TIL HEÐURS OG HUGBÓTAR

GREINAR UM TRÚARKVEDSKAP FYRRI ALDA

Ritsjórar
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SNORRASTOFÁ, RANNÍSÓKNARSTOFNUN Í MÍDALDAFRÆÐUM
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Efnisógrip

Í bók sinni Tools of Literacy fjallar Guðrún Nordal um þau áhrif sem mælaskræðahelð Evrópu hafði á dróttkvæðaskáld ellefu og tölftu aldar.
Helsta skáld þessa tíma var Einarr Skallason og rannsókn Guðrúnar sýnir ljóslega hversu vel hann var að sér bæði í klassískri mæluskilist og í skáld-

skapurfræðum. Í þessari grein er hugað að því hvernig guðfræðillardómur Einars biðist í meistaravækti hans, Geisla. Upphaf kvæðinsins er undir áhrifum frá því íslenska hynnasætti sem var notað við kennslu í mælasku-
fræði og guðfræði á svipaðan hátt og dróttkvæðin urðu kennsluefni með tímanum. Fágduð tók Einars á týþólógið skiljan sem svo mjög tókkaðist á hans dögu, sýnir að hann var vel menntaður í guðfræði engu stóur en í mæluskilist. Hin djarfa og frumlega myndhverfing hans, þar sem geisli stendur fyrir Ólaf helga, tengir Ólaf við Krist og gefur til kynna að sam-
band þeirra tveggja sé hlóstætt sambandi Sonar og Fóður innan Pren-
ingarinnar.

Poetry, Paganism and the Sagas of Icelandic Bishops

Margaret Cormack

This paper is not so much about the context of Christian poetry as about a context in which Christian poetry is lacking —
the sagas of the two Icelandic saints, Jón and Þorlákr, the
Preistssaga of Guðmundr Arason, and sagas about saints more generally.

Given the amount of energy that went into translating saints’ lives in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it is strik-
ing how little poetry about the saints has survived from that period. Plácitus drápa and Geisli are the only surviving poems of any length. Poems in honor of the Apostle Andrew and St. Þorlákr have been lost; fragments survive of works in honor of John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary. However, neither of the two Icelandic saints, Jón and Þorlákr, appears to have been the subject of laudatory or devotional verse at the time of their canonization (c. 1200), nor is Guðmundr Arason (bishop of Hólar 1203–1237) praised in verse by his con-
temporaries.1

The lack of vernacular verse in honor of the saints is all
the more surprising because not only poetry play an
important role in medieval Icelandic literature, there is also a
Latin prosimetric form — opus geminatum — which could validate the use of poetry for saints’ lives. Opus geminatum,
“twinned work”, consists of paired works of poetry and prose
on a given subject.2 Alcuin, who wrote such a work about St.
Willibrord, describes the two parts: “one proceeding in prosa-

1 The single stanza in Jóns saga is found in Gísls þátr, which is gener-
ally agreed to be an interpolation into the younger (fourteenth-century)
version of the saga. The few verses in the Preistssaga of Guðmundr Arason are not about Guðmundr himself.
2 On opus geminatum see: Godman, Peter. “The Anglo-Latin opus gem-
ic speech, which can be read aloud to the brethren in church... the other one striding with poetic feet, which should only be ruminated upon by your scholars in the solitude of the cell." The prose twin was transparent, to be read to the congregation; the poetic twin complex and subtle, requiring time and patience to appreciate its intricacy — just like skaldic verse. The two halves of the pair did not need to be by the same individual; in theory, Geisli could have been paired with a saga of St. Óláf, Plácitus drápa with Plácitus saga. However, it is not until the fourteenth century, in the youngest saga of Guðmundr Arason, that such a combination of verse and prose is found in an Icelandic saint’s life.

In considering the possible reasons for the lack of verse about the Icelandic saints I will argue that the local church’s acceptance of vernacular poetry, with its heavy reliance on pagan imagery, was not as smooth as has been suggested, and that the rationalization of pagan myth by Snorri Sturluson was a necessary prelude to the thirteenth-century skaldic renaissance which Guðrún Nordal has recently described.

