjört hefir Hugsvinnsmál. Pompeius flýði á Egiptaland ok vænti sér þar friðar. En hann varð þar drepinn svikliga með þeim hætti  
 80 at \*Septimius, riddari Tholomei konungs er þá réð Egiptalandi. Ok er Pompeius sá bana sinn ráðinn, vafði hann mötlinum um höfuð sér ok lauk saman augun ok helt at sér öndunni, ok eigi vildi hann spilla sinni frægð með né einu andvarpi. Þá var hann laginn í gegnum með sverði, en hann þagði sem sauðr, ok lauk svá hans æfi.

85 Cato var enn í \*Leptis er hann spurði þau tíðindi at \*Juba konungr var sigraðr ok Pompeius var fallinn. Þóttiz hann þá sjá at Julius ríki mundi ganga yfir alla veröld, en hann vildi engum kosti honum þjóna. Tók hann þá þat ráð at drekka eitr með sínum vilja, ok dó hann með því.

Julius kom nú til hofsins, er Capitolium var kallat, ok gekk inn. Síðan  
 90 var lokit aftr dyrum ramliga. Þá gengu þeir Brutus ok Cassius at Julio ok særðu hann fim sárum ok tuttugu með smám handsöxum, ok lét hann þar líf sitt. Ok er líkit stírðnaði, var höndin stírðnuð at bréfi því er honum hafði selt verit, ok var ekki brotit innsiglit. En þá er bréfit var sét, var þat á ritat at hann var varaðr við at fara á stefnuna til hofsins,  
 95 ok sagt at honum var bani ráðinn ef hann kæmi þar. Lík Julii var síðan brent eftir rómverskum sið, ok vápn hans ok merki. Síðan var askan tekin öll ok búit um dýrliga ok látit koma í eirknapp einn mikinn, ok var hann allr á at sjá sem gull væri. Sá umbúningr var færðr upp á steinstólpann þann er stendr á torginu ok heitir þat 'petra Julii' en pílagrímar kalla  
 100 'Pettarsnál'.

Systir Julii Cesaris hét Actia, ellri miklu en Julius. Hennar dóttir hét Octavia ok var hon móðir Augusti. Var hann ok af því kallaðr Octavianus Augustus. Antonius ok Augustus börðuz við Róma. Þar fellu Ircius ok \*Pansa. Þá var Augustus einn yfir Rómverjaher þar til at þeir sættuz,

80 Septimius] Siptinnius *in* 764.

85 Leptis] Leptini *in* 764. Juba] Inba *in* 764.

104 Pansa] Pinsa *in* 764.

þeir Antonius, með þeim hætti at þeir skyldu vera tveir höfðingjar yfir 105  
Rómarríki, jafnir at metorðum. Þat var litla stund at þeir mætti þat  
samþykkja at vera jafnir menn. Skiptu þeir þá ríkinu ok hlaut Augustus  
Rómaborg ok þat ríki er þar var til skilit, en Antonius tók þat ríki er  
liggr fyrir útan haf.

Varð Augustus einvaldskonungr yfir öllum heimi ok var þá kallaðr 110  
Augustus Cesar. En þá er Augustus kom auð þeim öllum í Rómaborg  
er hann eignaðiz á Egiptalandi eftir dauða Antonii ok Cleopatre, lét  
hann brenna í eldi öll skuldablöð Rómverja. Af því lét hann þat gjöra  
at hann vildi at allir Rómverjar væri frjálsir á hans dögum ok engi ætti  
öðrum skuld at gjalda. Hann galt af sínum fjárhlut hverjum manni skuld 115  
sína. Augustus bætti mjög Rómaborg bæði í því at hann lét gjöra mörg  
hús ok hallir innan borgar, þau er mikit skraut var at. Hann lét vel búa  
öll stræti þau er í Rómaborg vóru. Hann lét oft borgarveggi efla ok svá  
vigi umhverfum borgina. Augustus mælti ok svá fyrir vinum sínum:  
'Leirborg var Róma er ek tók við ríki, en svá skiljumz ek við at nú er 120  
hon marmaraborg.' Frá því er ok sagt at hallæri kom svá mikit á hans  
dögum at fjöldi manna dó af sulti. En Augustus sýndi svá ástríki sitt við  
borgarmenn at hann lýsti því fyrir alþýðu, ef eigi kæmi vistir ok  
leiðangrar innan þriggja náttu þeira er næstar vóru, vildi hann drekka  
heldr eittr ok deyja en sjá vesöld á fólkinu. En á hans dögum varð sá 125  
atburðr at í borginni spratt upp viðsmjörbrunnr ór bjargi einu einn dag,  
svá gnógliga at hverr maðr mátti upp ausa svá sem vildi. Ok virðu  
Rómverjar at í því merkti miskunnsemi keisarans, en betr skiljandi  
menn virða at í því merkiz guðs miskunn, sú er birtiz á hans dögum þá  
er dróttinn Jesus Christus var borinn í heim þenna. 130

Augustus hefir verit mestr stjórnarmaðr allra Rómverja konunga í  
fornum sið, ok hann setti þann frið um allan heim er engi hefir verit slíkr  
hvárki áðr né síðan. Af hans nafni hefir hverr sem einn yfirkonungr  
Rómaveldis kallaz Augustus, enda er þat hæst tignarnafn kallat í heiminum.  
Augustus var alls konungr sex vetr eða sjau hins séttá tigar. Hann varð 135  
sóttdauðr þá er hann hafði sjau vetr hins átta tigar. En í þessum tíma sáz  
á himninum þrjár sólir en varð ór ein. Þýddu vitrir menn at sá mundi  
koma til jarðríkis er bæði væri þrennr ok einn.

Hér lyktaz hinn fimti heimsaldr, hafandi í sér þúsund ok sextigi ára, en  
frá upphafi heims vóru liðnar fim þúsundir hundrað ok níutigi ok níu ár. 140

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## INTERTEXTUAL ASPECTS OF THE TWELFTH-CENTURY CHRISTIAN DRÁPUR

BY KATRINA ATTWOOD

*Gefr doglingr sólar stóls dýra orðgnótt?*

THE EXISTENCE of a sizeable sub-group of Christian poetry within the corpus of later skaldic poetry needs no arguing. The most casual reader of Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigting* (1912–15) cannot have failed to notice the large proportion of the stanzas assembled there that deals with matters of Christian import, ranging in scope from the largely devotional couplets and *helmingar* which illustrate the *Third* and *Fourth Grammatical Treatises* and which are scattered thinly in the *samtíðar* and *biskupa sögur*, to the impressive versifications of Marian legends, saints' lives and moral treatises which culminate in Eysteinn Ásgrímsson's *Lilja*. Among the pearls of this sub-group are undoubtedly the four magnificent *drápur* usually dated to the twelfth century with which this article is concerned: Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli* (*Skjd.* A I 459–73, B I 427–45), Gamli kanoki's *Harmsól* (*Skjd.* A I 562–72, B I 548–65), and the anonymous *Plácítúsdrápa* (*Skjd.* A I 607–18, B I 606–22) and *Leiðarvísan* (*Skjd.* A I 618–26, B I 622–33). Scholars have not always been generous in their praise of these poems. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, for example, dismissed them collectively as 'mere cloisterwork, void of inspiration' (Rydberg 1907, i), and suggested that *Geisli* be read for its 'historical notices and associations' alone, 'for the long-winded and sanguinary synonyms mixed up with grotesque religious "kennings", and the tiresome repetitions of the "stal" [*stef?*] will quickly weary the hearer or reader' (Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Powell 1883, II 284). Other scholars have not tired so easily, and the poems have been thoroughly examined in terms of their importance as sources for Scandinavian religious history (Paasche 1948, 104–52; Kahle 1901), their place in literary history (Finnur Jónsson 1920–24, II 65–68, 114–19; de Vries 1964–67, II 19–23, 54–61; Schottmann 1973, *passim*; Tucker 1985; Vésteinn Ólason 1992) and for their own sake (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1833 and 1844; Finnur Jónsson 1887; Kempff 1867; Rydberg 1907; Lange 1958; Astås 1970; Black 1971; Chase 1981; Louis-Jensen forthcoming).

That the four poems are intimately related has long been recognised. Paasche (1948, 104–52), Finnur Jónsson (1920–24, II 114–19) and de

Vries (1964–67, II 54–61) all devote considerable space to the enumeration of parallels between the *drápur*, and Skard (1953, 104–08) suggests a relative dating of them on the basis of these parallels. My intention here is somewhat less dramatic, although I do discuss the pitfalls of Skard’s technique later on. My immediate purpose is to reconsider the intertextual aspects of the four poems in terms of the insights that such reconsideration may give us into their compositional context and technique.

It might be as well to begin by offering a summary of the poems concerned. In view of their stylistic similarities, it is interesting to note that they vary considerably in their subject-matter. *Geisli* is preserved complete in the *Bergsbók* version of *Óláfs saga helga* and in a fragmentary state in the *Flateyrbók* text, and isolated stanzas are quoted in *Snorra Edda*, *Heimskringla* and the so-called ‘Great Saga’ of Saint Óláfr (Chase 1981, 2, 12–19). It is part eulogy, part saint’s life: a celebration of the death and miracles of Óláfr inn helgi Haraldsson, who is identified, from the opening stanza, with Christ, *gunnoflugr geisli miskunnar sólar* ‘the battle-strong beam of the sun of mercy’ (1/5–8).<sup>1</sup> *Plácítúsdrápa* survives only in AM 673 b 4to, where the beginning and end of the poem are missing (Finnur Jónsson 1887, 214–22). We are left with some fifty-nine stanzas, which recount most of the legend of Saint Eustace (known in Old Norse as Plácítús), from his conversion after receiving a vision of Christ crucified between the antlers of a stag, through the various trials and tribulations suffered by him, his wife and their children, during which they are separated and eventually reunited, to Plácítús’s recall to the military service of the Emperor Trajan. The manuscript breaks off at this point, so we are left to supply the end of the story from other sources, notably *Plácítús saga*, of which several versions survive (Tucker 1985, 1057–58; *Heilagra manna sǫgur* 1877, II 193–210): an elderly Plácítús and his entire family are martyred for their faith by being roasted in a brazen bull.

<sup>1</sup> Quotations from *Geisli* are from the normalised text in Chase 1981, 76–362. References to *Plácítúsdrápa* are to Finnur Jónsson’s edition in *Skjd.* A I 607–18, B I 606–22, which I have checked against the diplomatic transcript in Finnur Jónsson 1887, 214–22. Quotations from *Harmsól* and *Leiðarvísan* are from my own normalised texts of the poems, which appear in full in my unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds [1996], ‘The poems of MS AM 757 a 4to: an edition and contextual study’. Stanza numbers accord with those used in *Skjd.*, but all translations are my own.

Both *Harmsól* and *Leiðarvísan* seem to be conceived as versified sermons, if the poets' repeated references to their *systkin* (e. g. *Harmsól* 46/5, 62/1–4, 64/1–8; *Leiðarvísan* 2/4, 39/1, 45/1) are evidence for the original context of the works. *Harmsól*, which is attributed to Gamli kanoki in a marginal note in the only surviving manuscript (AM 757 a 4to 12r42), is essentially an exploration of and exhortation to the sacrament of penance. Gamli exploits the traditional tripartite form of the *drápa* to structure his argument. Having secured the indulgence and help of his divine patron, he launches into an explanation of why sinful men are denied access to God's glory, using a detailed confession of his own failings (st. 7–16) as an illustration. The *stefjabálkr* (st. 17–45) develops the theme established in this *upphaf*, being an account of how the Incarnation was intended to resolve this problem. A description of the Nativity of Christ is followed by a haunting evocation of the Crucifixion, focusing on the story of the penitent thief, which in turn gives way to treatments of the Resurrection and Ascension. The necessity of repentance is further urged by an account of the Last Judgement and by picturesque descriptions of the fate of the impenitent and the rewards of the just. This narrative is interspersed with meditations on the nature of the believer's response to the undeserved salvation offered by Christ. The *slæmr* (st. 46–65) further illustrates the theme of penitence by the use of the *exempla* of three famous penitents to whom God responded with pity, King David, Mary Magdalene and St Peter, before the poem closes with prayers to God for mercy and to the Virgin Mary for intercession.

*Leiðarvísan* survives complete only in AM 757 a 4to (10r39–11r38), though a partial text is also found in AM 624 4to (fols 85–90). It deals with a popular medieval motif: the so-called Sunday Letter, which purports to have been written by Christ and dropped into Jerusalem from heaven one Sunday *borgar lýð til bjargar* 'as a help for the townsfolk' (6/7).<sup>2</sup> After a brief introduction, in which the poet begs

<sup>2</sup> On the history and dissemination of the Sunday Letter, see Priebisch 1936. Of particular interest to students of Old Norse are the Old English homily versions discussed by Priebisch (1899; 1907), Napier (1901) and Lees (1985), and the Irish and Old High German versions considered by Tveitane (1966). In addition to *Leiðarvísan*, the Letter is twice mentioned in Old Norse sources. Nikúlas Bergsson's *Leiðarvísir*, the account of the abbot's pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the mid-twelfth century (Kedar and Westergård-Nielsen 1978–79, 206), describes the interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: '[P]ar suðr fra þi vid vegginn er alltari sancti Simeonis, þar kom ofan brefit gull-ritn[a].' The

God for inspiration and his audience for a hearing, *Leiðarvísan* summarises the contents of the letter, as it was understood by the wise men who studied it after its sudden appearance. Briefly, the letter warns that damnation will follow soon for those baptised people who fail to pay the correct tithes or to observe the feasts of the Church and, above all, who work on Sundays. The theme is developed in the *steffabálkr* (st. 13–33), which comprises an enumeration of occasions in Biblical history in which God demonstrated His love for mankind by performing acts of grace on a Sunday. This seems to be an elaboration of the original Sunday Letter motif, and is possibly related to an allegorical passage in the *Drottens daga mal* preserved in the *Stockholm Homily Book* (Wisén 1872, 25/24–27/28; cf. Finnur Jónsson 1920–24, II 119). The poem ends with a series of prayers and exhortations, and a blessed priest (*göfugr prestur*) named Rúnolfr is thanked for his help in the composition of the poem (43/4, 8).

Although, as I hope to demonstrate below, it is clear that these poems are intimately related, there is little reliable evidence either for a precise dating of the individual texts or for the establishment of a relative chronology. There would appear to be only two fixed points. A *terminus ante quem* is provided by the *Plácítúsdrápa* manuscript, AM 673 b 4to, which is one of the earliest surviving Icelandic manuscripts, dating from around 1200 (Hreinn Benediktsson 1965, v). Finnur Jónsson (1887, 213) uses this fact as a basis for his dating of the poem itself:

Da nu håndskriftet ikke er digterens eget, men, som de mange skrivfejl og misforståelser viser, en afskrift, følger deraf, at drapaen ikke kan være yngre end fra midten af det 12. årh. omtrent. Hvor mange afskrifter der ligger imellem denne, som vi har, og digterens exemplar, er selvfølgelig umuligt at sige, men ifølge vor afskrifts beskaffenhed kunde der godt være 2–3.

Though I have some reservations as to the reliability of this assessment of the speed of manuscript transmission, this dating does seem to accord with our other fixed point. In *Geisli* (st. 8–9), Einarr Skúlason asks for a hearing, naming four prominent members of his audience: the

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description of the same church in *Kirialax saga* (1917, 65; cf. Hill 1993, 447–49) is more explicit about the nature of this letter: ‘Þar stendr Simions kirkia . . . þar kom ofan bref þat, er sialfr drottin ritadi sinum haundum gullstaufum um hin helga sunnudag.’ For Icelandic, Danish and Swedish examples of the Letter from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, see Sandfeld-Jensen 1895–96, 193–96, 212–13, and on the use of a version of it in sixteenth-century Icelandic witchcraft, see Einar G. Pétursson 1993, 256–57.

joint kings of Norway, Eysteinn, Sigurðr and Ingi, sons of Haraldr Gilli, and Archbishop Jón Birgisson. Jón was consecrated archbishop during the papal legate Nicholas Breakspeare's visit to Niðaróss in 1152 (*Haraldssona saga* ch. 22, *ÍF* XXVIII 332, 333 note 1), and the violent disagreements between the Haraldssons seem to have begun in earnest during the summer of 1154, before the slaying of Sigurðr in 1155 (*Konungsannáll* 17). *Geisli* must, therefore, have been recited, almost certainly at St Óláfr's shrine in Niðaróss cathedral, sometime between winter 1152–53 and summer 1154.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence concerning the dating of the remaining poems is even more scanty. Gamli kanoki, author of *Harmsól*, is also mentioned in the shorter version of *Jóns saga postola*, where four verses of his *Jóansdrápa* are preserved (*Postola sögur* 1874, 510–11; *Skjd.* A I 561, B I 547–48). The saga describes him as *kanunk austr i Þykkabe* (*Postola sögur* 1874, 510), and lists him between two other authors of *drápur* about St John: Abbot Nikulás Bergsson and Kolbeinn Tumason. The Augustinian house at Þykkvabær was founded in 1168 (*Konungsannáll* 20), and the deaths of Nikulás and Kolbeinn are dated to 1159 and 1208 respectively (*Konungsannáll* 19; 30). It is clear from *Harmsól*, if not necessarily from his name, that Gamli was an elderly man when the poem was composed, and the chronology suggested in *Jóns saga postola* (if, indeed, it is a chronology) would seem to accord with Finnur Jónsson's approximate dating of the poem on linguistic grounds (1920–24, II 115):

Digtet synes ikke at kunne være ældre end fra omkring 1200 eller den sidste fjærdedel af det 12. årh., der findes rim som *tjallz : alla* 65/6 . . . ligeledes former som *vár-* (*várum*, *vára*; 18/8, 21/4, 57/8) ved siden af *ór-*.

The *prestr Rúnolfr* thanked for services rendered at the end of *Leiðarvísan* (43/4, 8) cannot be identified with any degree of certainty,

<sup>3</sup> In *Morkinskinna* (1932, 446) we read of the exceptional circumstances surrounding the composition and recitation of *Geisli*:

Einar S[kvla]s[on] var með þeim brøðrom S[igurþi] oc Eysteini. oc var Eysteinn konvngr mikill vin hans. oc Eysteinn konvngr bað hann til at yrkia Olafs drapo. oc hann orti. oc fôrþi norþr i Þrandheime i Kristz kirkio sialfri oc varþ þat með miclom iartegnom. oc kom dyrligr ilmr ikirkiona. oc þat segia menn at þer aminingar vrþo af konvnginom sialfum. at honom virþiz vel qveþit.

