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PAGANISM AND LITERATURE : THE SO-CALLED "PAGAN SURVIVALS" in THE SAMTÍÐARSÖGUR

Since the general theme of this Conference deals with "The Sagas and Medieval Icelandic Society", the precise subject I have chosen to develop here may seem puzzling at first view : one is not obliged to see immediately the link between Medieval Icelandic Society, its reflection or embodiment or direct translation into the saga world and the pagan survivals such as they appear through the samtíðarsögur.

Before investigating more accurately the matter and elucidating the puzzle, I have to explain why I chose, and limited my researches to the samtíðarsögur, here below understood as the whole Sturlunga Saga and most of the Biskupa Sögur (1). According to the classification proposed by Sigurður Nordal in Nordisk Kultur VIII B (1953), the difference between the samtíðarsögur and all other sorts of sagas comes from the distance in time which separates the presumed author of the work of the facts, more or less historical, he relates. In the case of the Íslendingasögur or family sagas, this distance uses to be three or more centuries (at least, two and a half). In the samtíðarsögur, this distance may be much less important and in some cases, such as Sturla Þorðarson's Íslendinga Saga, it is equal to nought since here, the author is also one of the actors of the saga. On another hand, the purpose of samtíðarsögur's authors is visibly to write history, in the meaning the word had in the Middle Ages, that is a kind of chronicle of the events they had themselves lived or learnt from reliable witnesses. It follows that the image of society given by the samtíðarsögur has all chances of being far more close to reality than the one we can find in all other kinds of sagas. Then, it seems highly probable that a good amount of samtíðarsögur - especially biskupa sögur - must have been written earlier than other sorts of sagas. Which is more, if it goes into the nature of the saga in itself - but this is a subject I shall not touch here - of being submitted to a kind of literary convention which, so

(1) the references will be to : Biskupa Sögur. Guðni Jónsson bjó til prentunar. Reykjavík. 1953. 4 vol.; Sturlunga Saga. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbo-
son, Kristján Eldjárn. Reykjavík. 1946. 2 vol. All the sagas will be quoted
by their titles and number of chapter in these editions.

to speak, governs the way of writing these texts, one may presume that this literacy is not so great or deep in the samtíðarsögur as elsewhere, I mean that they could be more faithful to reality. And they may have been used as kinds of models for many Íslendingasögur which have probably refined on the devices and schemes used in the former. Finally, it is more difficult to accuse them of trying to project in the past present situations, a reproach which may be brought upon many an Íslendingasaga, not to speak of fornaldarsögur and the like.

In fact, this paper would like to make an attempt of studying one important feature of the Icelandic medieval society, that is to say its religious attitudes such as expressed in the samtíðarsögur and, more precisely, to raise the problem of the Pagan Revival (la Renaissance païenne) in the XIIIth century Iceland since many a scholar - for instance F.Paasche, S.Nordal or S. Einarsson (1) - has used this expression. In the XIIIth century, Iceland has been christianized for more than two centuries. Has the victory of the Church upon the old Northern paganism been complete? And in that case, why and how has this pagan revival been possible, or, more exactly, which is the value of this revival?

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Before studying the pagan survivals in the samtíðarsögur, however, two things are necessary : we have first to make certain obvious reservations about the way a new type of culture and civilization can recover and eradicate an older one; and then, to define the principles according to which the study of the phenomenon will be conducted.

1/ As for the reservations to be made, it should be born in mind that there is a certain number of immemorial structures (dealing in general with the fundamental organization of the society, the vision of the world and the ethics) which can survive for centuries or more, independently of the "superficial" culture adopted by a country. As Mircea Eliade points out :

It is true that most of the rural populations of Europe have been christianized for more than a millenary. But they have succeeded in integrating into their christianism a great part of their pre-christian heritage of an immemorial antiquity. It should be inaccurate to believe that, for this reason, the peasants of Europe are not Christians. /.../ When they accepted christianism, the European peasants have integrated into their new faith the cosmic religion they had preserved since Prehistory. (2)

If these structures either are "inoffensive" or neutral, or may easily be adopted (adapted) by the new religion, they do not concern directly the subject.

 (1) F.Paasche : Norges og Islands Litt. 2d ed. 1957 pp.398 ssqq. S. Nordal : Sagalitteraturen, in Nordisk Kultur VIIIB p.248; S.Einarsson : A History of Icelandic Literature. 1957. p.142.

(2) Le Sacré et le Profane. Paris. 1965. p. 138

The present study will, accordingly, deal only with the "offensive" apparatus of the Northern paganism.

Moreover, all the Icelandic medieval texts which interest us now having been composed some two or three centuries after the christianization of the country, and composed by clerics or authors who have got a somewhat clerical education, we must not expect finding pagan features directly or openly; these texts ask for a "second reading" and it is on the so to speak unconscious level that they may be interesting. To give an instance, when, in Íslendinga Saga, chapter 55, Aron Hjörleifsson, having just killed Rögnvaldr, takes his weapons and clothes and throws his corpse into the sea, far from the coast, we may suppose that there is there a survival of an ancient custom of burying in wilderness, under stones (kasa, foera í úrd) or into the sea the ill-doers, sorcerers and the like. But true to say, the practice may as well be Christian and mean the refusal of burying a villain in the soil of Christian Iceland!

Let us precise that it is striking to see that most of the "pagan survivals" appear in the kenningar of the vísur included into the samtíðarsögur or in artistic objects such as discovered by archaeologists (1). As E.Ö. Sveinsson most rightly says, if the Northern paganism seems still living in the XIIIth century, it is in first place because of the scalds (2). In this respect, these traces must be relevant to a kind of literary convention and we should be right in suspecting them of being devoid of living meaning. Accordingly, they should be treated with caution.

And it is indispensable to keep in mind the way the Church worked, in the North as elsewhere, to fight against the paganism (3). The Church acted in four different directions : a) it accepted such features or beliefs which did not contrary at all its own teachings (for instance the conviction of the existence of another world, conviction common to Northern paganism and to christianism); b) it adapted such features and beliefs which could easily be christianized, for instance the great dates of life, jól becoming similar to Christmas, or such rites as ausa barn vatni, supposing this last one is really anterior to and different from Christian baptism; c) it tried to devaluate features and beliefs which looked dangerous to the christian doctrine. Certain beliefs into the Nordic gods take place here, and one is authorized to see a Christian intention behind eddic poems like Lokasenna or Hárbarðsljóð where gods are more or less ridiculized; and d) it openly struggled against features and

(1) see instances in K.Eldjárn : Kuml og haugfé. Reykjavík. 1956

(2) Um íslenzkar Þjóðsögur Reykjavík 1940 p. 166

(3) see H.Delehaye : Les légendes hagiographiques. Bruxelles. 3è éd. 1927, chapitre VI.

beliefs which it could not accept, human sacrifices for instance, or exposure of new-born children, and apparently, it succeeded in this work of eradication. It is, for instance, nearly confounding to discover that there is in the samtíðarsögur no mention at all of these practices as well as of such operations known to us by Íslendingasögur, like hólmganga, fóstrbraedralag (I mean here, the ceremony itself), and, what is still more surprising, seiðr.