I would seem to have an uphill battle to fight; after all, the story of the wedding at Reykjavíklor in 1119 describes a priest producing precisely the sort of prosimetric narrative one expects in medieval Iceland:

    Ingimundr prest saðði sögu Orms Barreyjarskálđs
    ok vísur margar ok flokk göðan við anda sögunnar,
    er Ingimundr haði ortan.


5 Sturlunga saga. Ed. Jón Þórmennsson et al. Reykjavík 1946, 1:27. — Ingimundr the priest told the story of Ormr, poet of Barrey, and many verses with it and a good flokkur at the end of the saga, which he had composed.

If taken at face value, this passage shows that priests were knowledgeable about — and indeed contributed to — native poetic traditions.

That priests indulged in poetry, however, did not always meet with approval, for a number of reasons. In a locus classicus on the reception of traditional poetry by the Church, Alcuin castigated the monks of Lindisfarne for their interest in vernacular verse: “in the refectory, the Bible should be read; the lector heard, not the harper: patriotic sermons rather than pagan songs. For what has Ingeld to do with Christ?” For Alcuin, a priest like Ingimundr might have illustrated the regrettable sort of cultural syncretism that arose in distant lands where there was no proper supervision of clerical education. Not that the Latin curriculum was without pitfalls, as can be seen from the example of the youthful Klængr Porsteinsson, chastised for reading Ovid according to Jóns saga biskups, composed early in the thirteenth century. Jóns saga is critical of the erotic, rather than the mythological, aspects of Ovid. Similar concerns were expressed by Ailred of Rievaulx (d. 1166 or 1167, canonized 1199) who forbade the composition of love songs and invectives on the grounds that they produce vicious and lascivious thoughts, quarrels,
and all sort of foolishness." A stricter attitude towards poetry in general is shown by Nicholas of Clairvaux, secretary of St. Bernard, who refused even to read poems sent him by a friend.  

Lena Wahlgren-Smith notes that among the authors of twelfth-century letter collections she has studied, it is the secular clergy, not monks, who compose poetry — but in their youth, before they have assumed responsible positions in the Church. More generally, poetry was considered unworthy of attention from the serious-minded. Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) considered poetry to be merely a secondary appendage to the liberal arts, permissible for occasional relaxation but not in itself to be an object of serious study.

All this poetry would, of course, have been in Latin. The Franciscan Salimbene (d. after 1287) recognized the necessity for high churchmen to consort with people of all types and social classes — and even to enjoy secular forms of entertainment. However, he never mentions love poetry or romances in this context, and those whom he praises for their musical ability devoted their talent to religious topics, including (Latin) hymns in honor of the saints.

It is in this context that the future saint, Þorlákr Þór-hallsson (d. 1197) is said to enjoy kvæði (poetry/songs) along with music and other forms of entertainment. The saga is careful to delimit such activities to those which could provide amusement to “good people” — a caveat which leaves the precise nature of the performance in question undefined. The older version of the saga specifies that such entertainment was acceptable not on its own account, but rather because it hindered less desirable activities in which his flock might otherwise indulge. In fact, the preceding description of Þorlákr’s lifestyle emphasizes his lenience towards a population which still has a long way to go towards full compliance with the expectations of the Church.

That poetic composition was considered an inferior use of God-given talent can be seen in an episode concerning the young priest Lárentius Kálfrsson who, we are told, “gjörði svá skjótt vers sem maðr talaði skjótast latinnu” (composed poetry as fast as a man could speak Latin most quickly). When Lárentius arrived in Trondheim with a letter of introduction to Archbishop Jörun in 1294, the latter asked for a sample of his work:

" [. . . ] kom til vár á margin ok sýn oss leið þitt, ok ef þú kanni nokkot at dikta." Næsta dag eftir kom sira Laurentius til erkibyðkups haldandi á inni rollu. Erkibyðskippin leit á ok lofaði leiðrit ok mælti: "Les fyrir oss þat er þú hefir dikta." Hann las þar af vers er hann hafði gjört til frú Hallberu abbadíssar þar Stað. "Er hon gott kona" sagði erkibyðskippin, "er þú hefir

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9 Paden, William D. Jr. “De monachis rithmos facientibus.” Hêlinand de Froidmont, Bertran de Born, and the Cistercian General Chapter of 1199.” Speculum 55 (1980), 669–685 at 672. Paden points out that the Cistercian opposition to poetry generally reflects a reaction to specific events.