There would seem to be two possible occasions for the recitation of such a poem in the presence of the three Haraldssons and the Archbishop. Perhaps most likely is the feast of St Óláfr—29th July—in 1153 (the first celebration of this festival since the establishment of the Norwegian archbishopric), though the Christmas feast during the same year must also be considered as a possibility (cf. Chase 1981, 44).

though speculation has generally centred on the two priests of that name mentioned in a *prestatal* dated 1143 and attributed to Ari Þorgilsson (*DI* I 180–94): one Rúnolfr Dálksson, nephew of Bishop Ketill Þorsteinson of Hólar (bishop 1122–45), who is probably to be identified with the Rúnolfr Dagsson named in chapter 19 of *Bjarnar saga Hítödlakappa* as the source of information concerning Björn's composition of religious poetry (*ÍF* III, 163 n. 2; Astås 1970, 266 col. b to 267 col. a, note 15),<sup>4</sup> and Rúnolfr Ketilsson (died 1186), son of Bishop Ketill. Rúnolfr Ketilsson was the author of a poem about the new church built at Skálaholt by Klængur Þorsteinsson (bishop 1152–76), one verse of which survives (*Hungrvaka* ch. 9, *Biskupa sögur* 1948, I 27–28; *Skjd.* A I 533, B I 513–14). As a known *skáld*, Rúnolfr Ketilsson is often considered to have the better claim, and *Leiðarvísan*'s mention of a *ramligt hús* 'strong house' (43/7) which Rúnolfr and the poet have built has been taken as an oblique reference to Klængur's church (*DI* I 186, 193; Finnur Jónsson 1920–24, II 121, note 5). Other more cautious scholars, however, have taken it to be a *heiti* referring to *Leiðarvísan* itself (see Paasche 1948, 141 note 1; Astås 1970, 267a). While it might be possible to cite *mærðar hús* 'house of praise' in *Katrínardrápa* 1/4 (*Skjd.* A II 516, B II 569) as a supporting example of the use of *hús* for poetry (see *LP* s. v. *hús*), I am not entirely persuaded by either explanation. Rúnolfr Dálksson/Dagsson's interest in, and knowledge of, Christian skaldic poetry, as evinced by *Bjarnar saga*, would seem to bolster his claim too.

It is possible to identify three types of parallel in diction between the poems grouped together here. Firstly, there is a small group of individual words which, though shared by two or more of these poems, do not appear to be attested elsewhere in Old Norse poetry or prose. In *Geisli* 26/2, Óláfr is described as *margfríðr jöfurr* 'a very beautiful [holy] king', the adjective appearing again only in *Harmsól* 51/8, where St Peter is characterised as *margfríðr skörungr* 'a very beautiful [holy] leader'. In each case, the word occupies the *höfuðstafr* position, and therefore anchors the couplet's alliterative scheme. A wounded priest healed by Óláfr is called *auðskiptir* 'sharer of wealth' (*Geisli* 60/5), a man-*heiti* otherwise only applied to Plácítús (*Plácítúsdrápa* 17/1). The word carries alliteration in each case. In *Geisli* 63/7, Óláfr is praised as *fárskerðandi fyrða* 'diminisher of men's harm', while *Leiðarvísan* 11/1 refers to God as *fárskerðir*. A relationship between the poems is further suggested by the fact that *fárskerðir* alliterates with *fyrðum* in the same

<sup>4</sup> I am very grateful to Dr Alison Finlay of Birkbeck College, University of London, for informal advice on this matter.

line. Similarly, God is *dýrðhittandi dróttinn* ‘glory-finding lord’ in *Harmsól* (7/7), and the man-*heiti* *dýrðhittir* used of Plácítús (*Plácítúsdrápa* 18/1) alliterates with *dróttin*. These are the only occurrences of *dýrðhittir*, but *LP* draws attention to *dáðhittir* ‘deed-finder’, used of Páll Jónsson, bishop of Skálaholt, by Ámundi Árnason, where the alliteration is again with *dróttin* (*Skjd.* A II 50, B II 59 *lausavísa* 3/1; *LP* s. v. *dýrðhittir*). Ámundi’s *lausavísa* must postdate the death of Bishop Páll in 1211, so it appears likely, if there is any direct connection here, that the *Harmsól/Plácítúsdrápa* compound is serving as the model for his. *Málsagnótt* ‘eloquence’ (*Leiðarvísan* 3/8) appears to be a *hapax legomenon*, but it is obviously on the same model as *orðgnótt* ‘loquacity’, which occurs three times in *Leiðarvísan* (1/8, 2/6, 4/8) and once in *Geisli* (10/2), always in stanzas asking God to inspire the poet with the gift of eloquence and always providing the *hofuðstafr*. The only appearances of *orðgnótt* in (supposedly) earlier poetry are in Arnórr jarlaskáld’s *Magnússdrápa* 5/2 (*Skjd.* A I 339, B I 312) and a fragmentary verse attributed to Ormr Steinþórsson (*Skjd.* A I 416, B I 386; *LP* s. v. *orðgnótt*). Similarly, *brandél* ‘sword-storm’, used as an element in an extended man-kenning in *Plácítúsdrápa* (*beiðir brandéls* 40/1–2) and as a battle-kenning in *Geisli* (51/2), is rare elsewhere: *LP* lists only two other examples (Þórvarðr Þorgeirsson, *lausavísa* 2/4; Guðmundr Svertingsson, *Hrafnadrápa* 10/6; *Skjd.* A I 533, II 49, B I 514, II 57), though it is, of course, a familiar kenning-type.

Secondly, evidence for a connection between the poems is afforded by the fact that they occasionally share identical kennings not otherwise attested in skaldic verse. Many of these are adaptations of traditional ruler-kennings to refer to God. Thus we find *himna valdr* ‘ruler of the heavens’ in *Geisli* 63/6 and *Plácítúsdrápa* 19/7, *himna* carrying alliteration in each case. God is *jofurr sunnu* ‘king of the sun’ in *Harmsól* 65/4 and *Leiðarvísan* 42/6, and the relationship between the poems here appears to be confirmed by the fact that the lines in which the phrase occurs are identical (*miskunn jofurr sunnu*). *Salvörðr grundar* ‘warder of the hall of earth [sky; heaven]’ appears as a God-kenning in both *Geisli* 19/3 and *Leiðarvísan* 6/5, the lines being strikingly similar both phonetically (*sýndi salvörðr grundar* (*Geisli*) and *sendi salvörðr grundar* (*Leiðarvísan*)) and in construction: the first word in each case is the subjunctive form of the verb of which the kenning is the subject. The heaven-kenning *fjalla salr* ‘hall of the mountains’ appears as the determinant of an extended God-kenning in *Harmsól* 30/2–4 (*vorðr fjalla salar*) and *Leiðarvísan* 1/2–4 (*harri fjalla salar*), and the struc-

ture of the *helmingr* is similar in each case: *fjalla salar* furnishes the two non-alliterating stresses of the second line of the first couplet, and the base-word is the *hofuðstafr* of the second couplet:

Ítr lofar engla sveitar  
allr herr *salar fjalla*  
víst með vegsemð hæstri  
*vörð*, ok menn á jörðu. (*Harmsól* 30/1–4)

Þinn óð sem ek inni  
allskjótt, *salar fjalla*,  
harðla brátt til hróðrar,  
*harri*, munn ok varrar. (*Leiðarvísan* 1/1–4)

Similarly, in *Geisli* 25/1–4, Óláfr is described as *fremðar lystir tynir tandrauðs fasta vala strætis* ‘renown-desiring destroyer of the flame-red fire of the hawks’ street [arm]’, i. e. ‘destroyer of gold’, *fremðar lystir* again forming the adjectival component of an extended man-kennening in *Plácítúsdrápa* 9/3. In each case, the expression forms the first words of the odd line of a couplet, and establishes an f-alliteration:

Tolf mánaðr var *tynir*  
*tandrauðs* huliðr sandi  
*fremðar lystir* ok *fasta*  
fimm nætr *vala strætis*. (*Geisli* 25/1–4)

Hrætskat *vörðr* þótt verðir  
(ves traustr ok ger hraustla)  
*fremðar lystir* í freistni  
*fránskiðs* af mér *Vánar*. (*Plácítúsdrápa* 9/1–4)

Although it must be admitted that, despite the lack of parallels to these forms, most of the kennings do follow traditional patterns, and might, therefore, have suggested themselves independently to different poets, the structural similarities outlined above would seem to suggest some direct connection between the poems.

Finally, as well as these identical expressions, groups of obviously related kennings for God and heaven are found in these poems. I do not accept Skard’s belief that these may be used as a basis for an evaluation of the relative dates of the poems (Skard 1953, 101), or even necessarily as evidence of direct relationships between them, but offer them rather as evidence for the general currency of several basic lexical units and kindred images in the compositional context of the *drápur*.

Perhaps most striking are the group of kennings based on the familiar concept of God’s holding creation in the palm of his hand. *Geisli* 16/7–8 and *Harmsól* 29/7–8 contain kennings in which the base-word is a

compound with the second element *geypnandi* ‘clutcher’. The components of the kenning are linked by alliteration in each case, and the base-word furnishes the first two stressed syllables in the couplet:

*umgeypnandi* opnask  
*alls heims* fyr gram snjöllum. (*Geisli* 16/7–8)

*skringeypnandi*, skepnu,  
*skýstalls*, sælu allri. (*Harmsól* 29/7–8)

*Umgeypnandi allrar skepnu* in *Katrínardrápa* 36/3 (*Skjd.* A II 523, B II 578) is almost certainly modelled on *Geisli*, and the concept also informs the God-kenning *frónspennir fagrtjalda* ‘clasper of the land of fair tents [heaven]’ in *Harmsól* 44/5–6. Other conceptually related groups may be discerned. For example, the God-kenning *itr stillir gagls leiðar* ‘glorious regulator of the path of the goose [sky; heaven]’ (*Plácítúsdrápa* 28/2–3) is reminiscent of *dáðreyndr jöfurr svana flugreinar leygs* ‘deed-proved prince of the flame of the flying-land of swans [sky; i. e. prince of the sun]’ (*Harmsól* 44/1–3). A similar concept lies behind *konungr mána slóðar* ‘king of the path of the moon’ (*Plácítúsdrápa* 4/7–8) and the more complicated *skryðir skýja slóðar skrins* ‘adorner of the track of the shrine of clouds [sun; i. e. adorer of heaven]’ (*Harmsól* 19/7–8). Very common are God-kennings whose determinants are heaven-kennings meaning ‘residence of the weather’. Lexical parallels are frequent in expressions of this kind. Thus, the Christ-kenning *sonr sólar hauðrs* ‘son of the land of the sun’ (*Leiðarvísan* 31/3–4) recalls *sannstýrandi sólhauðrs* ‘true ruler of the land of the sun’ (*Harmsól* 27/3–4), *sól*-providing the *höfuðstafr* both times. The compound *sólhauðr* is a *hapax legomenon*, and *LP* lists no other occurrence of *sólar hauðr* (*LP* s. vv. *sólhauðr*, *sól*). Similarly, *snjallr dróttinn dags hallar* ‘wise lord of the hall of day [heaven]’ (*Leiðarvísan* 15/5–8) is reminiscent of *snjallr konungr dagstalls* ‘wise king of the home of day’ (*Harmsól* 35/6). Apart from one other appearance in *Leiðarvísan* (45/6), *dagshöll* occurs elsewhere only in *Líknarbraut*, which is demonstrably later than, and borrows heavily from, *Leiðarvísan* and *Harmsól* (*Skjd.* A II 150–59, B II 160–74; Tate 1974, 28–33). *Mariúdrápa* 24/3–4 (*Skjd.* A II 468, B II 501) refers to the Virgin Mary as *dagstalls drotning*, which is probably a borrowing from *Harmsól*, as there are several parallels between the Marian section of *Harmsól* (st. 59–61) and *Mariúdrápa*. In *Harmsól* 4/6–8, we find the God-kenning *fylkir veðrhallar* ‘king of the storm hall [heaven]’, which is paralleled by *vísi veðrs hallar* ‘ruler of the hall of the storm’ in *Geisli* 2/3–4, neither expression being attested

elsewhere (*LP* s. v. *veðr*). The sun-kenning at the heart of *skryðir skýja slóðar skríns* (*Harmsól* 19/7–8) is identical with that in *skjöldungr skýja skríns* ‘prince of the shrine of clouds [sun]’ (*Leiðarvísan* 32/5–6), and *skríns* provides the *hofuðstafr* in each case. Although *skýja skrín* is popular in later poetry, and is of a familiar pattern, it seems not to occur earlier than here (*LP* s. v. *ský*). Two of the poets indulge in particularly elaborate variations on this ‘ruler of the weather-dwelling’ pattern, and produce kennings which are conceptually, if not lexically, related: Einarr’s heaven-kenning *hríðblásinn heiða sal* ‘storm-blown hall of the heaths’ (*Geisli* 7/5–6) recalls Gamli’s *valdr blásinna tjalda hreggs* ‘ruler of the wind-blown tents of the storm’ for God (*Harmsól* 57/6–7). A more obvious lexical relationship may be observed in *ǫðlingr rǫðla* ‘prince of suns’ (*Harmsól* 16/6) and *ǫðlingr rǫðla salar* ‘prince of the hall of suns’ (*Leiðarvísan* 33/2). What we might expect to be a very popular rhyming pair appears elsewhere only in a fragment of a *drápa* on Sveinn Forkbeard by Þórleifr jarlsskáld (*Skjd.* A I 141, B I 133), and in *Maríugrátr* 3/2 (*Skjd.* A II 473, B II 506), which may have been influenced by the earlier Christian *drápur*. A variant of the ‘residence of the weather’ type of heaven-kenning is demonstrated by *Leiðarvísan* 10/1–2, where God is invoked as *vǫrðr vallræfjs* ‘warden of the roof of the plain [earth]’, i. e. ‘warden of heaven’, which may be compared with *gramr landa ræfjs* ‘prince of the roof of lands’ in *Harmsól* 43/1–4.

Structural parallels between the *drápur* may be discerned on three levels: overall structure, *helmingr* arrangement and individual lines. Although the poems differ greatly in subject and tone, certain similarities may be observed in their overall arrangement. Such pre-Christian, heroic *drápur* as survive in a complete state conventionally begin with an invocation, in which the *skáld* asks his audience, and particularly his patron, to maintain silence and listen attentively to his poem, and end with a similar section, in which a reward of some kind is demanded. The Christian poets retain these features, but adapt them to their new audiences. Thus, although Einarr Skúlason does beg his royal audience for a hearing (st. 8 and 9), *Geisli* begins with an elegantly crafted prayer for divine inspiration (1/1–4):

Eins má orð ok bænir  
 —alls ráðanda hins snjalla  
 vel er fróðr sá er getr góða—  
 Guðs þrenning mér kenna.

The Trinity of the one God can teach me words and prayers; he who tells of the grace of the excellent ruler of all is extremely well-taught.

Similarly, Gamli kanoki and the *Leiðarvísan* poet make no opening reference to their *systkin*, but call directly on God for help in the composition of their poems, Gamli establishing one of his major themes by stressing the inadequacy of his technique for the praise of God:

Hár stillir, lúktu, heilli,  
hreggtjalda, mér, aldar,  
upp, þú er allar skaptir,  
óðborgar hlið góðu,  
mjúk, svá at ek mætti auka  
mál gnýlundum stála  
miska bót af mætu  
mín fulltingi þínu. (*Harmsól* 1/1–8)

High regulator of the storm-tents, you who made all men, unlock my tongue [lit. ‘gate of the fortress of poetry’] with good grace, so that, with your excellent aid, I might augment my soft words, the remedy for misdeeds, before men [lit. ‘trees of the noise of steel’].

Þinn óð, sem ek inni,  
allskjótt, salar fjalla,  
harðla brátt til hróðrar,  
harri, munn ok varrar;  
mér gefi döglingr, dýra,  
dæmi, stóls ok sólar,  
enn, svá at ek mega, sanna  
orðgnótt, lofa dróttin. (*Leiðarvísan* 1/1–8)

Lord of the hall of the mountains, I compose your poem very eagerly [lit. ‘quickly’], just as (I compose) my mouth and lips very briskly for purposes of praise. May the king of the seat of the sun give me precious, true loquacity and information, that I may yet praise the Lord.

Although the beginning of *Plácítúsdrápa* is lost, it seems reasonable to suppose that it, too, started with an invocation of divine assistance.

*Geisli* ends, as we might expect given the situation surrounding the poem’s original recital, with a direct appeal to Einarr’s patron, Eysteinn Haraldsson, for a handsome reward for his work:

Bæn hef ek þengill þína  
þrekrámmr stoðat framla  
íflaust hofum jöfri  
unnit mærd sem kunnum.  
Ágætr segir æztan,  
Eysteinn hvé ek brag leysta  
—hás elskið veg vísa  
vagnræfrs—en ek þagna. (*Geisli* 71/1–8)

Powerful king, I have amply done your bidding; I have certainly done my best to praise the king. Glorious Eysteinn will tell how I carried the splendid poem off. Praise the honour of the high prince of the roof of the waggon [Ursa major, Charles's wain; i. e. of the God of heaven]—but I will stop speaking.

*Harmsól* and *Leiðarvísan*, by contrast, end with prayers for God's mercy and requests for the intercession of the poets' *systkin* and, in each case, the poem's title is given in the penultimate stanza:

Létum hróðr, þann er heitir  
Harmsól, fetilhjóla  
fyr hugprúða hriðar  
herðendr borinn verða;  
mér biði hvern, er heyrir,  
heimspenni, brag þenna,  
æskiprórr ok eira  
unnröðla miskunnar. (*Harmsól* 64/1–8)

I caused the poem, which is called *Harmsól*, to be borne before the strong-minded promoters of the storm of shields [men]; may each craving-Óðinn of wave-suns [gold; i. e. each man] who hears this poem pray to the clasper of the world for mercy and peace for me.

Skulu eldviðir öldu  
alljósan brag kalla,  
þjóð hafi þekt á kvæði  
þvísa, *Leiðarvísan*. (*Leiðarvísan* 44/5–8)

Let the trees of the fire of the wave [men] call the very bright poem *Leiðarvísan*; may people derive pleasure from this poem.

Remarkable similarities may be observed between the *stef* of the various poems. Each has a repeated double refrain, the refrains occupying the second *helmingr* of the verses in which they appear and being introduced in the first *helmingr* with an explanation of the difficulties inherent in composing a good *stef*. The first *stef* of *Leiðarvísan* is strongly reminiscent of the *helmingr* introducing the second *Plácítúsdrápa* refrain:

Lúta englar ítrum  
óttlaust ok lið drótni;  
einn er siklingr sunnu  
setrs hvívetna betri. (*Leiðarvísan* 13/5–8)

Angels and people bow down to the glorious lord without fear; the one king of the seat of the sun [heaven] is better than everything else.

Lýtr engla lið ítrum  
anгрhrjóðanda ok þjóðir  
einn es öllu hreinni  
alt gótt sá er sköp dróttinn. (*Plácítúsdrápa* 32/1–4)

The company of angels and races of men bow down to the glorious destroyer of sorrow; the one lord, who made all (that is) good, is purer than everything else.

These should be compared with *Geisli* 66/5–6, which, though not a *stef*, displays remarkable similarities in subject, diction and structure:

Lúti landsfolk ítrum  
lim sals konungs himna.

Let the people bow down to the glorious limb of the king of the hall of the heavens [God, whose ‘limb’ is St Óláfr].

The first *stef* of *Harmsól* is very similar to *Leiðarvísan*’s two *stef*: the final couplet is reminiscent of that of *Leiðarvísan*’s first *stef* (st. 13/5–8, quoted above), and the opening lines are clearly paralleled in *Leiðarvísan*’s second *stef*:

Ern skóp hauðr ok hlýrni  
heims valdr, sem kyn beima;  
orr er ok öllu dýrri  
élsetrs konungr betri. (*Harmsól* 20/5–8)

The active keeper of the world made land and heaven as well as the race of men; the liberal king of the seat of the storm [heaven] is better and more precious than everything else.