Anyhow, it remains clear that, here, only points c and d interest us.

2/ Now, for the principles : I should like to try to show that the so-called pagan revival in Iceland is the result of foreign and literary influences, the first of all coming through the Church which acted here either directly or as an intermediary. Then that, very often, there is a kind of distance in time (décalage) or a visible effort of adaptation between the present (for the presumed author) and a past reconstructed by dint of archaisms. And, finally, that the pagan features which may appear in the samtíðarsögur have, not unfrequently, an origin which is not local : they could have been borrowed from foreign sources and adapted to local taste.

This paper being a study in method, I shall not directly try, or incidentally only, to venture upon historical evidences. It goes without saying, for instance, that one cannot but strongly be impressed by the Irish example in the IXth century particularly, where, in somewhat similar circumstances, there had been also an attempt of recreating the old past and of writing down the ancient traditions. For the fact is that pagan resurgences appear more and more in Icelandic literature as time elapses.

Thus, this little study would try to show that the so-called pagan survivals in the samtíðarsögur look like a patient reconstruction. Here, at the beginning, there was the text, whichever its origins, and this is the general impression which might give its general meaning to this pagan revival. For the sake of clarity, I shall examine here the cult and the institutions, then the gods and myths, then the other world and finally the witchcraft and magic, in a kind of general view which remains to be completed.

I. Cult and institutions.

As a principle, in this section, the genuine survivals should be, and indeed are often, still living. But in most cases, they have been accepted without struggle or adapted (one should say : recuperated) and even there, numerous instances of reconstructions or importations are visible.

a) We shall first enumerate features which seem inalienable and genuine but which may have been easily recaptured.

. The importance of the family (aett), according to the ancient Germanic and Nordic conception, understood as a sacred community in the bosom

of which the peace (frið or gríð) was warranted and the links of which are felt to be compelling (see the word skyldr which means both : obliged to and akin to) remains and will remain living for a long time and the illustrations one could give of the fact, in the santfðarsögur, are very numerous (e.g. Íslendinga Saga ch. 16, Dorgils Saga Skarða ch. 12, Sturlu Saga ch. 34, Jóns Saga Helga I ch. 16). The whole argument of Dorgils Saga ok Haflíða (where Haflíði Másson feels compelled to protect his nephew, Már Bergþórsson in spite of his contempt for the intrinsic value of the man; but he supports him fyrir fraendsemi sakir /ch. 6/) rests upon this conception (see also Guðmundar Saga Dýra ch. 30 where Guðmundr dýri helps Páll Sölvason in a bad affair because he has married Arndís, Páll's daughter; ibidem, Íslendinga Saga ch. 39, Sturlu Saga ch. 4, Þórðar Saga Kakala ch. 2, Dorgils Saga Skarða ch. 20).

But if the consciousness of belonging to a familial clan is nowhere absent from the mind of an Icelander, the religious or sacred strength of the link, mainly on political grounds, seems more or less lost. The aett is no longer a sacred community (as shown by M. Cahen /1/), but a collectivity united by the blood, possibly the affection, chiefly the interests and the tradition, but this, in a direction which tends towards laicization. Otherly, which is the way of justifying Guðmundr dýri's barbaric reply about his daughter : would she have been taken into the fire at Langahlíð, that would have made no difference (Guðmundar Saga dýra ch. 14), or the not less cruel reply of Einarr Rögnvaldsson to his father : three times, he cries to him, who is taken into the fire at Breiðabólstaðir, to run out; as the old man refuses, Einarr shouts : "Brenndu þar þá, djöfulskarlinn!" (Dorgils Saga Skarða ch. 32). And when Heusler declares (2) that one never sees the father against the son, or the brother against the brother, he probably forgets the tumultuous family of the Sturlungar!

. The private cult had been responsible of the general organization of the house (3), of its sacred character and of the solidarity which reigned among its members (4), visible in particular in the relations between master and servants. However, it is hard to say that there remains many conscious traces of this cult in the mind of the Icelanders in the Age of the Sturlungar. If the öndvegi are still the seat of honour in the skáli, they are rarely called by their name (Guðmundar Pátr Heljarskins ch.2, Sturlu Saga ch. 4, Íslendinga Saga ch. 39) and we find simply no mention at all of the öndvegissúflur which, according to so many instances in Landnámabók, ought to be sure witnesses of a private cult. Moreover, the word öndvegi itself is replaced by the continental

(1) La Libation. Paris. 1921 p. 5 and p. 9

(2) Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungerzeit. Berlin. 1912. p. 36

(3) See V. Guðmundsson ? Privatboligen på Island i sagatiden K/b. 1889 passim

(4) M. Pálsson : Sambúð húsbúnda og hjúa á lýðveldistímanum, in Skírnir CV, 1931, pp. 218, 224 and 235 : "The house was a place of peace".

loan-word hásaeti (so in Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch. 25) or even by a periphrasis perfectly neutral : á inn eystra langbekk miðjan, á inn vestra bekk miðjan (Íslendinga Saga ch. 170).

On the contrary, the tradition of the sacred tún surrounding the house and girdled by a garðr is well living in Guðmundar Saga Dýra ch. 8 where Sumarliði thrashes Brandr who has allowed his horse to graze in the tún. But the work of the Church is clear in a similar passage in Porgils Saga Skarða ch. 43 : Sturla Þórðarson prevents Þorgils of allowing his horses to run in the tún at Reykjaholt, because "it belongs to the apostle Peter" (who in fact is the patron of the local church). The same is to say of the old fertility rites attached to akr ok engi. Bishop Guðmundr Arason multiplies blessings and exorcisms of such places and the popularity, greatly attested by the santfæðarsögur, of the feast of Rogations (gangdagar or gagndagar) gives us a precise case of recuperation (see Guðmundar Saga Dýra ch. 13, Þórðar Saga Kakala ch. 12, Jarteinabók Þorláks Byskups III ch. 16, Guðmundar Saga Arasonar ch. 21, Árna Saga Byskups ch. 60).

. Let us now look at some of the great events of life : there is no trace in our texts of the ausa barn vatni; the only ceremony which is mentioned is the baptism (skírn, verb skíra); nor of the birth rites (such as presented by F. Ström /1/); no tannfé, no indication of interesting survivals in betrothal or marriage. As the same is not to say of the burial, we shall examine it later.