10 Wahlgren-Smith, Lena. Personal communication. Dr. Wahlgren-Smith is preparing an edition of Nicholas’s letters.

11 The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts. Transl. and notes by Jerome Taylor. New York and London 1961. Book 3 chapter 4 “Concerning the Two kinds of Writings” (87–89), summarizes Hugh’s views. Footnotes 44 (211–212) and 48 (212–213) present the position Hugh was arguing against. The monastery of St. Victor in Paris was a center for Scandinavian scholars, and it has been speculated that St. Þorlákr may have studied there (Gunnar Harðarson. Frjár þýðingar læðar frá miðöldum. Íslensk heimspeki III) Reykjavík 1989, 34–35.


13 Biskupa sógur II. Ed. Ásís Egilson. (ÍF XVI) Reykjavík 2002. A: Hann henti skemmtan at sögum ok kveðum ok at þllum strengilemum ok hljóðferum ok at hygginga manna ræðum ok draumum ok at öllum því er góðra manna skemmtan var, útan leikum, því at honum þótti slíkt dvelja öntar sýslur vándra manna (78). B: Heilagr Þorlákr byskup léi optíla skemmta sér ok órum ok hendi at því mikit gaman sem góðra manna skemmtan er, þáði at kveðum ok harþlátli ok leikum, en minnst dansi (182).

Archbishop Jörundr had an ulterior motive for re-directing Lárentius’s intellectual efforts; he needed legal expertise in his struggle with the cathedral chapter. However, Jörundr’s criticism of “false figures” reflects another attitude found in medieval schools; that poetry is less worthy of study than other topics because it is less reliable. It was a commonplace of grammatical literature that the rhetorical figures used by poets were, in fact, inaccurate; “poetic license” was precisely what distinguished poetry from the truth. As one grammarian comments:

“Virgil departs from history ... not through ignorance but according to poetic art ... in the same way all [these] things have been devised in opposition to this history: such as when Aeneas is said to have seen Carthage when it is agreed that Carthage was established seventy years before [the founding of] the city of Rome. In fact 340 years intervene between the destruction of Troy and the rise of the city of Rome.”

Nothing could be further from Snorri’s argument that skaldic verse could provide accurate historical documentation!

A distaste for skaldic poetry in its role as historical evidence may account for an interesting feature of the saga of Bishop Lárentius of Hólar. Its author, Einnarr Haflíðason, takes up the practice, already attested in the Prestssaga of Guðmund Arason and Árna saga biskups, of including annal entries throughout his work. He describes and justifies this practice as follows:

Eru hér ok margir hlutir saman settir af ýmsum atburðum sem fram hafa farit á ýmsum lóndum eftir því sem annálar til vísa hverver mestan fróðileik sýna, svá ok eru margir hlutir inn settir af byskupum ok öðrum veraldar höfðingjum sem samtíða hafa verið þessi frásögur. Ok þó at þat verði nokkot ónytsamligt starjfr saman at setja þvíuka hluti sem birtaz ok aúbýna má f þessu máli, er þó verra at heyra ok gaman henda at sögum heitinnan manna.

When Einnarr objects to stories of heathens, he may be re-

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13 Biskupa sögur III, 239–240. — “Come to us tomorrow and show us your writing, if you have any ability in composition.” The next day sára Lárentius went to the archbishop holding a scroll. The archbishop looked at the writing and praised it and said: “Read to us what you have composed.” He read from it a poem he had composed to Lady Hallbera, Abbess of Staðr. “Is she a good woman,” said the archbishop, “that you praise her so much?” “People in Iceland think so,” said Lárentius. “Refrain from composing poetry,” said the archbishop, “and study the laws of the church instead, or don’t you know that versificatura nihil est nisi falsa figura” (“versification is nothing but false figures”)? You must also be aware quod versificatura nihil est nisi maxima cura” (“versification is nothing except great trouble”).