Gramr skóp hauðr ok himna  
hreggranns, sem kyn seggja,  
einn er salkonungr sólar  
snjallr hjálpari allra. (*Leiðarvísan* 25/5–8)

The king of the house of the storm [heaven] made land and skies as well as mankind; the one king of the hall of the sun [heaven] is the excellent helper of all.

It is interesting to compare this last example with a *helmingr* preserved in the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*, attributed there to Markús Skeggjason the lawspeaker (died 1107). Finnur Jónsson (*Skjd.* A I 452, B I 420) assigns this *helmingr* to a lost *Kristsdrápa*, and Fidjestøl (1982, 153), while not ruling this out, suggests that it is ‘ikkje umogeleg at ho kan ha høyrnt heime i eit dikt om Knut den heilage’:

Gramr skóp grund ok himna  
glyggranns sem her dyggvan,  
einn stillir má öllu  
aldar Kristr of valda.

The prince of the house of the gale [heaven] made the earth and skies as well as the faithful army [of saints?]; Christ, the one ruler of mankind, has power over all things.

Given the likelihood that Markús's poem was composed and in circulation up to fifty years before the probable date of composition of *Leiðarvísan*, it seems possible that *helmingar* on this model were widely current in the Christian authors' milieu. The similarities between these *helmingar* also highlight the dangers of assuming both direct relationships and comparative datings from parallels in diction and structure between poems.

Identical lines are shared between two of the poems on four occasions. *Harmsól* 65/4 and *Leiðarvísan* 42/6 both read *miskunn jöfurr sunnu*, and the poems concur again at *Harmsól* 37/5 and *Leiðarvísan* 35/5, which run *oss skyldi sú aldri*. Indeed, the correspondence between the *drápur* at this latter point is yet closer, as the final lines of the *helmingar* are also closely related:

*Oss skyldi sú aldri*  
 unaðs-gnótt fira dróttins,  
 þar er orslöngvi engum  
 angrsamt, *ór hug ganga.* (*Harmsól* 37/5–8)

The abundant grace of the lord of men should never pass from our minds;  
 no arrow-slinger [man] is sorrowful there.

*Oss skyldi sú aldri*  
 ógnar-tíð en stríða,  
 drótt biði sikling sátta  
 sólvangs, *ór hug ganga.* (*Leiðarvísan* 35/5–8)

That severe time of terror should never pass from our minds: people should  
 beg the king of the field of the sun [heaven] for reconciliation.

When one considers that both stanzas refer to the Second Coming, and that what *skyldi oss aldri ganga ór hug* is the terror of the time (*Leiðarvísan*) and the grace of God (*Harmsól*), it becomes impossible not to assume some direct relationship between the two texts. Moreover, *Geisli* 64/6 and *Harmsól* 45/4 correspond exactly, except that the verb is indicative in *Geisli* (*heitfastr jöfurr veitir*) and subjunctive in *Harmsól* (*heitfastr jöfurr veiti*). Similarly, *Plácítúsdrápa* 31/8 and *Harmsól* 24/8 also differ only slightly: *Plácítúsdrápa* reads *sín heit friðar veitir*, while *Harmsól* has *þín heit friðar veitir*. Finally, *Leiðarvísan* 40/6 and 41/8 both read *óttalaus með drótni*, which recalls *óttalaus fyr drótni* at *Harmsól* 32/4. These lines are possibly related to the phonetically similar phrases in *Leiðarvísan* 13/6, *óttalaust ok lið drótni*, and *Harmsól* 36/6, *óttalaust af því móti*.

It is interesting to note that some of the apparently otherwise unparalleled words and phrases shared by poems in the group occur in lines

which are also strikingly similar. Thus *Geisli* 26/2, *margfríðr jofurr síðan*, is reminiscent of *Harmsól* 51/8, *margfríðr skörungur síðan*. The alliteration and internal rhyme in *Geisli* 60/5, *auðskiptir lá eptir*, and *Plácítúsdrápa* 17/1, *þás auðskiptis eptir*, are identical. *Leiðarvísan* 2/6, *orðgnóttar mér dróttin*, and *Geisli* 10/2, *orðgnóttar bið ek dróttin*, are also similar, though we should perhaps note, with caution, that these might be independent exploitations of a popular rhyming pair; of the two other occurrences of *orðgnótt* in *Leiðarvísan*, one (1/8) forms a hending with *dróttinn*, as does *málsgnótt* (3/8). The *orðgnótt* : *dróttinn* hending is also found in Arnórr jarlaskáld's *Magnúsdrápa* 5/2 (*Skjd.* A I 339, B I 312).

Other phonetically similar lines are shared by poems within this group. In their treatments of the Incarnation, *Leiðarvísan* and *Harmsól* invoke Christ in almost identical terms: *Leiðarvísan* 23/3–4 has *mæztr frá meyju beztri berask hingat*, which is paralleled in *Harmsól* 19/1–4, *þú mæztr vast borinn frá mildri meyju*. *Leiðarvísan* 20/8, *margri þjóð til bjargar*, is echoed in *Harmsól* 12/8, *margir þar til bjargar*, and *Harmsól* 35/1, *orð megu vönduð verða*, is twice paralleled in *Leiðarvísan*: *orð munu eigi verða* (12/5) and *orð mun allra verða* (43/5). A similar phonetic relationship seems to link the partial man-kenning in *Plácítúsdrápa* 31/3, *ládþofs lypti-Móða*, with the parallel lines *Leiðarvísan* 4/3, *láðs fyrir lyptimeiðum*, and *Harmsól* 18/3, *láðs til lyptimeiða*, which share an otherwise unparalleled man-kenning (*linns láðs lyptimeiðr* ‘lifting-pole of the land of the serpent [gold]’) completed in the following lines. Similarly, *Harmsól* 49/3, *höppum reifðr sem hæfði*, recalls *Plácítúsdrápa* 15/3, *höppum reifðr þás hafði*; and *Harmsól* 36/5, *sponð lætr öll til ynðis* is reminiscent of *Plácítúsdrápa* 54/5, *spanði ítr til ynðis*. *Harmsól* 16/5, *elsku kuðr alls yðvarr*, is clearly related to *Leiðarvísan* 36/3, *eljunkuðr of aðrar*, as is *Harmsól* 59/3, *ramligs búsi af ræsi*, to *Leiðarvísan* 43/7, *ramligt hús þars reistum*. Finally, although the affinities might not be quite so pronounced, it is interesting to note the similarity between *Plácítúsdrápa* 32/2, *angrhrjóðanda ok þjóðir*, and *Leiðarvísan* 11/6, *meinhrjóðandi þjóðum*; and between *Geisli* 20/3, *gramr vandit sá syndum*, and *Harmsól* 15/7, *esa vandi sá synda*. In each of the cases noted here, similar lines are used to fulfil the same function in the rhyme- and alliteration-scheme of a couplet, and very often a *helmingr*.

In conclusion, I hope I have demonstrated that there is evidence of close relationships between the major twelfth-century Christian *drápur*, and that parallels in structure and diction between the texts suggest that

the authors were familiar with one another's work, either directly or indirectly through the medium of lost intermediary texts. Vemund Skard takes this one stage further. Assuming that the relationship is direct, he considers the parallels between each possible pairing of the poems in turn, concluding, on the grounds of an increasing complexity and sophistication of style, that the poems must have been composed in the sequence *Plácítúsdrápa* – *Geisli* – *Leiðarvísan* – *Harmsól* (1953, 108):

Stutt vil vi då seia, at ein kan rekna med at Plácítúsdrápa er dikta i fyrste helvta av 12. hundreåret, kanskje ikkje alt for nær 1150; Harmsól er dikta ikring 1200 eller kanskje heller litt før; Leiðarvísan er dikta før Harmsól, men likevel etter 1152.

It is difficult to extract the evidence on which Skard bases this chronology, though he does explain his reasons for considering *Plácítúsdrápa* to be the earliest of the poems under consideration. His argument seems to be based on Seip's conviction (1949, 20) that the poem is ultimately of Norwegian provenance:

Ved ei gjennomgåing av dei norske sermerke av paleografisk og språkleg art slår han fast at skrivaren må ha hatt eit (aust)norsk førelegg, og han finn det mest rimeleg at P[lácítúsdrápa] også er dikta av ein nordmann og dikta i Noreg, rimelegvis samstundes med at legenden om Placitus vart overført til norsk,—truleg før 1150. (Skard 1953, 108)

Even if Seip's belief in the Norwegian authorship of *Plácítúsdrápa* is correct (and this is by no means established), the precise nature of its relationship with the surviving versions of *Plácítús saga* is far from certain (cf. Tucker 1985). The poem's Norwegian provenance alone does not, as Skard seems to imply, necessarily prove that it must predate *Geisli*; far greater precision in the dating of the *Plácítúsdrápa* manuscript (AM 673 b 4to) and the identification and dating of the recension of *Plácítús saga* which served as its source are necessary if the chronology is to be established with any degree of certainty. It would seem at least possible that *Geisli* in fact predated *Plácítúsdrápa*; the status of *Geisli* as a royal commission, dedicated to Scandinavia's favourite saint, would assure its wider popularity within the Christian corpus, and it is perhaps more likely that such a high-profile work would serve as a model for a rather obscure clerical composition than that Einarr should have been influenced by *Plácítúsdrápa* (cf. de Vries 1964–67, II 56).

Skard's stylistic analysis of the poems seems to depend on an assumption that a more complex kenning-structure must represent the

work of a more accomplished, and therefore later, poet. He appears to base his belief in the anteriority of one poem to another upon this assumption. In particular, he notes that, in several cases, *Harmsól* has two or three versions of kennings found only once in *Leiðarvísan* (1953, 101):

Men stórre interesse har dei stader der det frá eit punkt i det eine diktet synest gå liner til fleire punkt i det andre. I slike tilfelle tykkjest det gje ei vitring om kva for eit dikt som er opphavet.

Although I admire the dexterity of Skard's argument, I have several reservations about the boldness of his technique, and would advocate a more cautious approach to the problem. Although several of the parallels outlined above are striking, it is perhaps dangerous to assume a direct relationship between the poems on these grounds alone. It is clear that the output of Christian skalds during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was vast: a glance through *Skjaldedigting* reveals the loss of dozens of full-length *drápur*, many of them generically related to the texts considered here, whose existence is now attested only by the survival of a stray couplet or *helmingr*, and references to several now lost *drápur* are found in the prose literature (e. g. *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* ch. 19 (1987, 47), 'Andréasdrápa'; *Jarteinabók Þorláks biskups in yngsta* ch. 12, 'Maríuvers' (*Biskupa sögur* 1948, I 247); *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa* ch. 19, 'Tómas drápa postula' (*ÍF* III, 163)). It is difficult to imagine some of these poems having more than a very limited readership, and perhaps more reasonable to suppose that full-length works by such known and gifted skalds as Arnórr jarlaskald, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld and Markús Skeggjason might well have been more influential in the wider development of the Christian skaldic genre than such esoteric works as *Leiðarvísan* and *Plácítúsdrápa*. In other words, it is impossible to know just how many intermediaries may be missing between the poems in our 'group'; the preservation of Markús Skeggjason's *Kristsdrápa/Knútsdrápa* fragment suggests that certain patterns of phraseology and stanza structure may well have been widely current at that time. I am also sceptical of Skard's assumption that, in the case of *Harmsól* in particular, greater complexity in the lexical and grammatical structure of the stanzas necessarily implies a later date for the *drápa*. Surely it is just as likely that Gamli kanoki's magnificently constructed, hauntingly evocative *Harmsól* might have acted as inspiration for a rather lesser poet—the author of *Leiðarvísan*—as that Gamli superseded his uninspiring predecessor.

**Note**

This is a substantially revised version of my paper ‘The twelfth-century Christian *drápur*: evidence for a partially formulaic composition?’, given at a meeting of the Skaldic Studies Group held in Leeds on 22nd January, 1994. A shorter version of the paper was presented at the First International Medieval Congress (Leeds, 6th July, 1994). I am very grateful to members of both audiences, particularly to Professor Peter Foote and Dr Alison Finlay (both of the University of London), and to Professor Jonna Louis-Jensen of the Arnamagnæan Institute, Copenhagen, for much helpful advice. I am also indebted to the Leverhulme Trust for generous financial support which enabled me to undertake primary research on the poems in Copenhagen.

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THE EMERGENCE OF A SAINT'S CULT AS WITNESSED BY  
THE *JARTEINABÆKR ÞORLÁKS BYSKUPS*

BY HANS KUHN

THE *Jarteinabækr* are three collections<sup>1</sup> of miracles attributed to Þorlákr Þórhallsson, Bishop of Skálholt in southern Iceland from 1175, miracles that occurred not during his lifetime but after his death in 1193. The first collection is said to have been read at the *Alþingi*, the annual general assembly of free men, in 1199; on this occasion he was officially declared a saint, and the day of his death, 23 December, was instituted as a holy day. The second collection must have been gathered over the following years by his nephew and successor Páll Jónsson, Bishop of Skálholt until 1211. The third collection was not completed until more than a century later, for some events in its final chapters are dated 1323 and 1325. The total number of distinct miracles recorded in these three collections is approximately 120. Þorlákr's *Vita*, the *Þorláks saga byskups*, contains, apart from its panegyric and heavily homiletic biographical sections, a great number of miracles too, but they are for the most part identical with those recorded in the first Miracle Book and in the very beginning of the second. In the older version of the *saga* they are very brief, barely more than a list; in the younger version they are fleshed out a little more but the narration is still much barer than in the *Jarteinabækr*. The compiler of the *saga*, whether it was a Helgafell abbot such as Ketill Hermundarson or Hallr Gizurarson or some other churchman, must have been using the collections already existing and felt it unnecessary to transcribe the miracles in detailed form. For my purposes, however, it is less the bare facts, which are often conventional within a hagiographical context, than the details that count, and hence I feel justified in limiting my references to the *Jarteinabækr*.

It is not a work that has attracted much interest among students of Old Icelandic literature. Neither the bibliographies of the *Islandica* series nor the annual *Bibliography of Old Norse–Icelandic Studies*, which covers the field since 1963, mention a single study of the *Jarteinabækr*, and they do not rate a separate entry in the monumental *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for*

<sup>1</sup> In this article referred to by Roman numerals; Arabic numerals indicate chapters. The edition used is Guðni Jónsson's *Byskupa sögur* 1953, I 155–249.

*nordisk Middelalder*. No paper on these texts was delivered at the 1985 Saga Conference devoted to Christianity and Old Icelandic literature, but no fewer than three dealt with them at the 1994 Saga Conference on *Samtíðarsögur*, so the period of neglect may well be over.

One can see some reasons for such a state of affairs. These reports, varying in length between half a dozen lines and about two pages, are episodic and to some extent repetitive; there is little build-up, little psychological depth and little dialogue—in short, a poverty of those elements which make Old Icelandic prose literature so captivating. Even the Lives of Bishops, moulded as they are by partisanship and often by hagiographic stereotypes, have at least the story line of a life, a career with its struggles and triumphs, to keep us interested.

But I do not think the neglect stems merely from these aesthetic causes. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, in his classic work on the period, *Sturlungaöld* (1940), has a curious chapter entitled ‘Jarteiknir’, where he discusses the change from what he sees as a comparatively enlightened, critical attitude in twelfth-century Icelandic society towards an appetite for the miraculous and rank superstition in the thirteenth. He admits that there was a substratum of folk beliefs among the people who populated Iceland, although he would have us think that much of it was lost during Viking expeditions and settlement in a new land not seen through a haze of popular traditions; but basically he thinks it is the influence from Europe, mainly through the Church, that was responsible for a new credulity. He suspects Bishop Páll of ‘having opened the door to religious superstition, that formless monster hating all moderation’ (*að opna hliðið fyrir oftrúnni, hinum formlausu og hófhatandi óskapnaði* (1940, 129); curiously, in an article entitled ‘Jarteiknir’, which was published in *Skírnir* four years earlier (1936, 23–48), he showed a much more sympathetic attitude).

A deep-seated Lutheran aversion to Popish forms of religious worship probably combined with modern rationalism and an exaggerated notion of the enlightened humanism of the saga age to make works such as the *Jarteinabækur* unattractive to scholars of his generation. Today we have lost a good many certainties, both Lutheran and rationalist, and are less inclined to pass value judgments on past or remote civilisations, knowing that our vantage-point is as partial and insecure as any other. Also, we are less inclined to identify Icelandic society simply with the picture presented in the sagas and the attitudes implied by their narratives. We know that the detached, even humorous view of the gods we find in the Homeric epics, or the scepticism of the Augustan golden age in Rome, did not go very deep, sociologically speaking, and the same may have been true of Iceland,

although we tend to think of it as a simpler and more homogeneous society. The fact that the same century, the thirteenth, saw the flowering of saga writing and of sophisticated history (if we think of *Heimskringla*) and a spread of superstition and an appetite for the miraculous, should have alerted Einar to the existence of vastly differing modes of thinking at the same time and in the same place. And in view of what followed in Icelandic literature in the late Middle Ages and in modern times, books like the *Jarteinabækr* may have been more representative of the age that produced them than the classical sagas. Historians no longer reconstruct a past civilisation on the works of its greatest writers but on the scraps documenting daily life, and to some extent on the wishes and dreams reflected by trivial literature. Just *because* the *Jarteinabækr* only marginally conform to literary conventions and expectations, they deserve the attention of the social historian. The French *annalistes*, probably the most influential school of historians in recent times, have done much to vindicate the value of such sources.

A traditional Protestant materialist bias might dismiss these stories as fabrications of a Church eager to exploit to its own advantage the afflictions and the credulity of the uneducated masses. That is, after all, where Luther's initial protest against the sale of indulgences sprang from; he thought that true faith in God's grace could provide more lasting relief at no cost, and such a 'special' (if I may use a commercial expression), even though it defied normal human expectations of give and take, was hard to resist. I am not denying that Bishop Páll and other clerics at Skálholt, once a belief in the effectiveness of Þorlákr's help had taken root, were likely to be pleased with gains both tangible and intangible brought to the place where the blessed bishop had lived and worked and where his relics were kept. What I deny is the likelihood of such a belief taking root simply as a result of clerical propaganda. Visions and apparitions, miraculous events and resulting claims of saintliness for the agent or mediator involved, have almost always sprung up spontaneously outside the ranks of the Church, and the Church has normally provided a brake of scepticism. The tortuous judicial process of canonisation, which has been in place since the thirteenth century, seems designed to place as many delays and obstacles as possible in the path of potential sainthood. Indeed, none of the Icelandic saints ever made the list of officially recognised saints, neither Þorlákr nor the two bishops of Hólar that were venerated in Iceland, Jón Ögmundarson and Guðmundr Arason. It was not for lack of trying. As late as 1526 the Archbishop of Nidaros received a sum of money from Iceland for the purpose of furthering Guðmundr's canonisation; the Reformation sweep-

ing the country soon afterwards must have put paid to that plan. Yet there is no doubt that Þorlákr's cult was firmly established in pre-Reformation Iceland; his Office (text and music) has been preserved in AM 241 fol. (first published in Bjarni Þorsteinsson 1906–09, 71–119, and, in facsimile and with full critical apparatus, in Róbert A. Ottósson 1959).