. The great dates of the year give an interesting example of substitutions. They have more or less, all of them, been preserved, but their meaning has been deviated while some practices could easily be kept without harm. For instance, jól has become the Christian Christmas and nothing could prevent the maintaining of jólavcizla, jóladrykkja, jólaboð (Porgils Saga Skarða ch. 2 for instance) and jólavistar or jólafríð, provided the object of all these practices would be different from the past. In the same way, the Church has assimilated the vetrnaetr to the Saint Michael (although Guðmundar Saga Arasonar ch. 41 makes the distinction) and the sumarmál to the Saint John (2). The sense of the sanctity, past and present, of these dates, is not lost, even in the expression: we find very frequently such expressions as á vetrnáttahelgi (for instance in Porgils Saga Skarða ch. 25), á sumarmála helgi (Íslendinga Saga ch. 146), at miðsumarshelgi (Porgils Saga Skarða ch. 40). They go on playing an important part in the public life : marriages, payment of fines, end of truce take often place at vetrnaetr or at miðju sumri (Íslendinga Saga ch.5). Curious also is the fact that the third day of the einmánaðarsamkváma (the meeting of the hreppsmenn, supposing the hreppar are a genuinely pagan institution in Iceland)

(1) Nordisk Hedendom . Tro och sed i förkristen tid. Göteborg 1961 p. 42

(2) L.Masset : Histoire des peuples scandinaves au Moyen Age. Paris. 1955. p. 135.

is reserved to the formulation of public vows (heitdagr)(1).

. If now we cast a glance on some fundamental features of the political and juridical institutions it is clear that the greatest part of the deepest structures has remained unchanged, having in fact nothing to offend the new ideals coming from abroad. The old germanic law had very ancient roots, its spirit was quite original and most of its specific constituents - the administrative and political system, the jurisdiction, the constitution of popular assemblies or Þing - existed long before the beginning of Iceland. Particularly, the link between religion and law was deep-rooted too and the feeling of ~~it~~ could not but remain very sensitive even in the XIIIth century. For instance, there can be no doubt about the fact that, when Þorgils skarði delegates his powers to Þórðr Hftnesingr to helga Þveráleið (consecrate the autumn Þing at Þverá, Þorgils Saga Skarða ch. 27), we have here to do with a ceremony which existed already before the christinaization, even though Þórðr had to pronounce Christian formulas : like for the toasts we shall see later, the Church could modify the formulas, it could not alter the rites. The devaluation is certainly greater in Íslendinga Saga ch. 34 where we see people going in procession to the tribunals behind the prow of a ship sem Þá var títt at bera til dóma. Must we see there a survival of the belief into the landvaettir, so frequently attested by the Landnámabók? But nothing allows us to speak of a real survival here. And, sacred as it had certainly been, we are astonished to see that one unique passage in the whole bulk of the samtíðarsögur, Þorgils Saga ok Haflíða ch. 16 (where moreover the ironical intention is clear too), alludes to the inviolability of the Þing (Þinghelgrinn). What is far more obvious in the samtíðarsögur with their ceaseless fights, battles and murders during the alÞing and even in the lögrétta (Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch.2) is that the sacred character of this institution was not much felt. In a similar way, the respect for the tribunals, the authority of which should have been very old and undisputed, is, in the Sturlung age, much contested. In 1234, Bishop Magnús Gizurarson is obliged to forbid people to carry weapons before tribunals (Íslendinga Saga ch. 99), a fact which the deplorable habit of hleyppa upp dómimum (Þorgils Saga ok Haflíða ch. 18, Sturlu Saga ch. 5) justifies enough.

. Now, in the way of conducting war or warlike enterprises, we could expect find traces of ancient customs (2). Beside uses which do not seem to convey particular religious meaning and may be relevant to so to speak natural ways of doing (as, for instance, the kví in Íslendinga Saga ch. 80), or must belong to the Viking habits (the bera allt til stanga of Þorgils Saga

(1) see E. Bull : Folk og Kirke i Middelalderen. Kria. 1912. p.46

(2) see R.Boyer : La guerre en Islande à l'âge des Sturlungar. in Inter-Nord 11, 1971, pp. 184-202

Skarða ch.60), we find the famous wedge formation already noticed by Tacitus (1) in Íslendinga Saga ch. 155 or Þórðar Saga Kakala ch.42. We know from Skjöldunga Saga taht Óðinn himself was supposed to have discovered this tactics (2). Íslendinga Saga ch. 155 has the word rani (the snout of a pig). But here like elsewhere, it never appears that the possible religious sense of the practice is still living or conscious. On another hand, in battles such as Þrlyggsstaðir, the strategy, if one may express so, is banal and the great warman of the time, Þórðr Kakali, tries to apply European tactics in Iceland. We can also say two words of the truce, gríð, a most frequent habit in the samtíðarsögur. These texts give us all possible details about this practice and we have all evidences that the institution was highly regulated (see for instance Íslendinga Saga ch. 67 or Þorgils Saga Skarða ch.15), If, as seems certain seing the formulas preserved in Grágás or in Grettla, the operation had a sacred character, the Church had no pains to recuperate it and to confound it with the truce of God such as edicted by the Nice Council in 1041. The fact is that we see the progressive appearing of the word kirkjugríð (e.g. Þórðar Saga Kakala ch. 31) in our texts, to replace the simple gríð.

. There remains one very interesting survival in Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar (3) by Sturla. The latter remarks that, on the year of Hákon's access to the throne, "there was a good year, fruit trees yielded fruit twice in the year and the birds wanted to hatch two times." This, naturally, reminds us of the ancient belief into the sacred king elected til árs ok friðar, ársaell ok friðsaell (4). True to say, this detail, which would obviously show a clear survival, applies to Norway, not to XIIIth century Iceland. Has Sturla felt it inoffensive for his compatriots where the situation was quite different? Or have we to interpret it as a Northern version of the ecclesiastical new view about the monarchy of divine origin (la monarchie de droit divin)?

b) We can now study features where the instances of recuperation are still more visible. We have just seen such cases (about old sacred tún, akr ok engi) where the passage was already done. Here is a list where it is plain :

. Let us take first the word blót. The sacrifice, as everybody knows, was the very centre of Northern paganism, the real moment when the whole pagan assembly felt united in a communion with the gods. In its successive

(1) Germania, VI,6 : acies per cuneos componitur

(2) see Cleasby-Vigfússon-Craigie : articles hamalt, svínfylking and rani.

(3) quoted here after the Norwegian translation by A. Holtmark

(4) see F. Ström : op.cit. pp. 48-51

phases, it represented the religion itself, certainly far more than the myths or individual practices. The Landnámabók could bear witness of its importance, if it did not take place in a series of texts which do not belong to samtíðar-sögur and show a remarkable tendency to archaism. What must be stated here is ~~that~~ there is no mention at all of blót in our texts. The word blótmaðr occurs in Geirmundar Þáttr Heljarskins ch. 4, but we shall see that this is a text which should not deserve its place among the sagas of contemporaries and is in fact already an Íslendingasaga. For the rest, the word blót, present in Íslendinga Saga ch. 67, 71 and 95 has suffered such a devaluation that it means simply swear or revile (blót ok bölvun). And the term blótskapr used in Jóns Saga Helga II ch. 12 is a pure synonym of idolatry, copied down from some Latin text by munk Gunnlaugr.