15 Snorri did not, of course, claim that all skaldic poems provided such documentation. In a recent article Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has argued that for Snorri it was the prose narrative that was slippery and unreliable, whereas skaldic poetry composed and recited under the right circumstances was the counterpart of a written text. He then argues that the prosimetric form itself might have been valued in sagas about heroes of the past because it was thought to replicate a mode of expression identified with that past. If this was the case, it would be an additional reason for the Church to be leery of a form thought to have been used in pagan times. See Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. “The Prosimetrum Form 1: Verses as the Voice of the Past.” Skaldesagas. Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets. Ed. Russell Poole. Berlin and New York 2001, 172–190, esp. 175 and 188.

16 Biskupa sögur III, 216. — Here many things are collected concerning various events which have taken place in various countries according to the indication of the annals which contain the most learning, and also
ferring to secular saga literature as a whole. He may also have had a more specific focus. In his time, the presence of verses with mythological content in historical literature such as kings’ sagas would have been well established. It is possible that Einarr may have thought of the annal entries in Lærrentus saga as a recondite form of Christian learning corresponding to and replacing the heathen learning implicit in skaldic verse. Where the latter invoked a world of pre-Christian myth, the annals invoked the contemporary mundus christianus.

It will be noted that we have now returned from criticism of Latin poetry — which had, after all, its uses as a teaching tool — to poetry in the vernacular, which would not even have merited the title of literature (let alone been practiced in the classroom) in any medieval European cathedral or monastery.

Vernacular skaldic poetry presented a special problem: the kennings on which its imagery was based relied on knowledge of pre-Christian mythology. To understand or compose such poetry one needed to know rather a lot about the pagan gods, and to avoid naming them required conscious effort. That such an effort was made during the conversion period (c. 1000) is generally agreed. Subsequently, however, such avoidance was relaxed, and kennings incorporating the names of Óðinn, Óðinn, and other divinities came into use again. It is thought that one reason for the retention and use of such imagery was the fact that references to the gods in classical Latin poetry, which formed the basis of the school curriculum, would have facilitated the acceptance of the pagan mythological content of native poetry. It must be borne in mind, however, that the poetry of Ovid and Vergil was hedged round by numerous safety nets, in the form of accepted modes of interpretation, which defused it and made it acceptable for elementary schooling. According to the euhemeristic inter-

pretation, the classical gods were actually human beings, subsequently worshipped by their descendants; that worship had been taken over by the devil for his own purposes. Better yet, the poets were not referring to historical happenings at all — their fables were allegories, symbolic of some other, higher meaning.19

In twelfth-century England or France, where the native gods were long forgotten, there was no danger that anyone could be led astray by meeting them in their classical guise. In Scandinavia, however, the situation was different. While some learned churchmen may have incorporated the first part of the euhemeristic interpretation into their view of the past, equating traditional gods with ancient kings,20 to others the gods were still very much alive. These authors are not interested in the first part of the euhemeristic interpretation, but the second — the idea that the gods spoke with the voice of the Christian devil. The identification of Óðinn with Satan is the thought behind the famous passage in which Porbjørg, wife of Páll of Reykholt, tries to stab Sturla in the eye,21 or (a century later) the poem in which Sturla Póðarson uses Óðinn and Gautr in kennings which refer to Gizurr Porvardsdottir.22 The use of a pagan god to represent the Christian devil need not have been just a piece of literary erudition; sagas composed c. 1200 about the missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason

many things have been inserted concerning bishops and other secular leaders who were contemporary with this account. And although it may be a somewhat pointless task to compile such things as may be publish-
ed in this work, it is nonetheless worse to listen to, and enjoy, stories about heathens.