Nor is it likely that Þorlákr was launched as a miracle-maker by the Icelandic establishment to provide the common people with a handy remedy for their miseries. While he never got into strife with the chieftains to the same extent as Bishop Guðmundr did in the early thirteenth century, he was anything but popular with the leading men, as is evidenced by the record of *Oddaverja þáttur* in the younger version of *Þorláks saga byskups*. His determination to bring the numerous private churches under his sway, his ascetic lifestyle and insistence on fasting and confession, and his stand against sexual permissiveness in a society traditionally lax in such matters, must have made him a pain in the neck of an establishment which had not yet learnt to live with the church as a separate power structure.

The value of the Miracle Books is threefold. First, by their lack of literary ambition and their closeness in time to the incidents described, these stories give us a direct insight into life in Iceland around 1200, life not only among the land-owning class but among those categories of people that appear only marginally in the family sagas: children, shepherds, housemaids, beggars and vagrants. The accounts give us an idea of the occupational hazards of farming and fishing and housework, e.g. women being scalded when lifting heavy kettles off the fire, or children being victims of a variety of accidents with cutting tools. We also get an idea of prevalent diseases, many of them probably a result of malnutrition, such as children being crippled by rickets; afflictions affecting the eyes seem to have been particularly frequent. A scholar knowledgeable in medicine would find valuable information both about health problems and about the medical ways of laymen. Secondly, we get some insight into people's wishes, beliefs and expectations, and what they felt they could or had to do for the saint in return for his help. Thirdly, we are enabled to some extent to chart the growth and spread of a cult, and how it settled into generally accepted patterns.

In the last chapter of the Second Book the author, probably Bishop Páll, breaks the normal procedure of recording isolated events and looks back on Þorlákr's posthumous history. He regrets that his record is incomplete and adds, with a touch of humour, that God's store of mercy and generosity must exceed human resources of memory and preservation (*at almáttkum guði hefir glöggligar enzt mildi ok miskunnsemi til at gefa oss ótállig tákni*

og jarteinagerðir fyrir verðleik ok dýrð ins sæla Þorláks byskups en oss geð ok geyming at gera eftir ok varðveita, svá sem oss hæfði, II 23). When miracles first occurred, they were eagerly reported and written down. But gradually they became so frequent that the novelty of these happenings wore off and people no longer bothered to record them. But when God in His goodness extended Þorlákr's activities to foreign lands and reports of miracles and gifts started reaching Iceland from afar, this kindled fresh attention and devotion to their saint in Icelandic hearts. For the author, Þorlákr's miracles are mercy traps, set up to catch people and bring them to eternal bliss and salvation, just as the devil baits *his* traps with 'perverse unnatural love and greed, worldly honour and murderous intent, wrath and unrighteousness and all perverse desires' (*En at teygja til þessarar gildru eru þessi ögn: röng ást óskaplig ok ágirni, metnaðr ok mannráð, reiði ok ranglæti ok allar rangar fýsnir*, II 23) to catch people and send them to eternal damnation. He also contrasts Þorlákr's story with those of other saints and martyrs, which are often filled with the cruelty and depravity of godless people and make us grieve for those lost souls, whereas the narration of Þorlákr's deeds is 'all full of joy and happiness, nowhere followed by grief or harm' (*En þessi frásögn, sem hér er nú sögð frá hinum sæla Þorláki byskupi, er öll full fagnaðar ok farsælu, ok fylgir hvergi þó hryggð né hörmung*, II 23).

This is indeed quite an apt description, for while there is no shortage of human misery in the form of illness, injury, destitution and suicidal depression, it surfaces only to be relieved by the saint's intercession. There is none of the sadomasochism of the martyrs' legends, and there are only a very few punitive miracles, miracles designed to teach the godless or irreverent a lesson. One such occurs in chapter 16 of the First Book, and it says something about attitudes then current to pain and suffering. A man gets ill in the middle of the haymaking season; he swells to the size of an ox and is in terrible pain. His wife invokes Þorlákr for him, and with good effect; he improves quickly. A young woman on the next farm, who is something of a loudmouth, wonders what the world has come to if a saint's help was invoked for a man as if it were a woman facing childbirth. During the following night she wakes up with her eyes aching awfully. She quickly sends for the woman whose prayers had done so much for her husband. But she is aware of the fun the girl had had at their expense and lets her suffer through the night. In the morning she comes across and invokes Þorlákr for her, and that quickly frees her of her pain. Another example where a mocker is punished occurs at the beginning of the Second Book, where one of the miracles in foreign lands, which, according to the epilogue, helped

to rekindle enthusiasm for Þorlákr in Iceland, is related. A certain Auðunn in England has a likeness of Þorlákr made and put up in a church. An English cleric, with metropolitan scorn for the rustic, offers the statue a suet-sausage with the words: ‘Do you want it, suet-lander? You are a suet-bishop’ (*Viltu, mörlandi? Þú ert mörbyskup*, II 1). Punishment is immediate: he cannot move from the spot where he stands, and the hand holding the sausage is crippled. Only after true repentance and much intercession through prayer by his colleagues is he released and healed.

I do not know how much we should make of these reports of Þorlákr miracles in foreign lands. We know from the sagas how tales get taller the farther their location is removed from Iceland, and there is little in other records to suggest that Þorlákr was venerated outside Iceland. He is said to have had an altar in the Church of the Holy Cross in Bergen, but his feast does not figure in the calendars of the Archbishopric of Nidaros (to which Iceland belonged) until 1519, and then only in the lowest category of saints’ feasts. There is no record to support the claim made in II 14 that Norse warriors in the service of the Latin Emperor of Constantinople built a church to Þorlákr after receiving help from him in a seemingly hopeless battle against the heathens, with the emperor himself laying the foundation stone. Yet Icelanders, still fairly footloose in the period around 1200, may well have taken their trust in their particular saint to the countries they frequented. There is in II 13 the story of a rich merchant in Norway whose property is the only one to escape the attention of the pirates who otherwise clean out the ship on which he travels, because he invoked Þorlákr. The two preceding chapters record the help a rich lawspeaker in the Shetlands by the name of Hávarðr received from Þorlákr. Fleeing a party of raiding Norwegian vikings, he hastily hides his gold and silver in the sand of a beach and promises Þorlákr a gold ring if the vikings miss the treasure and if he finds it again. Both conditions are fulfilled, and he sends the gold ring to Skálholt. Next, he falls victim to an eye disease, and Þorlákr not only restores his sight but makes him see better than before. Hávarðr calls an assembly, tells his *þingmenn* what has happened, and asks each farmer who has grain to send a handful of flour to Skálholt—a nice way of spreading around the burden of payment for a favour received. And the author adds that this contribution was made not only once but regularly for a long time. Unlike the case of the Þorlákr church in Constantinople, Bishop Páll probably could produce some evidence for the gratitude of the Shetlanders.

These are, however, the only reports of Þorlákr miracles occurring in foreign parts, despite claims in the final chapter of Book II that such stories and gifts reached Skálholt in great numbers (*at kom af öðrum löndum*

*ógrynni auðæfa með fjarlægri frásögn margra merkiligra atburða hans jarsteikna*, II 23). Otherwise he remained very much a local saint, not only Icelandic but diocesan, to judge by the number of churches dedicated to him in the diocese of Skálholt (of the 51 churches of which he figures as patron or co-patron, only 5 were in the diocese of Hólar; for a complete list see Cormack 1994, 159–61). There is probably nothing extraordinary about that; few of the approximately 13,000 saints of the Catholic church have made it into the international league. In earlier times canonisation, too, was normally a diocesan affair. It was sufficient that the remains of a prospective saint were taken up, washed and put in a suitable receptacle and that a commemoration day was fixed in the calendar of the diocese with masses being said in the saint's honour.

This happened to Þorlákr on 20 July, 1198, four and a half years after his death. What is typical of Iceland is that it was not an internal matter for the Church but that the *Alþingi* was actively involved. It was the *Alþingi* that authorised the practice of invoking Þorlákr, after a letter from Bishop Brandr of Hólar reporting miracles attributed to Þorlákr had been read, and after some miraculous healings had occurred during the *Alþingi*. As a result, the first collection of miracles was made in writing and read out at the *Alþingi* the following year; hence the customary title *Jarsteinabók 1199*. This public reading, too, produced a small crop of miracles: an almost deaf old man hears it without difficulty and enjoys from now on perfect hearing, and an almost blind, and hence destitute, young man is so impressed by what he hears that he enters the church, invokes Þorlákr, and regains his sight. Þorlákr's sainthood is then officially declared at the *Alþingi*, just as Christianity had been adopted by act of parliament, so to say, two centuries earlier.

The three books do allow us some insight into how a cult develops from scattered and spontaneous beginnings into something governed by a set of conventions, where the individual seeking help and the clergy, holy places and holy objects, services and payments, all have their accepted place. The Third Book mostly contains miracles of the traditional kind, healings and rescues from deadly dangers, rescues not only of people but also of farm animals, crucial supports of livelihood in agricultural Iceland. It gives the impression of having been gathered as material to serve an official canonisation process. There is a tangible concern to be correct in doctrine with regard to the nature and position of saints; people no longer simply call upon the saint, but invoke God Almighty and the blessed Bishop Þorlákr for intercession. A great deal of trouble is taken to be specific concerning time, place and the names of the persons involved, including the names of

witnesses who had sworn, or were prepared to swear, to the truth of the events as described. These were important elements of evidence in the very legalistic process of canonisation. The Second Book is more of a mixed bag. Its last section, from chapter 16 onwards, lists, rather than describes in detail, miracles that occurred in the diocese of Hólar. It is also stated that Guðmundr, the later controversial bishop, sent a collection of them to the monk Gunnlaugr *at hann skyldi dikta*, so that he could write them in Latin, and fragments of a Latin collection of Þorlákr miracles have indeed been preserved and are accessible in the second part of Jón Helgason's critical edition of *Byskupa sögur* (1978), which also contains the first two *Jarteinabækur*. The First Book, which recently has been included in Ásdís Egilsdóttir's edition of *Þorláks saga helga*, produced on the occasion of Pope John Paul II's visit to Iceland in 1989, is in some ways the most appealing one. Although it already contains stereotyped elements such as 'he (she, they) called upon the blessed Bishop Þorlákr' or 'and this event seemed to him (her, them, those who heard it) very remarkable (*mikils verðr*)' or 'and they praised God and the blessed Bishop Þorlákr', there is not yet a more or less predictable set of situations, steps and responses.

The 1199 collection also contains the sort of light-hearted, one might even say trivial, miracles that do not occur (or are not recorded) later. Maybe even the dead bishop had to learn when it was appropriate to intervene—or else the faithful learned after a while not to trouble him unnecessarily, since he was obviously quite a busy man even beyond his grave. In II 22 he appears in a dream to a woman who suffers from a very painful leg, and while he gives it a healing stroke, he says: 'It will now be better, but I have to go and help Guðmundr dýri, who I hear has been taken prisoner' (*Heðan afmun þér batna, en ek verð at fara at veita lið Guðmundi inum dýra, sem ek nú heyri bundinn*, II 22). In the same night Guðmundr, who has a saga of his own in the *Sturlunga saga* collection, was attacked.

Returning to the light-hearted miracles, in two instances (I 3, 4) Þorlákr provides fair weather for the bishop's party when storm and rain prevail all around, and in two more chapters (I 13, 17) he saves the local ale-brewing from being ruined, which would have been a disaster since Bishop Páll had to be entertained. In these instances it is the hosts that invoke Þorlákr; they may have thought that Þorlákr had his nephew and successor's welfare and comfort especially at heart. Generally, these are homely miracles, whether it is a matter of pacifying a dangerous bull (I 29), immobilising a seal that seems to be ready to attack (I 5, 22), overcoming the pain in a limb dislocated at sport (I 28), giving sight to a blind sheep (I 2) or saving a rejected child from night and bad weather (I 36). The latter incident has,

again, a specially Icelandic flavour in its social context. The priest at Arnarbœli has a wife with an illegitimate child. As he is poor and getting old, it is decided that the boy, seven or eight years old, should be brought to his natural father, who lives on a farm at some distance; on the way two rivers in spate with strong currents have to be crossed. The boy is duly delivered to his destination but the farmer's wife is anything but pleased and chases him away. The weather turns foul, and at night the unwilling stepmother gets worried. A search party goes out to look for the boy and finally also comes to his former home. The priest is much distressed by the news, goes to the church, sings the psalter and invokes Þorlákr to take care of the boy. And lo and behold, after a short while the boy turns up, dry from his ankles up and happy. He had apparently sought refuge in a sheep shelter, invoked Þorlákr and fallen asleep, and when he woke up, he saw his former home at a short distance. Far be it from me to call this happening trivial but it definitely has a homely flavour, whereas the bulk of the miracles in the later books seem to be patterned on the types occurring in the New Testament, approved occasions for miracles to happen, one might say.

It may be appropriate to look at the verb I have translated as 'invoke', where English has simply taken over the Latin term used in such cases (*invocare*). The Icelandic expression is *heita á*, which originally may have been a loan translation but acquired a dimension the Latin word did not have because of the second transitive sense of *heita* in Icelandic, 'to promise'. So *heita* takes two complements, one indicating what you want the saint to do (the normal complement of verbs meaning 'to request') and one specifying the engagement undertaken, i. e. one referring to the object and one referring to the subject. The Lutheran doctrine of 'by grace alone', which devalues any human contribution to insignificance, must have struck many people as weird, for getting something for nothing is not a normal thing within the experience of people moving in a world of average selfishness. In Iceland, the notion of a deal or bargain (*kaup*) was fundamental to social relations. So people calling upon Þorlákr must have been quite prepared to pay in some way for the help received, but it may not have been immediately apparent to them what sort of payment a dead bishop expected, as there is little evidence of the veneration of particular saints earlier. A certain number of Paternosters—fifty is the most frequent figure used—seems to have been standard payment, at least for poor people. Candles or wax for candles appears to have been the next most frequent gift, often related to the wish, e. g. a candle as long as the aching limb or the wished-for fish. Feeding a certain number of poor people, usually on a feast day, was another way of 'paying back', but all sorts of other things occur as well.

If it was a matter of lost property, people were inclined to promise part of its value—a finder's reward, so to say—or to make the saint a partner, if the object was indivisible. In I 30 a farmer gelds a good young stallion but the operation goes wrong; first the horse bleeds copiously, then a tumour develops, the wound keeps secreting pus and blood, a fist-size opening appears, the whole foreskin has to be removed and yet the rot seems to spread inside (I mention these gory details to show how circumstantial these accounts can be):

En at hestinum kom blóðrás mikil, en eftir þat sullr æsiligr, ok svall allr kviðrinn á hestinum, svá at ekki mátti ganga at mat sér of síðir, ok gerðust at vágföll mikil ok hol á svá stór, at maðr mátti stinga í hnefa sínum. Ok þar kom of síðir, at fúnaði kviðrinn, ok váru skornar af allar skauðirnar af hestinum, ok þótti ekki ván, at lifa mundi lengi. (I 30)

The owner promises Þorlákr half the horse if it survives but has little hope for it; he leaves it to its own devices in the paddock. But Þorlákr, who now has a stake in the matter, looks after his new property well; despite a storm which could finish off a healthier animal, the horse recovers. After half a month it is in top form again and also has a foreskin like other geldings. In spring the owner consults Bishop Páll concerning the fulfilment of his obligation and buys back the saint's half by giving half the value of the gelding to the see. A similar deal is reported, in chapter 35, of a lady in the neighbourhood of Skálholt. She lost a valuable gold brooch during Þorlákr's lifetime, and invoking the saints led to no result. Fourteen years later, when Þorlákr's fame as a miracle-worker has started spreading, she offers the saint the same terms as the horse-owner. Shortly afterwards, a man on the neighbouring farm carting out manure notices something glittering on the road. It is the long-lost brooch, unharmed and more beautiful than ever, and that in a spot where countless beggars had gone past without noticing it. Indeed, one of them trod on it while the manure man watched.

One last example from the lost-property division: a man living near the sea in steep country misses some cattle, and all searches prove fruitless. He then promises one of the cattle if the herd is found. After a new search they all turn up, with the exception of one ox. The farmer says: 'I can see now that Bishop Þorlákr wants to keep the ox we have not found, and he shall do so if it turns up' (*Sé ek nú, at Þorlákr byskup vill nú eiga uxann, sem ófundinn er, ok skal svá vera, ef hann hittist*, II 7). Three weeks later they sight it on an inaccessible ledge on a steep mountain-side, well-fed and lively, and the grass on the ledge is not even touched. They tie ropes around it and lower it to level ground and then bring it to Skálholt.

Sometimes the faithful entering into this sort of bargain are no less specific than if it were a commercial transaction, e. g. stipulating 'if I recover my boat and nothing is missing in it' (*Þá hét hann . . . til þess, at bátrinn með öllu því, sem í var, fyndist, at ljá hest upp í Skálaholt, III 22*). It also seems to have become increasingly common to make such vows or promises not in the intimacy of prayer but in front of witnesses like any legally binding act; the phrase *fasta heit* 'fasten a promise', i. e. make it legally binding, is often used in the Third Book. But there is also evidence of the saint's reminding the faithful of their vows. The sportsman in I 28 with the wrenched arm, whose pain will not go away, sees Þorlákr in a dream complaining that many people do not fulfil their promises. It occurs to the dreamer that the summer before he had made a vow concerning his brother's eyes and then forgotten about it. When he has lived up to his obligation, the arm hurts no more. In II 5 a man promises prayers and six lengths of *vaðmál* to the saint if his dangerously wounded son recovers. In the summer he makes his usual shopping expedition and runs out of material to pay for a kettle he needs. He takes some of the woollen cloth promised to Þorlákr to pay for it and promptly finds the kettle broken when he arrives home, the only broken object in the cargo.

Another aspect which impresses itself upon the reader is the importance of the physical presence or proximity of the mortal remains of the saint. This is a form of primitive magic which imposed itself successfully upon the inherited Jewish spiritualism of Christianity, not only in Scandinavia, of course, but throughout medieval Christendom, in the West more than in the East. There *is* a spiritual interpretation of relics, as there is in the East of icons; they are meant to help the believer concentrate his mind on the qualities represented by the saint and thus make them more accessible to his own striving. But there is no doubt that the mass of the faithful ascribed to them an inherent beneficial or protective power. In Scandinavia there must have been an inherited readiness to believe in the potency of a person's remains, as is evidenced by the importance of the family grave-mound. It has been said that no feature in Christianity was harder for the primitive Scandinavians to accept than the Church's demand that the dead should be buried in churches or churchyards rather than on the family farm. Þorlákr's success as a saint may be ascribed not least to his presence, his proximity; he was within earshot, so to say. If I may recall the lady with the gold brooch: after the first unsuccessful search 'there was invoking of saints with promises of fasts, almsgivings, songs [prayers and masses] and candles, and yet the brooch was not found' (*Þá var síðan heitit á helga menn bæði föstum ok ölmusgjöfum, söngum ok kertagerð, ok fannst þó ekki*

*sylgjan*, I 35). Maybe half the value of the brooch later promised to Þorlákr was worth more than that and hence was more likely to trigger a supernatural intervention, but I think the point was rather that with Þorlákr the magic potential was closer. We have a similar story of the local saint outdoing a remote saint in the last chapter of the Third Book, dated to 1325. The shepherd Hallr of a farmer in the Reykjavík area passes out after he returns to the farm one day, and when he comes to he has lost the power of speech. When his state is still unchanged after three days, the farmer invokes St Blasius with a promise of train-oil if his shepherd is cured. The farmer Snæbjörn chooses the appropriate saint to invoke, for Bishop Blasius of Sebaste, who was martyred in Cappadocia in 287, was the saint whose speciality was diseases of the throat. But it does not help, so he tries the local saint, Þorlákr. The shepherd falls asleep and sees two men in black cloaks entering his room and discussing his case. They agree that he deserves to be healed, Þorlákr blesses him and he wakes up perfectly healthy. There is no hint of invalidating St Blasius's position as a throat specialist; the implication rather seems to be that if you have a doctor close at hand with a proven record, try him first rather than the remote specialist who may require time to make his way to Iceland.