. The sacrificial banquet or veizla (in its original acception) could last longer since it did imply practices which had other meanings than sacred ones. Its importance in the Sturlung Age has remained great and it is still the "communion in drinking" defined by M. Cahen (1). Its general arrangement has not been altered : placing people according to their rank, bringing tables and food, pronouncing the old formáli til árs ok friðar, drinking to the memory of the dead, eating and drinking untill drunkenness; during the veizla, entertainment of the guests with plays, dances, reading or recitating of sagas and poems : all that is known many a time, the best instance being the veizla in Reykjahólar in Porgils Saga ok Hæfliða ch.10 (but see also Íslendinga Saga ch. 39 or 170). Here, the Church could not alter the situation and it had to adapt itself to circumstances, a thing strongly visible in all our texts. But it could, and it did in fact, adapt itself, that is ^{re-employ} the old habit for its personal use and benefit. The meaning and the importance of the veizla came from the drink (beer, öl) which would be taken and which had to be consecrated first. Thence, the importance of the formáli and of the toasts. And we do see in our texts that the adaptation has been exhaustive : there are veizlur for purely religious purposes (not to speak of the assimilation of jól to Christmas) In Páls Saga Byskups ch. 7, the veizla is given for the exhumation of bishop Þorlákr's relics; the same text, ch. 14, precises that, in any place where he was invited, bishop Páll pronounced himself the formáli; as for the toasts, which were supposed to be given formerly to Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr, they are

(1) La libation, op.cit. p. 29

now given to the Christ, the Holy Virgin and Saint Michael (Lárentfus Saga ch. 36, Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar p. 232). The toasts in honour of the dead (drekka full fraenda) are replaced by toasts to the dead man for whom the banquet is given (drekka minni föður, for instance). In other words : if the fundamental meaning and importance of the veizla : the assertion of the sacred character of the group, had remained unchanged through the times, its expressions and its precise rites have been given a Christian content, and there is no instance in the samtíðarsögur of genuine pagan survival in the veizla, at least in its external forms.

. Another moment of the ancient blót was, if we are to believe such texts as, for instance, Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks, ~~the~~ taking of oaths, generally to accomplish extraordinary deeds. The institution was deeply rooted since we find it into the legislation where it constituted a legal way of disculpation. We may admit that the formula which is contained in Víga-Glúms Saga (1) was the right one. People had to swear upon a sacred ring placed in the temple or hof and the oath was to be made to the famous Áss inn allmáttki, supposing this last expression does not betray a Christian and, accordingly, ungenue tincture. The comparison with Árna Saga Byskups ch.59, where bishop Árni himself dictates the formula, is enlightening : Áss inn allmáttki has given place to guð and the stallahringr to the bók, that is to say the Bible. The word baug-eiðr has been replaced by bókeiðr or even by lögeiðr, which is thus "neutral". And the only two passages in the samtíðarsögur which give some precisions state that, if one does not swear upon the Bible, (Íslendinga Saga ch. 129) it will be on the Holy Rood (ibidem, ch. 156).

. A detail more : it concerns the names of the days of the week and of the months of the year. If we are to trust Jóns Saga Helga I ch. 24, bishop Jón Ugmundarson would be the man who tried to substitute to the pagan names of the days of the week new names such as annan dag viku, Þriðjudagr and so on. We must confess that he succeeded in a remarkable way whereas, elsewhere in Europe, the efforts of, for instance, Bede the Venerable or Isidore of Sevilla were a failure (2). We find once Týsdagr (Íslendinga Saga ch. 124) and once Þórsdagr (Þorláks Saga Byskups ch.18) in the whole bulk of our texts and most often, even sunnudagr is replaced by dróttinsdagr. The same thing applies

(1) Íslenzk Fornrit IX p. 86. See also Landnámabók, Hauksbók ch. 353.

(2) see Bede : De Temporibus in Migne P.L. vol. XC col. 281 or Isidore in Migne P.L. vol. LXXXII col. 181.

to the names of the months. Beside einmánaðr, we notice twice gói (Íslendinga Saga ch. 43 and Konungs Annáll for year 1276). No mention of Þorri, frermánaðr, hrítmánaðr and other. The silence of the texts, which use generally latin expressions, is here particularly eloquent.

c) We come now to instances where reconstructions or importations are highly probable. I take reconstructions in both directions : certain features which take place in Íslendingasögur or similar texts do not occur in samtíðarsögur and must therefore, in the former, be reconstructed, whichever the sources; on another hand, there is a lot of features present in the samtíðarsögur which strongly remind of details extant in European sources and must therefore have been adapted to Icelandic conditions.

. Such is the case for place names : the discrepancies between samtíðarsögur and Íslendingasögur (and Landnáma) are, here, very striking. A great number of toponyms witnessing the presence of a cult place has been listed by specialists (1). They are generally simply missing in the samtíðarsögur where we can find only about a score of them in all (2). No Blótarbjörk, no Goðafoss, no Landdísasteinar, like in Landnáma. Are we to conclude that these latter are fingered formations? that is, do they exist there merely for the sake of couleur locale? Besides, the comparison made by Kolsrud between place names which remind of the name of a pagan god in Norway and in Iceland (3) shows a big difference and it must be added that Kolsrud has investigated the whole saga literature.

. One could presume that the rites about death and burial where traditions use to be so strong everywhere and at any time, survived in the XIIIth century Iceland, especially if we bear in mind the minute descriptions given in Glúma, Gísla Saga Súrssonar or Egla. But we have to admit that it is not the case either : no veita nábjargir, no helskór in Sturlunga. One must wonder, accordingly, whether the picturesque details just mentioned have not been taken from Latin or European sources where magical or strange practices about death are very frequent.

. There is a field where discrepancies are still more surprising : it regards the so called "ancient" laws or juridic practices, so abundantly illustrated in Íslendingasögur. And this disagreement does not characterize a comparison between samtíðarsögur and family sagas on one hand, it is the same between samtíðarsögur and Grágás on the other hand! If we compare the three

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- (1) for instance Ó. Briem : Heidinn síður á Íslandi. Reykjavík. 1945. pp.75-85 and 134-137.
 - (2) that is : Helgafell, Heljardalsheiðr, Surtshellir, Þórsmörk, Þórsmess in Sturlunga and Heljardalsá, Reynir, Reynisness, Hofsstaðir (twice), Hofsteigr (twice) Hörgá, Hörgárdalur, Hörgárdalsheiðr, Hörgsholt, Hörgsland and seven different Hof in the Biskupa Sögur.
 - (3) Noregs Kyrkjesoga. I. Millomalderen. Oslo. 1958 pp.49-50

thousand pages of the samtíðarsögur with the three hundred pages of a group which would include Víga-Glúms Saga, Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða and Gísla Saga Súrssonar, we discover that the former do not say one word of things which are clearly stated in the latter, such as hólmanga (ÍF IX p. 12 or VI pp.10-11), the accusation against a dead man whose corpse is unburied (ÍF IX pp. 32-33), the lýritr or goði's veto (ÍF IX p. 84), the exact formulation of oaths (ÍF IX p. 86), the níðsstöng (ÍF IX p.88 or VI p.10), the taking of land by the fire (ÍF VI p. 89, XI p.99), the exact details about the way a féránsdómr has to be held (ÍF IX p.118), the vápnatak (ibidem), the fóstbraeðralag (ÍF VI p. 118), the geirnaglar (ÍF VI p.22), the difference between vífg, launvífg and mora (ÍF VI p. 44), the rites about shrouding the dead (ÍF VI pp.44-45) and the seiðr (ÍF VI p. 56). We should not know anything on these pagan survivals if we had only the samtíðarsögur at our disposal.