20 The first two elements of the genealogy of Ari Porgilsdóttir (d. 1148) are Yngvi and Njörðr, said to be kings of Turkey and Sweden respectively.
21 Sturlunga saga 1:109, on the same page as a poem which informs us that the devil stands at Sturla’s side. “It is obvious that the curious woman in that moment was not thinking of Odin the supreme god of the North, but of Odin the incarnation of the devil.” Halldór Hermannsdóttir, Sæmund Sigfusson and the Oddaverjar. (Íslendinga 22) Ithaca NY 1932, 49.
and St. Ólafr report meetings between their protagonists and Öðinn, who is recorded as having appeared to a farmer in Norway in 1208. In translated saints' lives the pagan gods who receive the sacrifices of Diocletian and other persecuting emperors often bear their native names, and it is worth noting that the saga of Jón Ógmundarson, composed in the early thirteenth century, attributes to its protagonist replacement of the names of pagan deities in the names of weekdays. One of the *articuli* of Styrmir fröði may represent the attitude of an educated priest around 1200. He tells how St. Olaf:

eydri òllum skurgðum, ðór guð Englis manna,
Óðin guð Saxa ok Skjöld, Skáununga guð, Frey Svíð
guð, Goðorm Dana guð ok morg ònnur blótskapar
skrims.

It is of course possible that conflicting opinions regarding the gods (and poetry) existed at the same time. Even today certain Christian groups reject the study of classical mythology because it deals with demons, and boycott the books of J. K. Rowling because they reputedly teach children to be witches and wizards. It is probably not a coincidence that Ailred, Nicholas, and Gunnlaugr Leifsson (responsible for the Latin version of Jóns saga) were monks. Perhaps among Icelandic churchmen, as in Europe, secular clergy held a more relaxed attitude towards poetry than monks.

In fact, the best evidence for attitudes towards “pagan” poetry in Iceland is the corpus of skaldic poetry itself. It suggests that in the latter part of the twelfth century the “anti-pagan” sentiment was on the ascendent, at least where official poetry was concerned. Bjarne Fidjestøl recently repeated Jan de Vries’ study of mythological imagery in skaldic verse, with certain modifications. Fidjestøl limited his study to court poetry, which, as he points out, covers a long period and has the best possible chances of accurate transmission — and, one might add, of reliable dating. He also used a stricter definition of “mythological” content, namely, the occurrence of names of divine beings in kennings. The distinction is an important one, as it is only such pagan divine names which could arouse objections among members of the clergy. When he graphed his results, Fidjestøl found a rapid decrease in mythological [as just defined] allusions in the kennings in these poems, from 25% in the latter half of the 10th c. to 2-3 % in the latter half of the 12th c., but then there is a notable increase, obviously due to the ‘renaissance’ of Snorri Sturluson and his nephews. The important difference from de Vries’s results is that there is no trace whatsoever of a twelfth-century renaissance.

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25 Biskupa sögur I, 210 cf. note 7 above. It is worth noting that the younger (early fourteenth-century) version of the saga actually incorporates one of the names said to have been banished by Óðin!

26 Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga, 2:694, 711. The spelling has been normalized. — destroyed all idols, Þorr the god of the English, Óðin god of the Saxons, Skjöld god of those who dwell in Skåne, Freyr god of the Swedes, Gutorm god of the Danes, and many other heathen monsters.

27 Guðrún Nordal has noted that even secular sagas differ in their use of skaldic verse (*Tools of Literacy*, 114–115).
Fidjestøl does not claim that the corpus he examined is typical of all skaldic poetry. However, what was true of poetry about kings would be doubly true of poetry about saints. An examination of twelfth-century Christian skaldic poetry reveals that it uses the names of gods with circumspection, if at all. Only Plácitus drápa uses pagan divine names with any frequency. This may have been considered appropriate for the subject matter—a pagan nobleman converting to Christianity—however, as Roberta Frank has noted, at least one of the names (Próttir) is an abstract common noun as well as the name of a god, perhaps indicating a practice similar to the use of allegory used to justify classical myths. Even more revealing is the poetry of a skald such as Einarr Skúlason, who, like Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, clearly censored his own verse. Although his Óxarflokkr shows him quite capable of using pagan imagery, not a single god is named in Geisli. They are also missing from surviving versions by Bishop Klaðgr Póristeinsson of Skálholt (d. 1176) and by his contemporary Runólf Ketilsson (son of another bishop and author of a verse celebrating the completion of the new cathedral of Skálholt), and from the extant fragments of poems dealing with the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist.