Even for Icelanders it would seem to have become more and more important actually to go to Skálholt in order to be successful with their petitions, or else to do so once the saint's help was received, so as to show gratitude and testify to his power. The expression used at first (it happens only occasionally in the first collection) is *sækja helgan dóm* 'to visit the holy relic'; by the time of Book III it seems to have become standard practice, and the most usual term is *ganga í Skálholt* 'to go to Skálholt'. Sometimes the ailing person already notices an improvement as he or she gets closer. One then prayed at the shrine or, better, kept vigil at the shrine a whole night or longer; critical cases were bedded down near the altar on which the shrine stood. The best thing was to combine the magic of place with the magic of time, i. e. be at Skálholt on one of the two *Þorlákmessur*. His proper feast was on 23 December, the day of his death; but because of the difficulties of travelling in Iceland in winter his summer feast, on 20 July (the day of his *translatio*), seems to have become as popular. The meeting of so many people on such days and the swapping of stories about Þorlákr's effective help must have been a tremendous boost to his cult; even those who only arrived hopeful must have left convinced. The saint, who often appeared to people in their dreams, did not fail to point out the benefit of such visits. In I 40 we hear of a young woman on the Vestmannaeyjar who had been ailing for years and who had invoked

Þorlákr, but without any lasting improvement. In this case he appeared to an acquaintance of hers and indicated that something more was needed: a pilgrimage to Skálholt. This proved successful, and as the *Alþingi* was just in session and she was of some standing in society, she went there straightaway to tell the assembly of her miraculous cure. The notion became established that fasting strictly for a whole day (*vatnfasta* is the verb used) at Þorlákr's shrine before one of his feasts was a particularly beneficial and meritorious exercise.

Connected with this stress on physical presence are the magical qualities ascribed to any object or substance that had been in physical contact with the saint. Here, too, there are only isolated instances in the first collection, whereas by the time of the third collection, *Þorláksvatn* and *Þorláksmjör* seem to have become standard remedies. *Þorláksvatn* was the water in which his bones had been washed after exhumation, and *Þorláksmjör* seems to have been butter blessed by the bishop (I remain sceptical of Margaret Cormack's interpretation (1994, 62) of *smjör* in this instance as 'oil consecrated by Þorlákr' or 'oil produced from his relics'). Both were primarily used for treating open wounds, and that there still was a sufficient supply of these substances a century after his death should perhaps not surprise us in view of Þorlákr's well-attested generosity and biblical precedents. Other substances with healing potential by association were his hair (II 15), his clothes (II 16), soil from his grave (III 1) and a linen bandage that had lain on his coffin (III 7). The connection can be as tenuous as in the case of a man who had been the victim of a cauterisation accident. The glowing iron had pierced his belly and left a gaping wound. After invoking Þorlákr he drinks water in which has lain a stone that once had been put on Þorlákr's coffin (*Eftir þat drakk hann vatn þat, er í var lagðr steinn sá, er lagðr hafði verið á kistu ins sæla Þorláks byskups*, III 7). While it does not cure him completely, it at least allows him to ride home; when the pain returns, Þorlákr's bone water is applied and does the trick.

Miracles are to some extent international and interchangeable; what many readers will find more absorbing and moving are the circumstances of the people experiencing them. One thing striking a reader in Australia is the exacerbation of misery brought to poverty by a harsh climate. And there must have been many poor: all those who did not own land or other property, who had no extended family to support them or who had no employment. The feeding and sheltering of the destitute was certainly a much needed exercise of charity. Elderly single women were probably among the hardest hit, as they still tend to be in our society. The *Jarteinabækur* contain some memorable scenes in this respect. As conditions became

harder in winter, beggars would seek the relative warmth and security of the bishop's see at Skálholt. What if the swollen Hvítá was too full of ice floes for the ferry to cross yet there was no solid ice over which one could walk? Freezing, shivering and crying, the beggars would gather on the banks of the river waiting for an opportunity to cross, and a good-hearted ferryman on the spot once almost lost his life when the ferry overloaded with these pitiful figures overturned in the middle of the river. On another occasion he admonishes them to sing five Paternosters for Þorlákr instead of crying and feeling sorry for themselves, and it works: a quiet passage opens between the ice floes and the boat can be rowed across (I 45–46).

In III 21 there is a pauper called Álfheiður with a bad leg that is swollen and looks as if the plague or gangrene (*drep*) has come into it. She still drags herself from farm to farm, coughing and groaning, knowing that she must not outstay her welcome anywhere. In the cold and wet weather the wound gets worse; finally the open area is about a span in each direction and discharges blood and rotting flesh. She finally has to give up at a farm called Þorvarðsstaðir, unwelcome as she is, for it has been a bad year and many poor people in the south are simply dying of starvation. She, too, expects to die, but as it is the day of the winter *Þorláksmessa*, she concentrates all her mental powers on the saint and vows prayers and a pilgrimage to Skálholt if she recovers. The rest is predictable. And there is the woman Guðfinna up in Steingrímsfjörður, who sets out one Sunday in December with nothing but tatters on her body, nothing to warm her head or her hands, and only one shoe. The weather turns bad, a biting wind comes up, there are showers of sleet and finally a mighty snowfall. She has not arrived anywhere by nightfall, and the following few days the weather is so nasty that people cannot even go out to feed their sheep and cattle. Then there are frost and harsh winds again, and finally two days of rain. Everybody is sure that she has perished. On Sunday, a full week later, a shepherd finds her and brings her to Tunga, neither cold nor hungry. She said she had invoked Þorlákr 'to help her, if he was as good as she had heard it said; she promised she would give him four ounces of train-oil' (*Sagðist hon heitit hafa á Þorlák biskup, at hann hjálpaði henni, ef hann væri svá mikils verðleiks sem hon hefði heyrt sagt. Hét hon at gefa hálfa mörk lýsis*, III 10).

The point of the *Jarteinabækur* is the miracles brought about by invocation and faith; they do not set out to survey material conditions and social relations in Iceland around 1200, or to entertain far-away latter-day readers with reported incidents of a strongly local flavour such as a boy's drowning in a tub of sour whey (I 7), an eagle's spoiling the bird-egg harvest for the people of Viðey (I 38) or a wife's sewing up her husband's badly cut face

when he has fallen on his weapon during a trip on a bitingly cold winter's day (I 6). It is remarkable that these vignettes, sketched with the deft, realistic strokes of what we would call classical saga prose, were written down *before* most of the sagas were committed to parchment; maybe this can be taken as an argument for the strength of oral narrative in Iceland before the flowering of written literature. They provide an invaluable insight into life in medieval Iceland, and it would be a pity if such insight were missed simply because the title 'Miracle Books' seems to locate their contents outside the world of everyday experience, as the long lack of attention to these texts suggests.

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## NOTE

### BRIGÐ ERU ÚTLENZK ORD

BY D. A. H. EVANS

In his *Heimur Hávamála* (1990) Hermann Pálsson, like others before him, divides the poem into a number of sections: five in his case (or six, if the last strophe is counted separately). To each of these, he gives a name of his own devising; the second section, which begins (rather implausibly, since it breaks into the *málahátttr* sequence) with st. 84 and continues to st. 110, he calls *Mankynni*. This is a *hapax legomenon*, which he has taken from st. 31 of *Hárbarðsljóð*, where it evidently means ‘relations with women, love affairs with girls’ or the like. (He apparently had second thoughts about the wisdom of this appellation, since in his edition of the poem, reviewed in *Saga-Book* 24:2–3 (1995), 186–88, he replaced it with the more familiar *Mansöngur*.) I much regret that in my review of Hermann’s book in *Saga-Book* 23:5 (1992), 414–16, I confused *mankynni* with *mannkyn*, ‘mankind’. Unless Hermann has an even weaker sense of reality than I had supposed, he must have realised that that was what had happened, but nevertheless he has used my slip as a pretext for the preposterous rigmarole which occupies pp. 496–98 of *Saga-Book* 23:7 (1993), presumably (to be charitable) in an elephantine attempt at humour, always risky in a foreign tongue.

Hermann calls my review ‘hostile and ill-informed’, though he does not adduce any instance of ill information beyond this one point. I suppose that any review which advances reasons for dissenting from a book’s conclusions might strike its author as hostile, especially where wounded feelings come into play; a less partial reader would, I hope, have realised that what I was aiming for was to be gently indulgent to a seasoned scholar with a bee in his bonnet.

## REVIEWS

SNORRI STURLUSON. HEIMSKRINGLA. Edited by BERGLJÓT S. KRISTJÁNSDÓTTIR, BRAGI HALLDÓRSSON, JÓN TORFASON and ÖRNÓLFUR THORSSON. *Mál og Menning*. Reykjavík, 1991. xi + 848 pp. (vols I–II), cxvi + 514 pp. (vol. III).

This handsome three-volume work is a product of patient scholarship in the service of a wide Icelandic-speaking public. The first two volumes contain the text of *Heimskringla* in modernised spelling, while the third, the *Lykilbók*, supplies a generous array of complementary texts, tables, maps, a glossary and other aids.

The arrangement of the *Heimskringla* text into two volumes, with the break after *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 143 (the end of Óláfr's attempted dealings with the obdurate Faeroe islanders), is an interesting departure from the three-volume format of the standard editions by Finnur Jónsson (1893–1901, henceforth FJ) and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII*, 1941–51, henceforth BjA), though it seems to have been determined by practicality rather than principle, since the 1991 editors in several places accept the traditional, and justifiable, notion of *Heimskringla* as a tripartite work.

The orthographic policy in the *Heimskringla* text matches that adopted in its companion volumes, the recent editions, by virtually the same team of scholars, of *Íslendinga sögur og þættir* (I–III, 1987, originally in two volumes) and of *Sturlunga saga* (I–III, 1988). Since these were not reviewed in *Saga-Book*, it seems appropriate to dwell on the orthography for a moment here. It is somewhat of a compromise, designed to give the flavour of the original without obfuscating the meaning for present-day readers. Modern spelling and morphology are used throughout, so that, for instance, *gengur*, *langur*, *hið*, *hún*, *svo*, *æðstir* and past participle *dvalist* appear where FJ and BjA have *gengr*, *langr*, *it*, *hon*, *svá*, *æztir* and *dvalzk*. This—like the use of modern pronunciation in reading Old Icelandic aloud—has the theoretical advantage of being an authentic system, in contrast to the normalised orthography used almost uniformly throughout the *Íslenzk fornrit* series and widely elsewhere, which, though convenient, has a kind of false monumentality about it, and which implies judgements about the dating of sagas which may not stand the test of time. On the other hand, the modern-spelling approach produces rather a strange hybrid, since many lexical items in *Heimskringla* are now either obsolete or have undergone sufficient semantic change to require explanation—which is supplied in good measure in the glossary in volume III. The grammatical system also has its own artificialities, especially since certain old nominal, pronominal and adjectival forms are retained but given a modernised spelling. *Hverigur*, for instance, rendered ‘hvaða’ in the glossary, is rather an oddity, and the differing treatments of verbal and nominal forms create inconsistencies: modern *dóu* rather than *dó* (past 3rd person pl. ‘died’), but archaic *fám* rather than *fáum* (dat. pl. ‘few’). However, since the making of modernised editions is very well established in Iceland, the compromises involved here are presumably not felt to be obtrusive.

As to punctuation, this edition differs from FJ and BJA in its very restrained use of commas to separate off subordinate clauses and coordinate clauses beginning with *en*, so that the text looks smoother, but is less immediately comprehensible. On the other hand, the numerous paragraph breaks make for easier reading. Another feature which, for me, improves on the BJA edition is the use of chapter headings, mainly based on those of the *Kringla* group of manuscripts. Although it is impossible to know whether these had Snorri's sanction, they appear to be old, and if nothing else they are a useful guide to the often complicated narrative.

For an international readership the value of the 1991 *Heimskringla* as an edition will depend largely on its choice of base manuscript and handling of variant readings. The policy here is clearly stated in III, lxxxvi–lxxxviii. The transcripts of K (*Kringla*) are taken as the base text, unless a majority of the main alternative mss agree against K on a particular reading, the chief alternatives being AM 39 fol., *Fríssbók* and *Jöfraskinna* in part I; AM 39 fol., Stock. Papp. fol. nr. 18 and AM 70 fol., together with the Stock. Perg. 4to nr. 2 ms of the *Separate saga of Óláfr helgi* in part II, *Óláfs saga helga*; and AM 39 fol., *Fríssbók* and *Eirspennill* in part III. Two lacunas in K are filled from *Fríssbók*. The policy and the resulting text (as a few samplings suggest) hence differ only slightly from those of FJ, and still less from those of BJA. The editorial decisions taken appear sound, but the fact that any departures from K are undetectable—there being no textual notes—reduces the textual value of the work. For instance, in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 12, where the drunken King Sveigðir accepts a dwarf's invitation to seek Óðinn inside a huge rock, the prose narrative ends in the 1991 edition with: 'Sveigðir hljóp í steinninn en steinninn laukst þegar aftur og kom Sveigðir aldrei út' (I, 15). The last five words, 'og/ok . . . út', are lacking from K and imported from *Fríssbók* and *Jöfraskinna*, as is made clear in BJA at this point, but there is no signal at all in the 1991 edition. FJ has fuller textual information still, though he prints the less satisfactory reading of *Jöfraskinna* 2 (AM 238 fol.): 'ok kom Sveigðir eigi aprtr'. Thus, while the 1991 *Heimskringla* admirably fulfils its role as a reading edition, the completion of a new scholarly edition, for which desiderata were stated by Vésteinn Ólason in 1988 ('Planer om en ny utgave av *Heimskringla*', in *Textkritisk teori og praksis*, ed. Bjarne Fidjestøl *et al.*, 130–37), still appears far off.

The verse quotations in *Heimskringla*—some six hundred—are handled according to textual principles similar to those used with the prose, though alternative readings are imported where those of the *Kringla* transcripts are particularly problematic. Emendation as such is almost entirely avoided, and some archaic word-forms (e. g. *emka*, *brandr*) are retained in order to preserve metrical features. The verses are accompanied by parallel notes, mainly explanatory rather than textual.

The supplementary materials in volume III, *Lykilbók*, are largely new and immensely useful, amply fulfilling the stated aim of smoothing the reader's path (I, ix). The introductory essays give sound and balanced coverage of the traditional topics of sources, manuscripts, editorial policy and the biography of

the author (this last covered by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir), while the essay on *Heimskringla* itself concentrates on literary features, in tune with the current orthodoxy that *Heimskringla* is best approached as a work of literature whose prime historical value is as an exposition of Snorri's view of Norwegian history rather than as a source for Norwegian history itself. The most thought-provoking essay is 'Ólafur helgi eilífur konungur', in which Sverrir Tómasson argues that Snorri intended to write about Óláfr Haraldsson as 'konunglegan píslarvott', one who lived on through his successors and through his miracles.

The supplementary texts which follow the essays are the most unexpected bonus in the edition. The first four, as the heading 'Í grennd við Heimskringlu' suggests, have an obvious bearing on *Heimskringla*: the two versions of the prologue to the *Separate saga*, the AM 392 fragment (included to represent *Heimskringla* mss not used in the edition) and *Rauðúlfs þátr*. The remainder of the selection, however, is unusual—not the predictable 'sources and analogues', but learned texts, some hitherto unavailable in modern editions, exemplifying aspects of the intellectual world of Snorri and his (near-)contemporaries. These include passages on the geography of Scandinavia extracted from *Historia Norvegiæ* and *Flateyjarbók*, extracts from the *Physiologus*, together with learned scraps from *Hauksbók* and elsewhere covering the theory of the four elements and humours, astrology and physiognomy (the well-named *gamanfræði*). Finally there is a printing of *Skáldasaga* from *Hauksbók*, extracts from the *Hirðskrá* of Magnús lagabætur and *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*. Manuscript illustrations are reproduced where available.

In the rest of vol. III, *Lykilbók*, almost everything in *Heimskringla* which is susceptible of dating, locating or tabulating is presented in the form of tables, lists and maps. The seventy-seven tables are mainly genealogical, embracing not only single dynasties but also, for instance, the relationships between the Norwegian royal line and the Danish descendants of Sveinn Úlfsson (table 75). Particularly valuable are the tables clarifying areas of complexity and potential confusion: the contenders for the throne in the twelfth century, for example (tables 70, 71, 73), or the numerous wives, mistresses and children of the great womanisers (e. g. Haraldr hárfagri, table 8, Magnús berfœtur, table 60). The ninety-seven maps are likewise well-designed and informative. Most of them collate information given in *Heimskringla* about journeys, military campaigns, battle-sites and territorial divisions, or topics such as the youthful travels of Óláfr Tryggvason (map 30) or the miracles of Óláfr helgi (map 90). Symbols used throughout show such things as burial mounds, pagan and Christian worship sites, assembly places and markets. Page references identify the relevant sections of *Heimskringla*, while in the text volumes relevant maps and tables are clearly signalled in the margins. Obviously, gaps and uncertainties are difficult to handle in tabular or cartographic form, but on the whole admirable caution is shown, as when map 92, showing the places of origin of Icelandic skalds, relegates any doubtful cases to an inset list. One could quibble over a few details of content and ordering in the tables and maps, or more radically object that the seriousness with which the seemingly factual content

of *Heimskringla* is treated here is at odds with the editors' disinclination to confront the question of *Heimskringla*'s value (or lack of it) as a historical source (III, xxviii). Nevertheless, the risk of misinformation is far outweighed by the great wealth of material here, and the editors deserve thanks for the evident patience and vigour with which they have undertaken the task.

Further supporting materials complete volume III. A tabular chronology of events compares their presentation in *Heimskringla* with that of *Konungsannáll* and *Resensannáll*; *Skáldatal* is printed in three texts parallel; and there is a list of skalds, their patrons and page references to their verses as quoted in *Heimskringla*. The glossary contains over 3000 words and phrases, and is reader-friendly to the extent of explaining, for example, that *allvel* means 'mjög vel', as well as glossing more recondite words and idioms. The indices to the *Heimskringla* text are characteristically thorough and helpful.

The lack of scholarly aids in the form of notes and references is, despite the substantial bibliography at III, xcvi–cxvi, the biggest drawback of this work from the point of view of this reader. It is frustrating that many specific points have to be taken on trust and can only be followed up with difficulty. Map 6, showing the distribution of settlements in Viking Age Scandinavia, for instance, is based on 'the conclusions of archaeologists', but this is too woolly to mean anything. References and cross-references are also sparse in the introductory essays, and the lack of textual notes has already been mentioned above. Although it is unrealistic, even churlish, to complain that the volumes have not been designed to one's own, quite different, specifications, it seems a pity that the detailed scholarship that has gone into them could not have been brought more to the surface in the finished product.