Are we to conclude, therefore, that in the three Íslendingasögur which have just been mentioned, and in the rest of such sagas as well, there has been a great effort of reconstruction which may be understood in two different ways : either the notions the list of which has just been given, present in the Íslendingasögur and absent in the samtíðarsögur, are more or less genuine and show an effort on the authors' side to recreate a past in accordance with their opinion; or, supposing these notions are genuine, have the authors of samtíðarsögur wanted to eliminate them of their texts in order to comply with the claims of the Church? This last view is hardly tenable since there are many different writers who have composed samtíðarsögur, at various times, and since the same man can well have written both an Íslendingasaga and a samtíðarsaga, as it is probably the case with Sturla Þórðarson. We are very tempted to conclude that the truth, the faithful reflection of the reality is rather in the samtíðarsögur, whereas Íslendingasögur are works of antiquarians, the antiquities in question coming either from the Germanic past or even from quite different sources.

. Let us take now three different features which seem quite clearly come from Europe and owe nothing to Northern or Germanic ancestry.

The first regards the dansar. Known as it is nowadays, the notion has never been studied in detail with the necessary distinctions. The word itself, of French origin, recovers certainly three different notions which should be carefully distinguished. Dans may apply to : leikr, spott (or flimt-an) and mansöngur. Without giving too many details - for this is a subject that would deserve a special treatment - let us say that the three types are present in the samtíðarsögur. In the first meaning : dans = leikr, it is a kind of play, accompanied by dancing and mimicking which may well have very

ancient cultural roots if we behold the rock engravings of the Bronze Age in the whole Scandinavia. Such would be the case of vísa 10 in Íslendinga Saga ch.33 where the quarrel between Viðidalr people and Miðfjörðr inhabitants is depicted in this way, and of vísa 6 in same text, ch. 28, to ridicule Kálfr Guttormsson. In spite of the probably most ancient Northern origins of this genre, D.Strömbäck and Stefán Einarsson (1) have established that this was perhaps a foreign custom coming from the south-west of France (2) and that it could have known a strong revival in the XIIth-XIIIth centuries because of the influence of the courteous literature which, it must be reminded, introduced in Europe the fashion of masks and disguises (3). Thus, we should have here to deal with an interesting phenomenon of revival through foreign influences.

The second type is more simple. It is also satirical but we are not obliged to consider that it implied mimic, disguise or special attire. It would be represented by the dansagerðir made by Kolbeinn ungi's followers against Þórðr Kakali in Þórðar Saga Kakala ch.39 or by those directed against Loftr Pálsson, or even by the vísa 18 of Íslendinga Saga : Loftr er í eyjum / bítr lundabein, and so on. K. Liestøl and D.Strömbäck agree in giving to this genre a foreign origin too (4) and we should have to do here, accordingly, with an Icelandic adaptation.

As for the third type, the most interesting for us, it is represented in Sturlunga by one verse only : Mínar eru sorgir Þungar sem blý (Íslendinga Saga ch.200) sung by Þórðr Andréasson the very day of his death, and, eventually, by the famous vísa 74 in the same saga, where Þórir jökull is depicted singing it when dying (Upp skal á kjöl klífa / Köld es sjávar drífa...) Elsewhere, the texts speak, without precisions, of dansleikar (Þorgils Saga ok Haflíða ch. 10, where the association dans-leikr is interesting), hringleikr (Sturlu Saga ch.20), dans sleginn í stofu (Íslendinga Saga ch.76) and, in Jóns Saga Helga I, ch.24, of mansöngur : in all cases, the text allows us of thinking that we are in presence of real dance in the present meaning of the word, accompanied with music, ^{and} (song) erotic, elegiac or lyrical. This is, no doubt, the French carole which was well-known in aristocratic circles in Denmark at the beginning of the XIIth century (5) and where, for the rest, the quotation from Þórðr Andréasson finds an exact equivalent : Eya; hvað sorigen du est tung(6).

Thus, the dansar are an ideal example of this confusion or fusion which happened in Iceland during the Sturlunga Age, between local traditions,

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- (1) D. Strömbäck : Cult remnants in dramatic dances, in Arv 4, 1948; S. Einarsson : Horse dance in the Sturlunga Saga, in Folkloristica. Uppsala. 1960
 - (2) it is also attested by Tacitus : Germania XXIV
 - (3) see for instance F. Heer : Medeltiden. Stockholm. 1966. p.105
 - (4) K. Liestøl : Dei eldste islenske dansekvæde in Arv, 1, 1945; see note 1.
 - (5) J. de Vries : Altnordische Litteraturgeschichte. Berlin 2 ed.1967 § 162
 - (6) Danmarks gamle folkeviser, number 37

pagan remnants and foreign influences.

. Let us take another point : let us look at the custom of fóstr (the fostering of a child) : this practice was universal in Iceland in the Sturlung Age, the case of Snorri Sturluson's fostering by Jón Loftsson that proved to be the only means of soothing Hvamm-Sturla's anger being the most expressive (Sturlu Saga ch. 34). It seems clear nowadays that this is an import from Ireland rather than a typical Germanic heritage (1).

. And finally, I shall give one instance of superposition. The role of Fate and the consultation of its doom by means of the drawing of lots, whichever their nature, is well established among typically Germanic religious features, since it is already witnessed by Tacitus (2). The practice has not disappeared in the Sturlung Age and the samtíðarsögur give numerous instances of the fact (see Sturlu Saga ch. 23, Íslendinga Saga ch. 162). Íslendinga Saga ch.100 gives interesting precisions : one used dice (tenningar) and the text quotes the usual expression kasta deus ok ás, which is an obvious translation of the French jeter deux et as, to denote a very bad result. It was a term of trictrac (Icelandic kvátra, itself coming from the French quatre pronounced /kwatre/ at that time because it was played on a small table divided into four parts).

To sum up : in this field of the cult and of the institutions, the general impression is that of a constant effort of substitution to possibly ancient practices of new features, borrowed either in Ireland or in the whole Western world. Of the old cult practices and of their embodiment into the institutions, extremely few things are left in the samtíðarsögur. In any case, the clear consciousness of the religious original meaning of these practices seems to have disappeared. The Icelandic society who lives in the samtíðarsögur does not stand at equal distances between pagan and Christian ways of living. This society appears quite well installed in the new state of things.