It thus seems that in the eyes of the Church skaldic verse was acceptable not because references to heathen gods were acceptable, but only after such references had been removed. The concern may have gone deeper than this, and called the skaldic poetic form as a whole into question. It is striking that although poems were composed on the occasion of the establishment of the archdiocese of Trondheim in 1153, before a new feast day for St. Þorlákr was being adopted in 1236, and (in quantity) when Guðmundr Arason was being promoted for sanctification in the middle of the fourteenth century, there is no evidence of any interest in poetic commemoration of the important events that took place around 1200, when Icelanders got not one, but two, saints of their own.

This cannot be for lack of poets; at least half of the forty-three thirteenth-century poets listed by Guðrún Ndal were active in the first third of the century. Even if the most crying need was for Latin liturgies and vitae rather than vernacular panegyric, there were those who could produce both; the monk Gunnaugr Leifsson, asked by Guðmundr Arason to compose a Latin life of Jón Óg mundarson, was a poet in both Latin (he composed a rhymed office of St. Ambrose54) and the vernacular. However, his extant vernacular poem, Merlinus-pá, is not a skaldic panegyric to a saint, but a translation of a secular Latin manuscript text in fornryðislag. The purportedly pagan, prophetic nature of the original may have justified its translation into a metre comparable to that of a native pagan prophecy, Völuspá. We may contrast the situation in Iceland around 1200 with that at the establishment of the archdiocese at Trondheim half a century earlier. That event resulted not only in a Latin vita of St. Ólafr, soon translated into a vernacular homily, but also Geisli, a drápa about him in traditional skaldic meter.

The lack of poetry associated with the events around 1200 raises the question of whether more was going on than the censorship of pagan kennings; it suggests the possibility

33 There has as yet been no conclusive argument for dating this poem any more closely than “twelfth century.”
34 Frank. Old Norse Court Poetry, 71. It is striking that on the two occasions in which goddess names, one of which is Gefn, i.e. Freyja, are used in kennings for Plácudus’s wife, it is in a passage which draws attention to her as an object of desire.
35 Frank. Old Norse Court Poetry, 62-65.
37 See Chase in this volume.
that the poetic form of which they formed the core was being rejected in certain ecclesiastical circles. Was dróttkvætt poetry considered to be an integral part of the secular culture against which archbishops such as Eysteinn and Íríkr inveighed? It is striking that among Guðmundr Arason's immediate family, it is the chieftains who are poets, whereas the clerical members of the family — Guðmundr's uncle and teacher, Ingimundr Porgeirsson, and Guðmundr himself — are not credited with a single verse.

Be that as it may, I hope that I have shown that by the beginning of the thirteenth century Snorri Sturluson, historian and poet, had a double battle to fight. He had to justify the use of poetry as historical evidence, and he had to face the fact that the language in which it was couched was highly problematic in the eyes of the church. The prologues to Heimskringla and Snorra Edda are not just the scholarly specifications of an antiquarian with nothing at stake; Snorri's whole enterprise (whether poetic or historical) depended on establishing the validity of a poetics based on pagan myth. What was needed was an equivalent of the euhermericistic and/or allegorical readings that distanced classical poetry from its readers. Snorri's solution was nothing short of brilliant. Not only are the gods human beings — the Æsir are Asians, of impeccable Trojan ancestry — but the stories they tell are completely made up:

En Æsir setjað þá á tal ok rāða ráðum sinnum ok minnask á þessar frásagnir allar er honum váru sagðar, ok gefa nōfn þessi hin þessu er áðr eru nefnd

77 Orri Vésteinsson. The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power and Social Change 1000–1300. Oxford 2000, 167–170. The archbishops' main concern appears to have been reforming the sexual behavior of chieftains, and preventing them from taking holy orders.

40 Guðrún Nordal. Tools of Literacy, 101–102. The fact that members of Guðmundr's entourage were poets makes the lack of contemporary poems about Guðmundr all the more striking. Guðmundr's own patronage of literary activity was limited to commissioning the Latin life of Jón of Hólar, and some visions pertaining to St. Þorlákr, from Gunnlaugr Leifsson.

munnun ok stoðum þeim er þar váru, til þess at þá er langar sundir líti at menn skyldu ekki ifask í at allir væri einir, þeir Æsir er nú var frá sagt ok þessir er þá váru þau þömu þöfn gefin."