Produced as a boxed set, these volumes are attractive in looks and content, and are generally well planned, with great consideration for the reader. The text is readable and reliable, and it will complement, though by no means replace, the standard editions, one of which is now nearly a century and the other half a century old. The third volume contains a wealth of materials which all will welcome, and it is probably here—at least for those who already own a text of *Heimskringla*—that the main value of the enterprise lies.

DIANA WHALEY

TWO TALES OF ICELANDERS: ÖGMUNDAR ÞÁTTIR DYTTS OG GUNNARS HELMINGS. ÖLFKOFRA ÞÁTTIR. Edited by IAN WYATT and JESSIE COOK. *Durham Medieval Texts* 10. *Department of English [University of Durham]*. Durham, 1993. xlv + 84 pp.

Despite reservations registered below, this volume may prove to be one of the most useful of a useful series devoted to affordable texts for students. The stories are good, the Glossary and Notes helpful; the book will fit into the Old Norse curriculum well as a follow-up to Gordon. The editions united here were both initially produced as M. Phil. theses at Birmingham, but the differing editorial approaches, as well as the contrasting style, genre and language of the

stories themselves, will add to the pedagogical value of the volume. I noticed few mechanical errors and inconsistencies.

Jessie Cook's edition of *Qlfokfra þáttir* is accomplished in its range of allusion to primary sources and in its factual work with geography, real life (e. g. charcoal production), and language; her notes highlight, though not exhaustively, interesting links with other texts. Cook is more or less a book-prosist, whose 'author . . . chooses to develop his story' in four sections corresponding to the manuscript divisions (why not keep the manuscript title and divisions?), and she makes a good case that 'much of his raw material is borrowed' (p. xxxix). Her critical reading, which in my opinion relies too much on 'literary caprice' (p. xxxix) and 'lighthearted entertainment' (p. xlv), is rather inconclusive, muting social applications of the story and finding its core in simple ridicule of 'great men who persecute little men' (p. xlv). A good discussion of dating emphasises law and arrives at a plausible range, 1250–1271. A discussion of 'four metaphorical phrases' that 'can be linked tenuously by association with the sea' (p. xliii and notes) could have included a fifth, 'Hvaðan rann sjá alda undir?' (p. 13, l. 140), and perhaps a sixth, *selfeir* (l. 185, erroneously 186 in the glossary).

The proportions of Cook's ten-page Introduction and nineteen pages of notes are reversed in Ian Wyatt's twenty-eight pages of Introduction with only seven of notes. He chooses to edit the *Flatheyjarbók* text of his *þáttir* because 'all previous editions and translations of *Ögmundar þáttir dytts* have used AM 61 fol. as the base text' and because *Flatheyjarbók*, while it may be further from a presumed 'original', has interesting literary qualities of its own (p. ix; also pp. xxxiv and vi). This reasoning is valid, but to correct the record, Þorleifur Jónsson's separate edition of the story in his *Fjörutíu Íslendinga-þættir* (1904) had already been based on *Flatheyjarbók*, with some use of AM 61 as printed in *Fornmanna sögur* II (see his p. xiii); and Þorleifur's text is reproduced by Guðni Jónsson in his *Íslendinga þættir* (1935; 1945). Neither of these predecessors is mentioned by either Cook or Wyatt. A quick comparison suggests that Þorleifur's normalisation from *Flatheyjarbók* is liberally seasoned with improvements from AM 61; interestingly he chose to follow AM 61 *in extenso* in Ögmundur's sailing accident. Wyatt's fourteenth-century normalisation reads well, and his notes pick out some interesting points for comparison among the different texts. At l. 116 his tentative association of slavery with cowardice seems excessively cautious, and the gnomic expression in l. 146 is almost certainly a proverb even though its unique citation in Bjarni Vilhjálmsson and Óskar Halldórsson's *Íslenzkir málshættir*, which is not cited, is circular evidence. Wyatt's comment on an odd usage of *garðr* at l. 187 needs a reference to the explanation given in *Íslenzk fornrit* IX (1956), 110; I would guess, however, that the word here refers to a palisade to protect the vulnerable side of the town. A number of scribal mistakes are briefly noted, but at l. 227 we might have wished for an explanation of the more substantial series of errors.

Wyatt's informal introduction ranges even to a disquisition on Freyr, but his best points concern differences among the texts and their interpretation. The varying presentations of the sailing accident and a few other features early in

the story support his idea that *Flateyjarbók* and AM 61 fol. (and AM 564 a 4to as far as it goes) contrast in the severity of their attitude toward the hero; but the differences or the editor's explication of them fade as the story proceeds, and the promise of stylistic comparison is not realised despite repetitions in the Notes. Wyatt's attempts to apply the observed variations to literary-critical interpretation of Ögmundur's character seem heavy-handed (as at p. xxvi, 'the idiot abroad'), and exposition itself is somewhat muddled by imprecise language (as at pp. xx–xxi); his stylistic analysis is not uniformly illuminating (e. g. 'This extract is short, punchy' (p. xxiv)) or even accurate ('Ögmundur acquires a ship' (p. xxiv), but in AM 564 a 4to he simply *has* the ship; 'the crew cannot see the other ships in the sound' (p. xxiv, cf. p. xxv), but vision figures only in *Flateyjarbók* and AM 61 fol., not in AM 564 a 4to, where reaction time is mentioned instead). The treatment of date contains a good point about the comparative chronologies of the *þátrr* and *Víga-Glúms saga* but is strangely silent about my extensive discussion of this textual relationship (p. xxx). Throughout Wyatt shows himself more attuned to the existence of oral tradition than Cook; nevertheless, his discussion of dating seems unobtrusive. The major struggle of his Introduction, however, is with the question of the unity of the story; his one-sentence critique of my article on this subject seems beside the point, and he fails either to dismantle my arguments or to build on them (p. xxxiii).

In my opinion the editions collected here share one shortcoming: the failure to come to grips with antecedent scholarship. (When our own precious words are involved, *amour propre* makes such a failure easy to spot but embarrassing to point out.) Both lack any real *Forschungsbericht*; the customary listing of previous editions and translations is missing; even something as well known and student-friendly as Hermann Pálsson's translation and critical remarks on *Olkofra þátrr* (in his Penguin *Hrafnkel's Saga and other Icelandic stories* (1971)) is absent, and the great *Íslenzk fornrit* editions (by Jón Jóhannesson and Jónas Kristjánsson) go unmentioned in the Bibliography, which simply expands the abbreviation IF. Cook comments on the meanings of the word *þátrr* and its use as a genre designation (p. xxxvi), citing an unpublished British M. Phil. thesis but ignoring John Lindow's article on the subject (in *Scripta Islandica* 29 (1978), 3–44) and my discussions in various places (see further below). Both editors treat direct speech in terms of its proportions and effects without reference to the classic treatments, and the *senna* in *Olkofra þátrr* does not tempt its editor to cite the literature on the practice or Lindow's article arguing a direct 'mythic modeling' of *Bandamanna saga* on *Lokasenna* (in *Michigan Germanic Studies* 3 (1977), 1–12). There is, of course, no end to the secondary literature that could have been used in Wyatt's discussion of Freyr; it is a question whether this kind of extensive but elementary presentation is needed in an edition of the story, but some notice should have been taken, I think, of recent literature on the Christian treatment of comparable pagan material, such as T. M. Andersson on the idol of Gudbrandsdal (in Gerd Wolfgang Weber, ed., *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See* (1988), 261–84). The discussion of *Völsa þátrr* would be more responsible with

an allusion to Heusler's article (in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 13 (1903), 24–39), still the principal general treatment, and to the study by Gro Steinsland and Kari Vogt in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 96 (1981), 87–106. Wyatt does argue—and convincingly—against Helga Reuschel's article on his *þáttir*, but he does not even mention that of A. H. Krappé (in *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 3 (1928–29), 226–33). In puzzling over 'why [the two constituent stories of his *þáttir*] were brought together in the first place' Wyatt tentatively proposes: 'It could be argued that they are thematically related, each offering a story of self-redemption after going astray, the first in conformity with the old heathen ethic of achieving honour by blood-revenge, the second following the Christian ideal of repentance and reform' (p. xxix). I would have to agree, since this is exactly the major theme of my article on the *þáttir*, which (though referred to in the Bibliography) goes unacknowledged here. Wyatt's musings on generic classifications proceed as if there were no antecedent literature on the subject; especially relevant to p. xxxiv would have been my 1980 effort (in *Folklore Forum* 13, 158–98) on *Røgnvalds þáttir ok Rauðs* and a subgenre that centres on the opposition of Christianity and paganism, but two more of my articles deal extensively with this group; they will be found in John Lindow *et al.*, eds, *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature* (1986), 187–219, and in Flemming G. Andersen and Morten Nøjgaard, eds, *The Making of the Couple* (1991), 43–66. None of these studies is cited; nor is my overview 'Þættir' in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (1982–89), XII 1–6, with its extensive bibliography.

The *þáttir* is a small sub-field, and its literature relatively easily mastered. Nevertheless, I would not want to argue that the *Forschungsbericht*, as invented in Germany and perfected in Italy, should precede every word an anglophone writes. Conventions vary, but to avoid provinciality scholarship must, in my opinion, come to terms with what has been written, not merely citing it, but engaging with it in the course of building an independent argument. Of course there are limits to anyone's reading in secondary literature, and reinventing the wheel can be a good exercise; but in a series expressly for students, I feel, there should be a sense of intellectual engagement with the tradition of scholarship.

JOSEPH HARRIS

BOTH ONE AND MANY: ESSAYS ON CHANGE AND VARIETY IN LATE NORSE HEATHENISM. By JOHN MCKINNELL. With an appendix by MARIA ELENA RUGGERINI. *Philologia* 1. Rome, 1994. 209 pp. + 17 ills.

'The whole [Norse] mythological system was rather fluid' (p. 23); 'if the system is seen as a shifting one, any meaning we attach to a myth should simply be what we believe it meant to the poet or artist who produced the work we are looking at, and perhaps (but not necessarily) to his or her contemporaries' (p. 26). In this collection of papers John McKinnell sets out his theoretical stall early. The texts, mythological figures and stories for which he offers close

readings cannot be integrated into an overarching system designated as the 'Norse mythic world' and so they ought not to be teased into yielding up an 'original' form. McKinnell is content to look at what we have and, for the most part, to interpret the texts within their own system of signification, though his selection of texts which may be the products of 'late heathenism' means that possible Christian influence is frequently taken into account.

From this standpoint then, McKinnell proceeds from a chapter entitled 'Basic Considerations' to an analysis of the functions of Loki. Chapter 3 deals with the various tellings of the myth of Þórr and Geirrðöðr while Chapters 4 and 5 offer close readings of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Völuspá*. An appendix by Maria Elena Ruggerini, containing some observations on *Vafþrúðnismál* and some lexical notes, completes the book.

The study originated in a series of lectures given at the University of Rome; hence the style is simple, there is considerable paraphrase of the plots of the different texts and a kind of lecturer's bonhomie survives the revisions. McKinnell states at the outset that he has produced 'a series of distinct papers on different topics' (p. 9), linked by the theme of variety; thus it would be churlish to complain of the disunified nature of the volume. Nevertheless some inconsistencies may strike the reader. The assertion that we must interpret myths in terms of what they have meant to the authors of individual texts sits rather uneasily with McKinnell's treatment of *Lokasenna*. Admittedly the full argument concerning Loki's motivation in this poem is set out in McKinnell's article in *Saga-Book* 22:3–4 (1987–88), 234–62, but it underpins much of what he has to say about Loki here. If Loki is seeking to provoke the gods to bind him in order to hasten the onset of Ragnarök, this seems to point to a more complex and interrelated mythic system than McKinnell has suggested earlier in his book.

The chapter on Þórr and Geirrðöðr sets out with exemplary clarity the different versions of the pattern of this myth in *Þórdrápa*, the *Poetic Edda*, Snorri and Saxo. McKinnell is adamant in his rejection of Margaret Clunies Ross's socio-psychological approach to *Þórdrápa*, finding that 'social reasons for this mistrust of women, especially among aristocratic men, are not hard to suggest' (p. 70). The examples he adduces from the sagas, however, are of dubious relevance; even if one does not wish to accept all of Clunies Ross's suggestions, the psychological reading remains productive as a means of interpreting *Þórdrápa*, and, as McKinnell himself demonstrates on p. 78, also illuminates *Hymiskviða*. There is an unexamined assumption, most insistent in this chapter, that humankind—in particular the poet and his audience—will identify with Þórr and his exploits and find 'messages' in the poetry: '[Þórr's] followers could also take heart, whatever unheroic situations they might be placed in' (p. 81). On what basis we can assume that texts that deal with the Æsir and their giant antagonists while scarcely mentioning humans are at some level 'really' carriers of messages to humans is never made clear.

The chapters on *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Völuspá* are detailed and valuable analyses of those texts; the poems are ascribed to roughly the same period and the author demonstrates the distinctive use each poet made of the origin and developing history of the cosmos. *Vafþrúðnir's* display of knowledge is, rather

unfairly, castigated as ‘an empty parade of knowledge without wisdom, reflecting *Vafþrúðnir*’s arrogance but no real understanding of the world’ (p. 94); this characterisation does not square with the progress of the contest nor with what one understands to be its rules. Reference to Anne Holtsmark’s sensible suggestion that the questioner must know the answers to his questions if he is to verify the truth of the replies might have clarified both McKinnell’s and Ruggerini’s understanding of the contest’s rules. McKinnell’s proposal that the suspense in the poem is generated by the anxiety that Óðinn will not be able to ‘put the unanswerable question before the giant realises who his questioner is’ (p. 101) is an intriguing one. Not every reader will be persuaded that the unmasking of Óðinn is a significant risk however, since it occurs nowhere else in the corpus; giants simply do not recognise Óðinn until he chooses to reveal himself; hence frost-giants turn up at the hall of Hávi in *Hávamál* 109 enquiring about the health of *Boļverkr/Óðinn* who has just stolen the mead of poetry.

The speaker in *Völuspá* too is found guilty of deploying ‘mere knowledge’ as opposed to Óðinn’s ‘wisdom’, though it is conceded that she does understand ‘causal links’; this makes the distinction between the speaker’s knowledge and the interlocutor’s rather confusing. The reading of *Völuspá* might have benefited from the useful concept of the ‘mythic present’. By the end of *Völuspá* ‘Ragnarøk is upon us and there is no time to do anything more about it’ (p. 114), but there is no suggestion in the framework of *Völuspá* that the ‘fimbulvetr’, described in the body of the poem as happening in the future, has in fact occurred—indeed it is not clear that Baldr is already dead. The analysis of *Völuspá* modulates into a broadly Nordalian interpretation of the poem as driven by a (probably) Christian morality, though in places McKinnell’s reading conflicts with Nordal’s. Little account is taken of other writing on *Völuspá* however.

In the appendix Ruggerini makes a series of points about various lexical and linguistic aspects of *Vafþrúðnismál* and comparable poems; though whether *Höfuðlausn* belongs to the wisdom contest tradition is debatable (p. 143). Some of these observations are securely grounded and point towards a degree of lexical characterisation of Óðinn as a speaker, others are less so, however, for instance the suggestion on p. 165, on the basis of two examples, that ‘*mæla orðom*’ might be an Odinic trait.

*Both One and Many* represents a useful contribution to the sceptical position in the debate about Eddic poetry and its meaning. How we read Eddic poetry is a question which has been considered only intermittently in recent years; the dearth of writing in English on the mythological poems of the Edda means that little debate of any kind has been generated beyond close readings of one or two texts. However, with the publication of this book, Margaret Clunies Ross’s *Prolonged Echoes I* (1994) and Terry Gunnell’s book on *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (1995), a new era of Edda studies in English seems to be dawning. McKinnell’s writing, in particular the work on *Vafþrúðnismál*, will carry discussion forward into that era.

SKÍRNISMÁL: MODELL EINES EDDA-KOMMENTARS. By KLAUS VON SEE, BEATRICE LA FARGE, EVE PICARD and MARIA-CLAUDIA HESS. Universitätsverlag C. Winter. Heidelberg, 1993. 101 pp.

This commentary on *Skírnismál* is offered as a model for future commentaries on other Edda poems which, when combined, will ultimately form a *Gesamtkommentar* on the whole corpus of Eddic verse. The authors of this first volume invite their readers to regard it as a test of procedures and methods of presentation which will, depending on how they are received, be carried forward in this or a modified form into the larger project.

The book opens with a section ('Zweck und Ziel des Kommentars', pp. 5–18) justifying this ambitious enterprise and stating its aims. A new general commentary on the poetic Edda is, it is claimed, long overdue. The Gering-Sijmons commentary, though still valuable, is now over half a century old, Detter-Heinzel and Boer even older. More recently, complete commentaries, or editions of all the Edda poems incorporating extensive commentaries, have been conceived but have foundered (Magnus Olsen) or been slow to appear (Ursula Dronke). The heavy administrative burden under which most university teachers now labour is held responsible for this lamentable state of affairs; no one scholar has the time to complete anything so long in the writing as a general commentary on the Edda poems. One of the consequences of this is that any kind of broad evaluation of work on individual aspects of the subject is indefinitely delayed.

The shortcomings of the commentaries already published are mentioned. Of the more recent efforts, Olsen is blamed for allowing his special interests in runology and onomastics to dominate his work, Dronke for overestimating the archaic qualities of the texts she edits. All the earlier general commentaries have inevitably dated. Thus Gering's contribution, in some respects out of date even when it was published, is overburdened with metrical emendations according to Sievers's five-types theory, and vitiated further by the author's commitment to a nature-based mythology, monolithic and static, of which the texts themselves afford only occasional glimpses—a view greatly at odds with the currently prevailing conception of Germanic mythological and religious ideas as fluid, varied and unsystematic. The style and genre of individual poems have never received proper attention. Detter-Heinzel is praised for its careful linguistic analysis but criticised for its neglect of historical and mythological questions. Boer was too ready to explain textual difficulties in terms of interpolation and revision during the course of transmission. The present authors join with Andreas Heusler in condemning all three of these older commentaries as preoccupied with minor details and consequently more or less blind to the broader interest and significance of the primary texts upon which they are based.

The choice of *Skírnismál* as *Demonstrationsobjekt* for a new commentary was determined partly by the fact that its subject-matter is largely unrepresented in other Eddic poems (though this does imply that the real test of this series will be the way it handles poems which require much more cross-

referencing than this one). Another attractive factor was the sheer variety of current critical opinions of the poem, which the authors see as a challenge to find the right balance in a commentary between the presentation of objective information and the divergent interpretations of critics. The authors are generally very scrupulous in attending to problems of method and procedure, some of them difficult to solve in practice. For example, a strophe-by-strophe, line-by-line commentary (*Stellenkommentar*) cannot hope to convey an idea of a poem's general nature as a literary work; nor does it offer the right framework for exploring the literary-historical milieu from which the poem emerged. Yet if the *Stellenkommentar* fails to keep in view a strong idea of the poem as a whole, it will suffer from the myopia which Heusler condemned in the early commentaries. Some place must be found for general observations and ideas in a commentary, but where should they come? The present authors' solution to this problem is to preface the *Stellenkommentar* itself with an introduction dealing with general matters and providing summaries of topics later considered piecemeal at various points in the *Stellenkommentar*. Again, we will have to wait for later volumes in this series to see how cross-referencing between individual commentaries is handled. Obviously there will be difficult decisions to be made about the degree of repetition permitted from commentary to commentary.