II. Gods and myths.

We shall, I think, draw still more drastic conclusions of the examination of our second chapter, which concerns gods and myths of old Northern Europe, such as reflected in the samtíðarsögur. F.Paasche declared(3) that "under the action of Christianity, it was comparatively easy of chasing away the great gods : they had been transported into the temples and they disappeared with them".

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- (1) see K.Gjerset : History of Iceland. London. 1923 p.92; ÍF III p.7 note 1; O.Loyer : Les chrétientés celtiques. Paris.1965 p. 67
 - (2) Germania X; see also R.Boyer : L'Islandais des sagas Paris 1967 ch. 1
 - (3) Møtet mellom hedendom og kristendom i Norden. Oslo. 1958. p. 81

The verification is swiftly done. There is a passage in Jóns Saga Helga I ch. 2, where Týr, Óðinn and Þórr are mentioned about the names of the days of the week. Then, Sturlu Saga ch.31 compares Hvamm-Sturla to Óðinn (because he is in danger of becoming one-eyed, as is Óðinn), Sturla Sighvatsson is two times called Dala-Freyr because he indulges in luxury in his house and ways of living (Íslendinga Saga ch.71 and 85); and if we want to include Völundr among the gods, Hrafn's Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar ch.3 states that Hrafn was as good a smith as Völundr himself.

These instances reveal a good knowledge of the Northern mythology : they are applied with great ability. But, studying the samtíðarsögur, one does not see how to confirm G.Turville-Petre's opinion when he says that "the gods were part of the life of the old Icelanders"(1).

The above examples came from the passages in prose of the samtíðarsögur. It goes without saying that, by force, the situation is different in the vísur, since this kind of poetry was hard to write without the employment of kenningar and heiti which, in their turn, used nearly automatically names of gods or references to myths. There are in Sturlunga Saga as a whole 53 kenningar dealing directly with mythology. Of these 53, 13 interest Óðinn under his various names, 5, Freyr, 3, Baldr and 1, Njörðr. There is no mention of Þórr. There too, we discover a most remarkable knowledge of the Northern mythology. Such rare Óðinn's names as Hnikarr, Högnir or Þundar are used; small divinities like Gerðr, Njörun, Rán or Hlín, or valkyries like Guðr, Göndul, Mist, Hildir, Sigrlóð; even mythological sea-kings like Gylfi, Ála, Sigarr are present. Which is more remarkable is the very strong sense of the artistic resources of this mythology which is there displayed : the employment of certain legends attached to heroes like Hamðir, Hrólfr kráki, Heðinn or giants like Suttungr, Íði is very conscious and clever in the same way as the references to the myth of the origin of poetry with the two vessels Boðn and Són. I want to state here that the decorative value of these references is prominent, and admirable as well. But, to take an instance, calling bishop Guðmundr (Íslendinga Saga vísa 2) the maple of the fire of Gylfi's ground : Gylfa láfs báls hlynr (Gylfi's ground being the sea, the fire of the sea being gold, the tree of the gold being the man, here Guðmundr) is certainly much satisfying for a lover of technical acrobatics, but it is difficult to attach a religious value to the image, the link between Guðmundr and Gylfi being hard to see. It is even permitted to speak here of inadequacy.

(1) Um Óðinsdyrkun á Íslandi, in Studia Islandica 17, 1958, p. 9

Let us add that these mythological kenningar represent only one fifth of the total amount of kenningar included into Sturlunga (53 out of 246 in all). All the other are "neutral" that is to say, deprived of precise references to mythology, such as geirnets hyrjar hreggmildir (Íslendinga Saga, vísa 13) for a man inclined to fighting, literally : liberal in the storm of the fire of the net of the spears.

There may be cases which look mythological at first view but are not indeed. For instance, Hrafn Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar ch.19 tells us that, at the place where Hrafn was beheaded, the grass remained everlastingly green, a detail which reminds us immediately of a similar remark about the burial mound of Þorgrímr in Gísla Saga Súrssonar (because, this last text says, there had been a strong friendship between Þorgrímr and the god Freyr) (1). But, as A. Tjomsland noticed (2) this is a point which is nearly banal in the Saints or Martyrs lives in Latin. We are fronted here to the reverse movement : a detail has been taken in Church literature and adapted to the Icelandic one (Hrafn is clearly presented like a kind of saint in his saga), and finally turned into a so-called Northern mythological detail in Gísla Saga.

Another fact may call our attention : the frequent presence, especially in the dreams which constitute a kind of set theme in sagas of all kinds, of animals and, accordingly, the link which one is tempted to establish with old pagan beliefs. It is well known that the raven was Óðinn's favourite animal, the swine or the ox or the horse, Freyr's, and so on. All these animals and other play a part in the samtíðarsögur. The raven remains a fatidical bird in Íslendinga Saga, vísa 9 or vísa 72. The pig is present in Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch. 4, although I have suggested elsewhere (3) that the detail could have been borrowed in Pope Gregory's Dialogs. There is a furious bull in Þorláks Saga Byskups, Þingri gerðin, ch. 47 (and in Jarteinabók Þorláks Byskups I ch.29) which is soothed by an invocation to Þorlákr. It is naturally possible of seeing in all these stories remainders of ancient sacred terrors, although they may as well belong to stock images due to timeless superstitions.

It is a fact that, without satisfying explanations, the seal has been considered a special and fatidical animal by the Icelanders. The nickname Urknhöfði (head of a seal) given to Hallr Teitsson in Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða vísa 13, and the monster Selkolla which torments many a time bishop Guðmundr (Íslendinga Saga ch. 25, Jarteinabók Guðmundar Byskups ch.20) are evidences of the fact. What is to be pointed out here, however, is that, very curiously, it

(1) see ÍF VI p. 57

(2) introduction to The Saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Ithaca, 1951, p. XIV

(3) The influences of Pope Gregory's Dialogues in Old Icelandic literature, in The Acts of the First Saga Conference, Edinburgh, 1973.

looks as if it were the Church itself which would have taken for its own account the strange properties of this animal : it plays an important part in the tales of miracles, being very often the instrument of the miracle-doers (e.g. Þorláks Saga Byskups ch. 26, ibidem, yngri gerðin ch.45, Jarteinabók Þorláks Byskups I ch. 5 and 22).