The fact that the language of poetry is built on fable removes its threat. Poetic language — pagan gods included — could now be used in the service of the Church. It can be no coincidence that the Third Grammatical Treatise, by Snorri's nephew, Óláfr Bóðarson (d. 1259), is the first work to formally approve pagan mythology for Christian use, based on the work of his uncle:

Eigi skulu menn þessum frásognum trúa framar en skýnsamligt er, eftir því sem segir í fyrsta hlut bokarinnar, með hverju villumar fjölguðusk, ok af því hefir hvert skáld sett ár regílur, þat sem eigi trúði réttliga, af þvíat þeir hugðu Óðin guð verit hafa ok alla þá með guðmagni sem honum þjónuðu, sem heyrar hefur mát þeir margum frásognum þessar bokar. En nú skal lýsa hversu ný skáld ok fræðimenn, ok einkanliga klerkarnir, vilja lofask láta, hversu kveða skal, ok önýta eigi at heldr þat sem fornir menn hafa framit, útan þat sem klerkligar bækir banna, þvíat þat er náttúruligt at menn sé nú smásmuglari sem fræðibækark viðfara nú viðara.

It is worth noting that there are, evidently, still certain restrictions; one would very much like to know what it is that

41 Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning. Ed. Anthony Faulkes. Oxford 1982, 54–55. — "...the Æsir sat down to discuss and hold a conference and went over all these stories that had been told him, and assigned those same names that were mentioned above to the people and places that were there, so that when long periods of time had passed men should not doubt that they were all the same, those Æsir about whom stories were told and those who were now given the same names." Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Transl. and ed. Anthony Faulkes. London 1987, 57.

42 Den tredje og fjørde grammatiske afhandling i Snorres Edda tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlings prolog og to andre tillegg. Ed. Bjørn
“clerical books forbid.” However, thanks to Snorri, pagan kennings could now legitimately be used by clerics, presumably even in poetry praising rulers — or saints. Ólafr, a subdeacon, composed poems about St. Ærlákr and Thomas Becket, both of which are unfortunately lost. It is not until two generations after Ólafr’s death that we have extant evidence of the new, liberal attitude in the form of poems about Guðmundr gőðr Arason. The middle of the fourteenth century saw a concerted effort to promote him as a saint, and skaldic poems were composed in his honor by two churchmen (the monks Argrímr Brandsson and Árni Jónsson) and the layman Einarr Gilsson. These poets, however, differed in their use of mythological references. The layman Einarr has no qualms about referring to the pagan gods; his kennings feature Týr, Bólverkr, Gáutr, Svölnir, and Njörr, as well as a host of goddesses and valkyries. Árni and Argrímr are more restrained. To be sure, Argrímr once refers to Guðmundr himself as Baldr; this is, however, an isolated example. It cannot be coincidence that the god chosen is an innocent victim whom later scholars have compared to Christ. Does this indicate that Argrímr looks at the native religion as prefiguring Christianity in the same way as the Old Testament was believed to do? There are otherwise only a handful of very minor mythological characters in the sixty-six verses he composed about Guðmundr. Árni has even fewer in a poem of comparable length. We do not need to take literally their statements deprecating their knowledge of the rules of vernacular poetry (eddur reglur); such an indication of humility was virtually mandatory for Christian monastic authors. And since eddu reglur were by this time available on parchment, it is more likely that Argrímr and Árni were consciously avoiding pagan kennings than that they were unaware of them.