Careful thought has obviously been given to the structure and content of the introduction to the commentary. A standardised scheme consisting of ten numbered sections (p. 12) has been designed with a view to providing an adequate framework for discussion of any Eddic poem:

- §1 bibliography;
- §2 an account of the manuscripts and of the textual condition in which the poem has survived;
- §3 a history of modern criticism of the poem;
- §4 a broad history of the poem's subject-matter and of any later literary manifestations of this material;
- §5 the imaginative and generic conception of the poem;
- §6 form and structure;
- §7 metrical character;
- §8 vocabulary and stylistic peculiarities;
- §9 position of the poem in literary history;
- §10 date of composition of the poem.

Each of these ten sections is liable to subdivision into paragraphs on particular topics, indicated by lower-case letters (here only §§ 2 and 10, both very brief, are not subdivided in this way), the aim of this subdivision being to enable the user to find the appropriate part of the introduction when the *Stellenkommentar* refers back to it. The presentation of the bibliography is quite complicated. First comes a general bibliography, with primary and secondary sources listed separately, consisting of works dealing in some way with several Eddic poems. The bibliography for each individual poem which follows will invariably be tripartite, as it is here: under a) come references back to the general bibliography

giving the page-numbers of those works which refer to the poem currently being commented on; under b) appear (with full bibliographical details) works dealing only with the poem in question; and under c) are to be found works testifying to the later survival of the poem's subject-matter. This elaborate system seems to work well, especially as the authors have distinguished between works listed under a) and those under b) and c) by citing (both in the bibliography itself and elsewhere in the book) the first in lower-case letters, the second in capitals (e. g. p. 41, §5, 'Larrington 1992, 143; s. auch LARRINGTON 1993, 5f.'). Reference back to the bibliography from the commentary is an easy matter as a result.

Another theoretical problem faced here is the proper attitude of the commentator to the history of the text. The authors of the present work emphasise very firmly the importance of accepting the surviving text as it is, rather than as it might have been at some earlier stage in its development; indeed, they claim that the commentary's main task is to reveal the coherence of this surviving version as a product of a certain milieu (p. 9: 'Die vornehmliche Aufgabe des Kommentars wird es daher sein, die Stimmigkeit dieser überlieferten Fassungen herauszuarbeiten, sie als Ausdruck eines bestimmten kulturellen, sozialen und literarischen Milieus zu begreifen und nicht als bloßes Abfallprodukt ihrer nichtüberlieferten Vorgeschichte'). There is no doubt that this is a sensible *initial* approach to any medieval text, particularly as a test of its coherence; but it seems to me to embody some very modern and so possibly anachronistic (and prejudicial) assumptions about medieval authors and how they worked. I was reminded here of J. R. R. Tolkien's approach to the Old English poem *Beowulf* in his essay: '*Beowulf*: the monsters and the critics' (*Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936), 245–95) where he drew a similarly firm distinction between the 'original or aboriginal nature' of the 'ancient and largely traditional material' out of which *Beowulf* is made, supposed to be of interest only to antiquarians, and 'what the poet did with it', which is the concern of literary criticism (see p. 250). No one would oppose the disencumbering of a medieval text from the burden of supposed or even real antecedents if its true literary character stood revealed as a result; but this approach does imply certain rather large assumptions about the attitudes of the poet to his material. It is almost bound, in effect, to cast this poet in the mould of an independent-minded, innovative literary artist, organising the fragments of received traditions and imposing a fresh unity upon them in line with his own interests and priorities; but for all we know, the organising and unifying tendencies of the *Beowulf* poet and the Edda poets alike may have been tempered with standards and enthusiasms hidden from us—a regard, for example, for literary or non-literary qualities inherent in the material they received, qualities they thought worth preserving, perhaps at the expense of the kind of artistic coherence the modern critic of these works looks for as a test of their value. It is worth remembering, for example, that the distinction between material and treatment made by the authors of this commentary, though an easy one for us to make, might well have been meaningless to a medieval poet working within a tradition of composition retaining a considerable residuum of 'oral' habits and thought and procedure.

It therefore seems to me that, although it is both convenient and methodologically sensible to work on the hypothesis that any Eddic poem is wholly the product of one age, one place and one poet, we should be prepared to modify our critical perspective if and when we are faced with narrative inconsistencies, apparent irrelevancies, dislocations of one kind or another—all, perhaps, signs of a complex history of the story within which the surviving text is, so to speak, in transit. It is to be hoped that the authors of this series of commentaries will not seek to obscure these less satisfactory aspects of the texts they work on, but will respond to them with sensitivity and caution.

I can find little to criticise in the technical presentation of this volume, or in the coverage of the *Stellenkommentar*, which seems exemplary. I would have liked to see some discussion of the parallels between str. 35 and the Norse poem ‘The Waking of Angantýr’, especially in the phrase *undir viðar rótum*, used in the latter poem in a terrestrial context of grave-mounds, which closely matches *Skírnismál* 35/5 *á viðar rótom* and supports the impression of the death-like state of existence with which Gerðr is threatened under the terms of the curse (see my ‘*The Wife’s Lament and Skírnismál: some parallels*’, *Úr Döllum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. Rory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n. s. 11 (1989), 221); but one cannot but admire the skill and thoroughness with which the secondary literature on *Skírnismál* has been sifted and summarised. If future volumes match this one, the study of Eddic verse will have taken an important step forward.

PETER ORTON

NORDENS KRISTNANDE I EUROPEISKT PERSPEKTIV. By PER BESKOW and REINHART STAATS. *Occasional Papers on Medieval Topics* 7. *Viktoria Bokförlag*. Skara, 1994. 62 pp.

This balloon of a title strings along three short but rewarding papers. Professor Staats of Kiel prints a lecture, ‘Missionshistoria som “Geistesgeschichte”'; ledmotiv i den nordeuropeiska missionshistorien 789–1104’. Like English, Swedish can apparently offer no adequate rendering of *Geistesgeschichte*, so the author thoughtfully explains what the term implies in German scholarship. We might perhaps roughly paraphrase it as the study of a given period’s mental and emotional climate viewed in the conditions of that period. He then deals in well-known facts, with authority and occasionally a little fantasy, but shades his emphases with sympathy and originality. In keeping with current modes of mission thought, he stresses that the conversion process involves not simply central cultic change but large-scale cultural mutation. The substance of Christianity may be differently moulded and coloured in different surroundings, but it is not essentially altered. I may mention one or two of the numerous sensible and suggestive points that he makes. Semantic studies are of basic importance and can be undertaken in good heart, not because we know that much about, say,

eleventh-century Danish or Swedish but because our interpretations can be reliably guided by the continuity of Christian teaching and practice as then established in the western world. While we should not underestimate political pressures, secular and ecclesiastical, in leading toward conversion, we should not overestimate them either. The propagators of the Faith in the North did their work before crusades were legitimised. They made a deep impression through their schools and their hospitality (both strong in the Benedictine tradition), doubtless through diplomatic gift-giving too. To maintain these and to advance their proselytising, prosperity and peace—not dominion as such—were imperative needs, and the missions promoted these ends directly and indirectly. Corporate dedication to poverty would have made little sense in the missionary circumstances. The author cites Rimbert's description of the commercial benefits which followed Ansgar's mission to Slesvig—German merchants then felt safe to go there—and he would see ambition for similar benefit in the initial response to Ansgar in Birka. But the author has many more wise things to say and his paper may be warmly welcomed, not least perhaps because it gives those of us who are more familiar with Norway and the Atlantic islands and their connections with the British Isles a cheering glimpse of the North German perspective on the Scandinavian conversion.

In the other two papers Dr Beskow of Lund considers special topics but elucidates them against a wide background. In 'Runor och liturgi' he criticises the authors of two recent discussions of runic inscriptions of Christian import (E. Segelberg, 'Missionshistoriska aspekter på runinskrifterna', *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 1983, 45–57; C. F. Hallencreutz, 'Runstenarnas teologi: våra första uttryck för inhemsk kristendomstolkning', *Religion och Bibel* 1982, 47–56), either for making too much of native independence in the formulation of the inscriptions' Christian elements, or for finding more direct Byzantine influence in them than the evidence can possibly warrant. Beskow works through the contexts and terminology: prayers for the soul, God, *Drotten*, Christ, the verb *hjalpa*, the nouns *andi* and *säl(a)*, God's Mother, light and paradise, Michael, the phrase 'better than he deserved'; and ends with consideration of some later runic messages in Latin. He shows convincingly that they are all best understood in terms of missionary preaching and the requiem liturgy. He sensibly thinks that liturgical explication would have been no less, and probably more, significant in catechetical instruction than biblical exposition. Some terms are used in the North which do not have immediate parallels in the early English, Saxon and Frisian which provided most of the Christian vocabulary of Scandinavia. One such is *hvitavädir* for the baptismal robe. Beskow notes that this term is known from six Uppland inscriptions; in fact, it is known in damaged form certainly from one more, possibly from two, see Lena Peterson, *Svenskt runordsregister*, 1989, s. v. (I may mention in passing that Beskow does not seem to know Erik Moltke's *Runerne i Danmark og deres oprindelse*, 1976, a not-to-be-neglected revision of his and Lis Jacobsen's *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, 1942.) He goes on, 'Förutom i dessa inskrifter och på ett ställe i Flateyarbók [sic] (1, 383) är ordet obekant i germanska språk.' The term *hvitavädir* is of

course nothing like as rare in West Norse as he claims. It occurs in a section on *guðsifjar* in *Gulapingslög* and *Frostapingslög*, see E. Hertzberg in *Norges gamle Love* V, 1895, s. v.; and Fritzner offers six other Icelandic instances, as well as *hvítvæðungur* in *Eigi var hann enn þa scírþr, oc görði hann þó hvítvæðungs verc . . .* (*Heilagra manna sögur*, ed. C. R. Unger, 1877, I 554/26–27; cf. *hvítvæðings verk* in another text of the same passage, ed. cit. I 608/25), which answers literally, and surely also idiomatically, to *Necdum tamen regeneratus in Christo, agebat quendam . . . baptismi candidatum* (*Sulpicii Severi Vita Martini*, ed. Jan W. Smit, in *Vite dei Santi*, ed. Christine Mohrmann, IV, 1975, cap. 2, ll. 32–34). As commonly acknowledged, the origin of *hvítavāðir* is not itself obscure, it is a calque on *vestis alba*, *vestes albae*, *vestimenta candida*, the act and phrase of the baptismal rite, ‘Accipe vestem candidam, quam immaculatam perferas ante tribunal Domini nostri Jesu Christi’—and missionaries obviously thought in Latin as well as in their vernaculars. Beskow mentions Sven B. F. Jansson’s suggestion that it was formulated in some mission centre and spread from there to Uppland and Iceland. It is certainly natural to think that some appropriate terms arose from discussion between missionaries and converts, which were then either established or replaced in the usage of first-generation native clerics. Beskow would not venture an opinion on where the mission centre might have been in this case, and the second element in the compound could as well have been prompted by Old Saxon *geuuēde* as Anglo-Saxon *wæde*, *gewæde*, though the collocation found in *hvítavāðir* is recorded in neither of these dialects. One might perhaps prefer attribution to a western mission centre, but only on tentative analogy with the well-attested *hvítadagar*, *hvítasunnudagr*, *hvítadróttinsdagr* for Whit week, Whitsun(day), terms which are restricted to West Norse and have only English antecedents. (Early Danish and Swedish followed specific German usage in calling the Sunday before Ash Wednesday ‘White Sunday’; German *Weisser Sonntag* for Low Sunday, *Dominica in albis*, earlier *post albas*, is said not to have become established until late medieval times.) Easter and Pentecost were of course the prescribed major baptismal seasons, and though the Latin liturgical *albae* referred only to the weekdays after the paschal ceremony (and still linger in *sabbatum* and *Dominica in albis*), the vernacular ‘white’ in English and Norwegian and Icelandic, undoubtedly derived from the baptismal custom, became confined to Whitsunday and Whit week.

Lund had 24 churches in the Middle Ages, including three monastic churches and two outside the walls (the cathedral had no parochial function). In ‘Kyrkodedikationer i Lund’ Dr Beskow studies their *patrocinia* with reference to their location and date (archaeology is indispensable), comparison with the dedications of churches in other Danish and Swedish townships (evidence of rural dedications is scanty) and due consideration of foreign influence, pilgrimage and the availability of relics. Much of interest emerges. The John the Baptist dedication of the cathedral crypt, with its natural well, may very likely be on the model of San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome’s prime baptismal church. Dedications to Stephen, Clement, Martin and Botulf, for example, are eleventh-

century in origin; the presence of Botulf is a well-known sign of English influence, of which there are few traces in Lund after about 1060. Following Erik Cinthio, Dr Beskow plausibly links the choice of Lawrence as patron of the cathedral church with Sven Estridsen's visit to Emperor Henry III in Merseburg in 1053; the cathedral there had been dedicated to Lawrence after Otto I's victory over the Magyars at Lechfeld on the saint's day in 955. In the dedication to *Drotten* Dr Beskow believes the appellation is to be equated with *Salvator*, a customary title in the missionary period for a first church on a central site in a settlement. He refers to the Lateran *Basilica Sancti Salvatoris*, and mentions Christ Church, Canterbury, among similar instances. Bede's full phrasing—he says that the church was dedicated by Augustine *in nomine sancti Saluatoris Dei et Domini nostri Iesu Christi (Historia ecclesiastica*, lib. I, cap. xxxiii)—may point up for us the way in which the term *Drotten*, *Dominus*, subsuming all Christ's attributes, came to have pre-eminent appeal in the North. In both his papers Beskow rightly emphasizes the 'Christomonism' of the missionary message: Christ is God, the Blessed Virgin is God's Mother, and so on, with no complication of the Persons. Erik Ejegod's pilgrimages around 1100, to Rome, Bari and Constantinople, and relics acquired by him must have had most influence on the choice of Nicholas and Holy Cross, while a dedication to St Godehard, unique in Denmark, can be confidently attributed to the interest of Eskil, archbishop of Lund from 1138 till his resignation in 1177. In his teens Eskil had studied at the cathedral school in Hildesheim, ten or fifteen years before Godehard, bishop there 1022–38, was enshrined in 1131. Olaf of Norway and Magnus of Orkney are represented, but not before the end of the twelfth century and perhaps rather later than that in the case of Magnus. There is much more to be learnt from Dr Beskow's research, and it is to be hoped that we shall soon have further studies, on the same intelligent lines, of other concentrations of church dedications in Scandinavia. They would do much to deepen and refine our perceptions of the process of *Nordens kristnande*.

PETER FOOTE

THE REIGN OF CNUT: KING OF ENGLAND, DENMARK AND NORWAY. Edited by ALEXANDER R. RUMBLE. *Studies in the Early History of Britain*. Leicester University Press. London, 1994. xviii + 341 pp.

1995 marks the (probable) millennium of the birth of Cnut and this may explain the recent flurry of interest in him. The first biography of Cnut, by Laurence M. Larson, was published in 1912, the second, by M. K. Lawson, only came eighty-one years later in 1993. Their very title-pages suggest a difference in approach. Larson's book, published in New York, was called *Canute the Great, 995(circ)–1035, and the Rise of Danish Imperialism during the Viking Age*. The use of the epithet and the hint that Cnut's empire somehow survived, not only him, but also the Viking Age, sets up a Danish Empire as a

kind of Scandinavian precursor or even rival to the British Empire on which the sun was then just setting. Lawson, published in London, manages to suggest in his title (*Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*) that Cnut's reign was merely a blip in the otherwise orderly progress of English history, an intervention by a foreign tourist whose 'reign was characterized by a spirit of compromise and a conspicuous display of continuity with the immediate Anglo-Saxon past' (as Lesley Abrams put it in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 August 1994, p. 24). As a collection of essays, some of which started life at a conference in Manchester in 1990, the volume under review eschews such reductive positions and its carefully-balanced title manages to give Cnut his due without making overblown claims for his significance. Although reviewers sometimes complain that collections of essays, in their variety and inconsistency, lack the coherence of the well-rounded monograph, we are surely glad, after two well-rounded monographs on Cnut, to have this rougher-edged but more stimulating volume.

The editor introduces the book by setting 'Cnut in context', and many of the chapters tell us about some aspect of his reign, often in the form of 'Cnut's X'. Thus, we are told about his Scandinavian empire (Peter Sawyer, with an appendix by Birgit Sawyer on the evidence of runic inscriptions), his Danish kingdom (Niels Lund), his earls (Simon Keynes), his skalds (Roberta Frank), his archbishop (M. K. Lawson), his coinage (Kenneth Jonsson) and even his bones (John Crook). There is an outline of military developments in his reign (Nicholas Hooper). Two chapters raise questions (and answer them rather equivocally), 'Danish place-names and personal names in England: the influence of Cnut?' (Gillian Fellows-Jensen) and 'An urban policy for Cnut?' (David Hill). The last chapter reports at length on 'An iron reverse die of the reign of Cnut' found in London in 1991 (Michael O'Hara and others). Finally, in a 'Textual Appendix', Alexander Rumble provides an annotated edition and translation of Osbern's account of the translation of St Ælfheah's relics from London to Canterbury in 1023, mainly, it seems, because it is otherwise 'available in print only from editions of 1691 and 1701' (p. 2). The chapter on Cnut's bones and the numismatic contributions are fully illustrated, and there are a number of useful tables, particularly the 'Select list of political events, 1001–42' (Table 1.1) and the 'Attestations of earls in the charters of King Cnut' (Table 4.1). The Index is quite good on people, places and coins, more variable on texts, and the arrangement takes some getting used to. Thus, most Old Norse prose texts are listed under 'sagas', but *Ágrip* is distinguished by appearing under 'chronicles, annals and histories' along with *Historia Norwegiae*. Snorri Sturluson gets his own entry, as do chroniclers, but court poets are listed only under 'skaldic verse'. The reader has to work quite hard to follow up points raised by the contributors, as the footnotes in each chapter too often make use of short titles separated by an unknown number of pages and footnotes from the original reference which gave full details. A summary bibliography would have been a great help. However, despite the inevitable inconsistencies, there is a wealth of information and scholarship in this book to delight all Cnutophiles

and stimulate them to the proverbial further research (some ‘areas of study’ are helpfully outlined by Rumble on p. 2). In particular, Simon Keynes’s chapter on the charter evidence for Cnut’s earls is exemplary in setting out some quite difficult material in a way that will be of both interest and use to specialists in other disciplines.