But there can be no doubt that the horse had got a magical and ritual value in the old Scandinavian religion. Once more, we can invoke here Tacitus's testimony (1), and we think also of Freyfaxi in Hrafnkatla. The Church was aware of the fact since one of its first orders was to forbid the eating of horse flesh. Nevertheless, its role remains considerable in the samtíðarsögur and it is certainly not accidental if Sturla Sighvatsson's horse bears the name Álftarleggr (Íslendinga Saga ch.175), the álfar being, like Freyr, divinities of the fertility-fecondity. The horse was also supposed to possess certain powers, between other, the ability of foreseeing the future. And indeed : it appears in several dreams in Sturlunga (Hrafn Saga Sveinbjarna sonar ch. 18, Íslendinga Saga ch.190). Particularly interesting is Sighvatr Sturluson's dream in Íslendinga Saga ch.132, where Sighvatr sees his own horse, named Fölski : the horse asks his master why he does not invite him to eat and drink; then, he takes place at Sighvatr's table and devours everything at hand, the plate included. Just then, Sighvatr recites a vísa (number 54 in Íslendinga Saga) which, mark the point, contains a metaphore which is directly borrowed from Sighvatr's brother, Snorri Sturluson's Gylfaginning (Hunger is Hel's plate, cf. Gylfaginning ch. 23). Is Fölski Sighvatr's fylgja, since it is clear that his appearing foretells Sighvatr's death? The common name fölski, which occurs in Gylfaginning too, applies to the ashes which remain in the fire when the burning of a thing is over and before this object has lost its shape. Moreover, Fölski devouring the plate strongly reminds us of Logi eating out, once more in the Gylfaginning (ch. 45 and 46) the trough in his match against Loki. This makes in all three direct references to Gylfaginning and we must bear the fact in mind for a while.

There are still, about old heroes, some details which deserve the attention. In the famous chapter of Jóreiðr's dreams (Íslendinga Saga ch. 190), Guðrún Gjúkadóttir appears, and says, notice the fact : "It does not matter whether I am pagan or christian, but I am the friend of my friends." : a declaration which shows a visible contempt for all religious feelings; it may seem quite natural also that Snorri Sturluson has called his búð at the athing Valhöll (Íslendinga Saga ch.80). And if the valkyries are present in the famous vísa 4 in Íslendinga Saga (Guðr and Göndul), perhaps also in same text ch.122

(1) Tacitus : Germania X,4-5, see also G.Gjessing : Hesten i førhistorisk kunst og kultur in Viking 7, 1943, and B.Egardt : Problem kring hästskallar, in Rig 33, 1950.

(the woman who tears out men's heads with a kind of net), their images are purely symbolical : they belong, as J. de Vries would say, to the mythological apparatus of heroic poetry, not to faith (1). Let us notice that the Church, here too, has assimilated the notion : the saint hermit Hildir is called God's skjaldmaer (a typical heiti for the valkyries) in Jóns Saga Helga I ch.48.

There remains a curious fact : it concerns the phenomenon of herfjöturr, this uncouth and sudden paralysis which strikes a man, in a battle for instance or at the very moment when it would be most urgent to him to take to action : unable of taking flight or of defending himself, he is killed on the spot. There are very few instances of this in the whole Icelandic literature, except in Sturlunga, where one finds several cases of it (Íslendinga Saga ch.144, Sturlunga Saga II p. 288, Þórðar Saga Kakala ch.24), the first two ones having the word herfjöturr itself. There is a valkyrie who is named Herfjöturr : she is mentioned in the Grimmsmál (strophe 36), a poem which is recorded in Snorri's Edda. Moreover, the question is to know whether this notion - which may well be founded on quite normal or physiological features - is Germanic or Northern at all. We have instances of a similar belief in Homer's works (Odyssey XXII 297 ssqq and Iliad XII 358-360 or XXII 5 ssqq.) or even in Atharva Veda (VIII.8 or XI.9) and two miracles at least in the jarteinabaekr remind us of the fact : Oddaverja Þáttur ch. 6 and Jarteinabók Þorláks Byskups II ch.1. Identical remarks would apply to a similar phenomenon, Þeim var bilt, in relation with goddess Bil and illustrated, about god Þórr himself, once more in the Gylfaginning (ch.44). It occurs several times in Sturlunga, for instance in Íslendinga Saga ch.98.

These are all the instances I could find of references to gods and myths in the samtíðarsögur. They call for an important and very significant remark : practically all the details which have just been listed above, scanty as they are, might come from Snorri Sturluson's works (all of them written before 1241, and some of them some twenty years earlier), especially Gylfaginning. The fact is particularly convincing for the Fölski episode in Íslendinga Saga. As if Sturla Þórðarson and other authors of samtíðarsögur had tried to apply in their works what they had learned in Snorri's works - and we do know that Snorri did not compose his Edda out of regret for the old faith, but on pedagogical and so-called historical grounds. As regards the kenningar and the heiti, the greatest number of them reflects an attentive reading of the Skáldskaparmál.

 (1) Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte 2 ed. Berlin. 1956. § 193

I think one may conclude that, as far mythology is concerned in the samtíðarsögur, the so-called pagan revival or pagan survivals are a purely literary feature devoid of all living religious meaning.

III. The other world.

Obviously, it cannot be possible to draw such radical conclusions from the study of the idea that the Icelanders could have of the other world and of the beings who were supposed to inhabit it. For here, we reach the deepest of all religious structures. Nevertheless, I feel inclined to contest a little E.Ó. Sveinsson's opinion when he says that

the old belief into souls, dreams, appearances and ghosts has maintained itself, without fully agree^{ing} with the Christian faith (1).

. We know that the other world was a reality for the Old Germans, that they had a cult for the dead, supporters and protectors of the family, that they believed in the migration of souls, and that their religion was highly eschatological (2). The notion of hugr corresponds fairly well to our conception of a soul foreign to the body it inhabits, susceptible of freeing itself from it and of acting independently. In that case, it could take a proper shape, hamr, which was like the symbolical figure of the internal ego. Certain individuals had this property like our modern werewolves: at night, they could escape their bodies which remained inert as dead, and go elsewhere to commit mischiefs. Such a man was said to be hamrammr or rammaukinn.

Landnámabók gives a lot of instances of the fact.

We must notice that there is only one mention of the fact in the samtíðarsögur, and in Geirmundar Láttr Heljarskinns, a rather recent text. And in connection with this property, a capital remark must be made. It may be true that the hamrammr phenomenon is of shamanistic origin (3) and Snorri's Ynglinga Saga tells about Óðinn things which do not differ from what we can learn in shamanistic texts (4). But let us have a closer look at Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch.19 : we read there that priest Guðmundr Arason has fallen asleep, out of physical exhaustion, on the side of a deacon sitting beside him;

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- (1) Um íslenzkar Þjóðsögur, op.cit. p.66
 - (2) see F. Ström : Nordisk Hedendom op.cit. pp.146-148.
 - (3) ibidem p.81
 - (4) Ynglinga Saga ch.VII (ÍF XXVI pp.18 ssqq.

after a while, the deacon does not feel at all the weight of Guðmundr's body. And at the same time, a man in a distant region who has been tormented for a long time by a flagg, having just invoked Guðmundr, sees the saint appearing in a light, sprinkle the flagg which immediately disappears into the ground, never to come back. This story may be relevant to the hamrammr complex and, as such, belong, under Christian disguise, to genuine Northern traditions as reflecting shamanistic influences. But rare is the mention of a hamrammr man travelling under human form - they usually are supposed to take the shape of an animal - and, which is far more interesting, a reader who would not be aware of Northern antiquities would doubtless take the whole story for a rather commonplace case of levitation, a property most commonly attributed to Christian saints in medieval hagiography (1).