The poems about Guðmundr Arason are unique in another way as well; they are found in the same manuscripts as the contemporary prose sagas about him. The fourteenth century saw the composition of four sagas about Guðmundr. Two of these (A and B) are cut-and-paste jobs based on existing sources. They incorporate poetry found in those sources; in this they resemble native historical writing such as Sturlunga saga. Little of that poetry pertains to Guðmundr. Version C, consciously rewritten according to contemporary taste and concepts of what a saint’s life should be, contains very few verses. The D version is of greatest interest in terms of its treatment of poetry and prose. Probably written by Argrímr Brandsson, it has been preserved in two branches which treat the poetry in very different ways. AM 219 fol. and its descendant, AM 398 4to, include only five verses within the text, but follow it with a drápa in honor of Guðmundr composed

Magnússon Ólaf. (STUAGNL. 12) København 1884, 152–53. — “people should not believe these stories more than is sensible, according to what was said in the first part of the book [i.e., the Prologue to Snorra Edda] about how the errors grew and therefore each poet who did not have the true faith set himself his own rules because they thought [italics mine] Ólaf had been a god and all those who served him had divine power, as we could hear in many stories in this book. But now we shall describe how new poems and writers, and particularly the clerics, want the composing of verse to be allowed while not dismissing that which ancient men have composed, except that which clerical books forbid, because it is natural that people are more discerning now that the learned books have become more widespread.” Guðrún Nordal, Tools of Literacy, 209, with emendations.

4 Eiðskú Baldr ‘Baldr of charity/love’ verse 60, Skjáladigtning B II:387.

44 Nauma, Prófr, Hjör. Nauma can however simply be a heiti for ‘woman’. I base my count on the edition in Skjáladigtning B II.

45 Rínfr and Ullr, in seventy-nine verses.

46 Skjáladigtning B II. Argrímr, verse 2 p. 372; Árni, verse 78 p. 461.

47 For a detailed discussion of the sagas and poetry about Guðmundr, see Guðrún Nordal, Tools of Literacy, 100–110.


by Árni Jónsson. The result is a pair resembling Latin opus geminatum. The version of the saga represented by Stock Perg 5 fol. and AM 396 4to contains yet more poetry, by Einarr Gilsson and Arngrím — a total of 116 verses, some interspersed within the text, the remainder following it. Jón Helgason interprets these variations as reflecting the time of writing and the material available to the various reuters; he considers that some of the poetry in Stock Perg 5 fol. and AM 396 4to was simply composed after the saga in AM 219 fol. had been written.

Guðrún Nordal sees the differences as stylistic, reflecting the intended audience — foreign or native. It is also possible that the varying treatment of the poetry reflects different attitudes towards verse within the Icelandic ecclesiastical community.

Clearly, high-level fourteenth-century Icelandic ecclesiastics were willing to accept not only dróttkvøtt poetry about saints (pagan gods and all), but also a prosimetrical form reminiscent of secular literature. It is impossible to say whether the addition of poetry at the end of these sagas reflects a conscious awareness of the possibilities of opus geminatum. In the twelfth century Ingimundr’s flokkr followed the saga, so this arrangement could reflect a native rather than imported, tradition.

A few other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Icelandic manuscripts include poetry along with saints’ sagas: AM 649 a 4to, (1350–1400) follows the saga of John the Evangelist with some skaldic stanzas (not complete poems) about the saint, while AM 621 4to (1450–1500) contains the saga of St. Peter followed by Péturs drápa and Márki ðikt. AM 429 12mo, a manuscript devoted to the sagas of female saints written c. 1500, follows the sagas of St. Cecilia and St. Dorothy with poems about them. These poems, however, use a simpler diction than that of the skalds, without complex kennings that might require the use of divine names. And without such kennings, the question of pagan gods ceased to be an issue.

Efniságrip

Í bók Guðrúnar Nordal, Tools of Literacy, er litit á kvéskap sem nokkurs konar einkennissfrótt alls heilra fólks á Íslandi á tólfu og þrættændu öld. Í þessari grein eru færð rök fyrir því að í kringum 1200 hafi síðavandir menn innan kirkjuhann haft horn í síðu dróttkvøskaldskapar. Sú réttlætning sem Snorri Sturluson og Ólaflur hvítaskald, báru fram fyrir þessari tegund kvéskapar var því nauðsynleg forsenda þess að hægt var að beita honum til að losfnya Guðmund Arason, hinn innenda dýrling, en jafnvel þá vörtust klerkar að nota hálcioðar kenningar.