As the subtitle makes clear, the editor was concerned to give the Scandinavian dimension its due (though there is some scrappy proofreading of anything in a Scandinavian language in some of the chapters and in the Index). Gillian Fellows-Jensen turns in her usual polished performance, though the question mark in her title (see above) suggests that she doubts its real relevance to the theme of the volume. She continues the ancient English practice (first recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) of using ‘Danish’ where ‘Scandinavian’ (or ‘Norse’) might occasionally be more judicious, or even more accurate. Roberta Frank is both scholarly and witty as usual, though her chapter should be read in conjunction with her contribution to the Jónas Kristjánsson *Festschrift* (‘When poets address princes’, in Gísli Sigurðsson *et al.*, eds, *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni* 1994, 189–95) for a fuller picture of Cnut in skaldic verse. Curiously, Frank adopts the rearrangement of the stanzas of Hallvarðr háreksblei’s *Knútsdrápa* proposed in Bjarne Fidjestøl’s ‘Skjematisk oversyn over korpus’ (*Det norrøne fyrstediktet* 1982, 172), taking no notice of Finnur Jónsson’s reconstruction in *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigting*. The latter (based on the content of the stanzas) seems quite logical to me and, in an uncharacteristic glitch, Fidjestøl elsewhere in his book (p. 125) describes this arrangement as ‘meir eller mindre sikker’ and fails to justify his own rearrangement of the stanzas. Frank’s bald statement (p. 119) that ‘the surviving stanzas have been reassembled as follows’ should thus have been glossed. Birgit Sawyer quite rightly stresses the importance of runic inscriptions for the study of the period, but the particular use she makes of them is not convincing. She simply restates the argument put forward by Peter Sawyer in *The Making of Sweden* (1989, 34–35, and repeated in the Swedish version, *När Sverige blev Sverige* 1991, 54) that Swedish runic inscriptions, particularly those containing the words *þægn* and *drengr*, provide evidence that ‘Drengs who fought for Swein or Cnut and survived may well have continued as thegns to accept him as their royal lord after returning home. It is indeed possible that they had some special status as royal agents’ (p. 25). The evidence will simply not bear the weight of this interpretation (as I try to show in ‘Skaldic and runic vocabulary and the Viking Age: A research project,’ in *Developments around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age*, ed. Björn Ambrosiani and Helen Clarke, 1994, 294–301) and constant repetition does not strengthen it.

There is no doubt that, from a historical point of view, skaldic verse and runic inscriptions are the most important Old Norse sources for the eleventh century. Yet the Cnutophile with an interest in Old Norse studies may still feel somewhat cheated; even given historians’ understandable nervousness about sagas, the absence of any sustained consideration of Old Norse prose literature in this volume is remarkable (there is even less mention of them in Lawson’s book).

You would have to read Roberta Frank's footnotes quite carefully to discover that her 'contemporary' poetry survives only in prose texts of the thirteenth century or later. Most of the index entries under 'sagas' refer, not to the chapters by the five Scandinavianists, but to Simon Keynes's chapter, in which he gives a brief summary of the sources for Cnut. Keynes is quite open (p. 48) about turning 'with some sense of relief' from considering saga sources to the Anglo-Saxon charters, in which he is a specialist. But surely he could have been spared the agony in the first place? It is extraordinary that no saga-specialist was invited to contribute to this volume. Like skaldic verse, the sagas may not be 'well suited to the mundane purposes of an Anglo-Saxon historian' (Keynes, p. 46), but they do have a contribution to make. Unlike the historian, who mines the sagas for nuggets of information and then worries about how 'genuine' those nuggets might be, the saga-specialist has an overview of all the relevant texts, their relationships (which are quite complicated for the Kings' Sagas), their sources, the extent to and ways in which they structure the evidence of their sources and so on. A saga-specialist could have pointed out that there are more versions of *Jómsvíkinga saga* than the one edited and translated by Norman Blake (pp. 12, 48). While Roberta Frank bemoans (p. 107) the 'scrappy and late preservation of the verse', a scholar considering this verse in its prose contexts would have asked why these particular stanzas were preserved and not others; was it chance, or did the twelfth- and thirteenth-century historians choose their evidence to match their theories? And, if so, what can we learn from that choice and those theories? However, it may not be entirely the historians' fault; most saga-specialists have long since turned from the historical bias of the old philology to the blandishments of literary theories, and the increasing emphasis on the Icelandicness of Old Norse texts devalues the real contribution those texts can also make to the study of Anglo-Scandinavian cultural and political connections, most of all perhaps for the eleventh century.

JUDITH JESCH

DICTIONARY OF NORTHERN MYTHOLOGY. By RUDOLF SIMEK. Translated by ANGELA HALL. *D. S. Brewer*. Cambridge, 1993. xiv + 424 pp.

This volume is an enlarged version, translated into English, of Rudolf Simek's *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*, published in 1984 by Alfred Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart. It gives an alphabetically-arranged set of short entries (maximum length is about six pages, minimum length a few lines) on a whole range of topics relevant to 'the mythology and religion of all Germanic tribes—Scandinavians as well as Goths or Angles and Saxons.' Its vast scope is a considerable achievement and it fills a gap in the English-language reference books available to students of Germanic mythology. It is thus to be welcomed. Given its range, it is not surprising that it does not altogether satisfy this reviewer as a scholarly reference tool in areas where she feels able to pass judgement.

As the Preface to the English edition asserts, the dictionary has been ‘updated, enlarged and indeed thoroughly revised by the author.’ In this reviewer’s estimation, that assertion is true in some senses but not in others. Many bibliographical references have been added, to cover the years between 1984 and 1992 and to inject more English-language secondary material into the Bibliography; some new entries have been written and there has been some updating of entries. However, the dictionary is not really up to date in its assimilation of the ideas about Northern (or Germanic) mythology which have become current in the last twenty-five years or so and projects a rather old-fashioned, positivist approach to its subject-matter. The authorial tone admits no room for doubt, even on rather controversial subjects. Sometimes, though, Simek actually espouses a particular point of view without revealing what it is, which may mislead the inexperienced reader. An example is the apparently Dumézilian first line of the interpretive section of his entry on the god Loki, which states: ‘Loki is a god without a function’ (p. 193).

A few examples will give some idea of the dictionary’s positivist stance. Simek’s entry on the topic *hierós gámos* (p. 146) begins by stating: ‘The *hierós gámos* is the wedding between the god of heaven and the mother goddess of earth . . . Odin’s various love adventures . . . should be seen as reflections of a *hierós gámos*, even if Odin was not originally the Germanic god of heaven.’ Though he adds a reference to Gro Steinsland’s 1991 book on this subject (discussed by Rory McTurk in *Saga-Book* 24:1 (1994), 27–30), he gives no hint of its argument in his entry, nor does he reveal anything of the debate that has gone on in recent years about the applicability of the *hierós gámos* concept to Germanic myth and to Old Norse literature in particular. We see a similar lack of signposting to the give-and-take of contemporary research in his entry on ‘Sacred kingship’ (pp. 269–71) and here also, though the ‘hot’ topic of the Germanic kings’ descent from the gods is mentioned, there is inadequate bibliographical reference to recent and extensive writing on the subject, especially but not exclusively in English-language publications. Some of the entries that relate to the evidence of material culture for early Germanic beliefs and cults are rather sparse; those on ‘Runes’ and ‘Runic inscriptions’ (pp. 268–69) do not mention the Bryggen (Bergen) corpus, which has added considerably to our knowledge of Norse mythological texts.

One interesting and valuable feature of the German first edition was its inclusion of material in the form of short notes and bibliographical entries on the modern reception history of Germanic mythology, both in literature and art. Simek was here well abreast of the growing international interest in medievalism, so it is a great pity that the English version of the dictionary has not expanded these notes to include references to English-language translations of Germanic myths and to literature and art inspired by them, to add to the German and Scandinavian references already in the first edition.

An area of inconsistency, in terms of the scope of the dictionary, which Simek half acknowledges in the Introduction (p. ix), may give the seeker after knowledge some headaches. The general field of what has traditionally been called Germanic heroic literature is sometimes included, sometimes not. The

guiding principle seems to be whether or not the topic relates to heathen Germanic religion (pp. ix, xii), but the author's criteria for selection and his definition of the central subject are not clarified. There are entries on Skjöldr, Scyld Scefing and Scyldingas, but nothing on Hrólfkraki, even though a number of medieval sources include him among the Scyldingas. There are short entries on Fafner and Fáfñir, but one searches in vain for Sigurðr/Siegfried.

The English translation, the work of Angela Hall, is in the main good and idiomatic, though it occasionally fails to convey the sense of Simek's German and to make much sense in English. The title itself could have done with an indefinite article: *A Dictionary of Northern Mythology* sounds more idiomatic to my ear than the book's actual title, and the justification for changing the reference from 'Germanic' to 'Northern' (p. vii) does not appear very convincing to me. The translation of the first of Walter Baetke's theories of sacral kingship as 'The king's fortune which is associated with his sacred position as a gift' (p. 270) fails to give the English-speaking reader the essential concepts conveyed by Simek's German 'Das Königsheil, das als Gabe mit seiner sakralen Stellung zusammenhängt.' And sometimes the translation is unidiomatic or stilted, as with the two negatives and superfluous definite articles in 'The *Hymiskviða*, which is not very much older than the *Snorra Edda*, is not the only other record for Snorri's text of Thor and the Midgard serpent' (p. 324), and the awkwardness of 'The meaningful names of the goats are surely a young invention' (p. 325).

There are also numerous typographical and other errors, which is unfortunate in a reference work. Without making an exhaustive check, I came upon such things as: 'He is the father of the god's [*for* gods'] enemies' (p. 193); 'the name of the divine ancestor of the kings could also be born [*sic*] as an honorary name' (p. 270); 'Odin Ho\*enir [*sic*] and Loðurr' (p. 21); 'Odin, Hönir and Loðurr' (p. 17); 'Schjødt, Peter' [*for* Schjødt, Jens Peter] (p. 414); four bibliographical entries under 'Clunies-Ross, Margaret' on p. 386 and one other under 'Ross, Margaret Clunies' on p. 413. The entries on 'Odin's migration' and 'Odin's exile' are badly conflated on pp. 246–48, where 'Odin's migration' appears twice as a heading, though the first of the two entries is contaminated by the second part of 'Odin's exile', which is missing in the first section. There is an erratum slip and a replacement page 246 with some copies of the book (though not in mine), but the mistake remains an inconvenience.

*Dictionary of Northern Mythology* bears unfortunate marks of haste and carelessness, which is to be regretted, as it will doubtless be consulted by students and the general reader for some time to come. I hope it will soon be possible for Professor Simek to improve the accuracy of his valuable book so that the less expert reader can use it with confidence.

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

ALVISSMÁL: FORSCHUNGEN ZUR MITTELALTERLICHEN KULTUR SKANDINAVIENS. Edited by EDGAR HAIMERL, THOMAS KRÖMMELBEIN, DONALD TUCKWILLER and ANDREAS VOLLMER. Berlin, 1992–.

Despite the editors' gingerly justification of the appearance of 'alvíssmál', no reasonable Old Norse scholar will begrudge its existence. Containing articles and reviews (in German, English and the Scandinavian languages) devoted entirely to the Scandinavian Middle Ages and at a subscription price of around 30DM (\$20/£13) per volume, the four well-edited volumes that have appeared to date are good value indeed. Unusually, there is not a single article on the *Íslendingasögur*: instead, eddic poetry, myth, Snorri Sturluson, the contemporary sagas, skaldic poetry and other topics as well receive treatment. Longer articles (presumably those over ten pages) written in German and the Scandinavian languages are provided with an English summary.

Volume 1 contains four articles, six reviews and two conference reports. The first article (by Carolyne Larrington in English) examines the 'gaps and absences' in Skírnir's curse in *Skírnismál* and concludes that what women want is 'intimacy with a lover, social standing, autonomy, and choice'. The second article (by Heinz Klingenberg in German) is the first instalment of a three-part rehabilitation (in opposition to Heusler, Faulkes and, although not mentioned, von See) of the middle sections of the Prologue to the prose *Edda*. The third article (by Reidar Astås in Norwegian) discusses the sources and special character of *Stjórn* IV. In the fourth article (in German, translated from Russian) Elena A. Gurevič traces 'the development of the *pula* genre in its three main forms—the mythological, the heroic, and the skaldic *pula*—in the literature of medieval Scandinavia' (cf. p. 67). The two informative conference reports (on the Eighth International Saga Conference in Gothenburg, 1991, by Donald Tuckwiller and on the Snorri Symposium in Greifswald, 1991, by Donald Tuckwiller and Stefanie Würth) testify to the reporters' stamina at conferences. (The reviews in all four volumes will be dealt with later.)

Volume 2 contains three articles: (1) William Sayers's lively comparative examination ('Irish Perspectives on Heimdallr') of Irish legendary history to extend our knowledge of the god; (2) Klingenberg's continuing discussion of Snorri's 'learned prehistory'; (3) Edgar Haimerl's stimulating reading (in German) of Sigurd's development into a hero in the 'Young Sigurd Poems', *Reginismál*, *Fáfnismál* and *Sigrdrífomál*. Six reviews and a report on the Viking exhibition in Berlin in the fall of 1992 complete the volume.

Volume 3 features five articles: (1) Rory McTurk's argument that the duped Gylfi tricks the Æsir by not believing them to be gods ('Fooling Gylfi: Who Tricks Who?') adds another dimension to a discussion of the Prologue's role; (2) the final instalment of Klingenberg's discussion of learned prehistory; (3) Anne Heinrichs ('The Search for Identity: A Problem after the Conversion') uses Freudian categories to speculate on 'personal and collective cultural identity in medieval Icelandic literature'; (4) Else Mundal argues (in Norwegian) that Ari fróði's *Íslendingabók* was the first attempt to write an *islandsk bispekrønike* and that Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae*

*pontificum* served as its literary model and inspirational source; (5) Reidar Astås examines (in Norwegian) the role played by the Bible references in *Porláks saga byskups*. Eight reviews appear in Volume 3.

Three of the five essays in volume 4 deal with *Sturlunga saga*: (1) Richard Gaskins's balanced article outlines 'a comparative strategy' between what he terms the Hobbesian, Freudian and Parsonian Visions, on the one hand, and Sturla's vision (*Íslendinga saga*), on the other, in order that the decline of values might be approached; (2) Lois Bragg's elegant article ('Disfigurement, Disability, and Disintegration in *Sturlunga saga*') offers, among other things, the kind of interpretation of Þorgils skarði that will, it may be hoped, provoke further discussion; (3) Thomas Krömmelbein (in German) suggests some of the implications of regarding *Geirmundar þátr heljarskinns*, together with *Sturlu þátr*, as a framing device for *Sturlunga saga*. In addition, John Lindow ('Bloodfeud in Scandinavian Mythology') imaginatively argues that 'the whole sweep of Scandinavian mythology . . . looks quite a lot like a feud' (p. 56). Finally, Judy Quinn traces 'the transformation of the oral art of skaldic composition into a literary *ars poetica*' from the mid-twelfth century to the mid-fourteenth century. Volume 4 also contains eight reviews and Margaret Clunies Ross's memorial tribute to Bjarne Fidjestøl.

Reviews give a journal its special character, for, unlike articles, they are chosen on the basis of their authors' track records. But horses, notoriously, do not always run true to form, so that we might wonder how the editors of a new journal reacted to the judgements of those (especially the large number of yearlings) whom they entered in the race. They would not have been surprised that Andersson (4 (1994)) liked McKinnell's book on heathenism, for few reviewers equal Andersson's generosity; nor that Heinrichs (2 (1993)) liked Whaley's book on *Heimskringla* (Andersson, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993), 559–601, perhaps liked it even more). Nor would a feminist's praise of a book about women by a woman (Larrington, 1 (1992), on Jesch's *Women in the Viking Age*) have raised many eyebrows; moreover, this admirable book has been well received by Frankis, *Scandinavica* 32 (1993), 81–82, Jochens, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993), 597–99, McTurk, *History* 78 (1993), 79–80, and Simek, *Skandinavistik* 22 (1992), 136–37. Nor, most likely, did Larrington's approval (3 (1994)) of Steinsland's book (*Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi*) ring any alarm bells given the appreciative remarks by McTurk (*Saga-Book* 24:1 (1994), 27–30) and Motz (*Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993), 443–45). The editors might even have welcomed the contrast to La Farge's negative response (*Skandinavistik* 24 (1994), 55–59) and the repeated citations of her review in *Skírnismál*, ed. Klaus von See *et al.* (Heidelberg, 1993). On the other hand, Harris's mild criticisms (4 (1994)), amidst general approval, of Larrington's *A Store of Common Sense* in contrast with Orchard's unreserved praise (*Medium Ævum* 63 (1994), 322–23) would not have seemed unusual. The editors might have thought—on the basis of Sørensen's mellow response in *Skandinavistik* 23 (1993), 141–42, to Strerath-Bolz's dissertation on the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda*—that perhaps Krömmelbein (1 (1992)) objects too much to what she did not write rather than to what she

did; they might also have been initially nervous (in the light of the positive reviews by Clover, *Speculum* 69 (1994), 571–72, Jochens, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93 (1994), 84–86, and Clunies Ross, *Skandinavistik* 24 (1994), 59–60) that Taylor’s reservations (2 (1993)) about Swenson’s book on the *mannjafnaðr* and the *senna* would look like claim-staking had it not been for Sayers’s comparable strictures (in *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993), 265–68) and Ober’s even more stringent objections (*Scandinavica* 32 (1993), 82–83). And they must have been pleased that Kreis (like Andersson, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 19 (1992), 197–210, at 200–02; Krause, *Skandinavistik* 23 (1993), 58–60; and Whaley, *Saga-Book* 23:7 (1993), 506–10) gave Poole’s book (*Viking Poems on War and Peace*) a hearty welcome (2 (1993)). They might also have been gratified to see that Weber’s views (4 (1994)) on Bagge’s examination of *Heimskringla* were in line with other positive appraisals (those of Andersson, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 19 (1992), 197–210, at 202–10, and Wolf, *Scandinavian Studies* 64 (1992), 473–75), especially considering Klaus von See’s condescending review (*Skandinavistik* 24 (1994), 149–51), but then made uncertain by Ciklamini’s lack of enthusiasm (in *Speculum* 69 (1994), 413–15). They must have been pleased that Klingenberg’s well-disposed review (1 (1992)) of Simek’s *Altnordische Kosmographie* agreed with Kreutzer’s remarks (*Skandinavistik* 22 (1992), 55–59) and took some of the sting out of Anthony Faulkes’s harsh treatment (*Saga-Book* 23:5 (1992), 396–99). They might have been surprised that Heinrichs (3 (1994)) expressed little enthusiasm for Würth’s book on the *þættir* in *Flateyjarbók* given Würth’s laudatory review two years earlier (1 (1992)) of Heinrichs’s book on *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs* (which Clunies Ross, *Skandinavistik* 21 (1991), 141–42, also liked); some of what Heinrichs disapproved of met with favour from Kellogg, *Scandinavian Studies* 65 (1993), 570–72, Kreutzer, *Skandinavistik* 23 (1993), 139–41, and Maack, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993), 601–03. Finally, I cannot say what they thought of the reviews of the essay collections and editions too numerous and various to mention here, but I’ll wager a tidy sum that no one was particularly happy with Gunnar Karlsson’s treatment (4 (1994)) of Miller’s magisterial *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking*, a review that simply fails to do justice to this book.

What does a review of reviews show? Unsurprisingly, that fish swim in schools, that language is not always a tie that binds and that even where never is heard a discouraging word, there are still plenty to be read. A great-aunt of mine used to say that if you don’t have something nice to say about people, then become a reviewer, but her cynicism does not apply much to the contributors to *alvissmál*, by and large a civil bunch. They are not people living in stone houses throwing glass. It is heartening to have so many books that many of us may never have time to read treated with genuine respect. Finally, I have it from one of the editors that the eccentric typographical style of ‘*alvissmál*’ is designed as a pronunciation aid for librarians with no Icelandic. *Hjálpsamt?*

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