. The belief into the immortality of soul, whatever its name, has given birth in the North to another body of creeds which expresses itself into the devotion for landvaettir : these could be the souls of the dead who take refuge into places or things, which "inhabit" them and protect thus their descendants (2). They want a special cult and offerings, if we are to trust a lot of tales of the Landnámabók or of Kristni Saga. There was here too a real difficulty for the Church which, as a consequence, fought hard against the landvaettir as we can see in the beginning of Úlfjótr's laws. Once more, we are obliged to state that there is in the samtíðarsögur only one mention of landvaettir, and once more in Geirmundar Þáttur Heljarskinns : it is the well-known story of the rowan-trees at Skarð.

As there are similarities between landvaettir and álfar (3), we shall, perhaps, be more lucky if we seek for such creatures in the samtíðarsögur. But here too, the harvest is poor. Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch.4 borrows probably to German annals, for year 1167, the mention of strange beings - kynjamenn - riding in the sky. Two kenningar for warrior use álfar (sword's álfar in Þórðar Saga Kakala vísa 3, fight's álfar in Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar p. 192). And, if we accept E.Ó.Sveinsson's suggestion that we have to deal with álfar in two different tales of miracles (in Þorláks Saga Byskups ch.51 and in Jóns Saga Helga I ch.30), the examination of these passages shows narrow links with bad creatures and devils familiar to European saints' lives

(1) see for instance O.Leroy : La lévitation Paris 1928

(2) See Jón Helgason : Íslands Kirke fra dens grundlaeggelse til Reformationen. København. 1925. p.18; K.B. Ólafsson : Landvaettir og álfar, in Andvari, haust 1962, pp.260-271.

(3) F.Jónsson : Álfatrúin á Íslandi, in Íimreiðin I, 1895, pp.95-103; K.B. Ólafsson, art.cit. pp.269-270.

in latin. Here, par excellence, literature has superseded what could have been a genuine belief originally. The confusion reaches its peak in Míðsaga Guðmundar Góða ch.2 where we can imagine that the two monsters which carry away Kolbeinn's wife are álfar. But here, the text speaks of troll! The visible effort of the Church has clearly been to assimilate all possible pagan creatures of the other world, genuine or not, to the Christian devils. And in many a case, the intervention of such beings, either seems invented for the sake of edification, especially in the jarteinabaekr, or has been placed there to create artistic effects

. Different is the situation with reincarnation. There is in Þorgils Saga Skarða ch.62 a passage which seems to show a true belief into migration of souls. The text says that, once Þorgils sakrði has become, after Kolbeinn ungi, the chief of the Skagafjörður, the inhabitants of this district thought that "Kolbeinn ungi was back (aftr kominn) and reborn (endrborinn)". Snorri Sturluson says exactly the same about Hákon the good who was Haraldr hárfagri endrborinn, in Heimskringla (ÍF XXVI p.150 /1/). There is a good means of verifying this belief : it consists of studying the choice of names given to children. Everyone knows that, according to specialists (2), in the Germanic world, this custom obeyed strong principles : one had to give children part of the names of their parents: Ásgeirr and Þorgeirðr should have children called Geirr and Þorgeirr, and so on...

A statistical study of all the names included in the samtíðarsögur convinces us immediately that these principles have never been applied in Iceland. The only evidence is that, possibly, one can detect a predominating name inside one given family, generally because this has been the name of an illustrious ancestor : Saemundr by the Oddaverjar, Gizurr by the Haukdoelir, Þórðr and Magnús by the Reykhyllingar, Egill by the Myramenn, and so on... Moreover, we see an increasing popularity of the names of saints, Icelandic saints chiefly, such as Jón. If we compare statistically the frequency of names in Njála on one side and in the samtíðarsögur on the other side, we see that the most popular names in Njála are Þorkell (18 out of 229 names), Ketill (16/229), and Þorsteinn (15/229) whereas in the samtíðarsögur, they are Jón (166/401), Þórðr (119/401) and Þorsteinn (117/401). Exist in the samtíðarsögur, but are absent in Njála : Páll (39/401), Andréas (20/401), Nikulás (14/401), Markús (13/401) etc... This is a good illustration of the progressive substitution of the cult of the saints to the old cult of pagan heroes.

(1) see also de Vries : Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte op.cit. § 138.

(2) M.Keil : Altisländische Namenwahl. Leipzig. 1931; E.Wessén : Nordiska namnstudier ; J.Jónsson : Um íslensk namanöfn, in Safn til sögu Íslands III, 1896-1902, pp. 569-700.

. We have just spoken of trolls. The notion is very complex. Kelchner sets the equation troll = jötunn = the soul of a dead person, "ordinarily, somebody wicked" (1). But the reading of the samtíðarsögur proves that this notion too is regularly suffering degradation, since it is equal, sometimes to draugr, sometimes to álfr, sometimes even to landvaettr. The ^hcristianism has not missed the opportunity of reducing all these notions to devils, see the expression troll hafi Þik (e.g. in Jarteinabók Guðmundar Byskup ch.18). Troll is also assimilated to draugr or flagð in many passages of Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða or Jarteinabók Guðmundar Byskups. The general impression is that it is very difficult to make the distinction, if ever, between all these qualifications. Everywhere in the samtíðarsögur, they are synonyms to devils (óhreinandi in Viðbaetir to Jóns Saga Helga ch.10, see also Sturlu Þáttur ch.2, Sturlunga Saga II p. 284, Míðsaga Guðmundar Byskups ch. 2 and 12).

On the other side, there are visibly Christian stories which are given so-called pagan features about the other world. Such is the case of the vampire Faraldr, in Hrafns Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar vísa 3, who probably does not belong to the genuine pagan mythology but is, on the contrary, much frequent in the Latin Vitae. He resembles the horrible Járngrímr who appears to Guðmundr Guðibekkr in Íslendinga Saga ch.141 : all these figures remind us very strongly of the numerous Dances macabres or Vers de la Mort, so popular throughout the Middle Ages in the whole Europe.

. One word more about the difficult and complex notion of fylgja and/or hamingja, a kind of protective spirit attending on one individual or one family. It is well probable that these figures go back to pagan sources. We find, unfortunately, or typically enough, four mentions only of fylgjur (or hamingjur) in our texts : these are Þorgils Saga Skarða ch.12 where Þórr Sturluson appears in a dream to his son Sturla to announce him the arrival of the viðbjörn (that is Þorgils skarði), then Íslendinga Saga ch.90 where Sighvatr Sturluson guesses that Valgarðr Styrmison is feigr by looking at the latter's horse. The word fylgjur itself accurs in Sturlunga Saga II p. 287 (Óvina fylgjur) and in Íslendinga Saga ch.70 (Ófriðarfylgjur). This is very little for a notion that all specialists consider to be one of the most important in Northern paganism (2). How are we to interpret this scantiness?

- (1) Dreams in Old Norse literature. Cambridge. 1935. pp. 41-43. L.Musset : agrees in Histoire des peuples scandinaves op.cit. p.135.
- (2) see B. Melsted : Íslendinga saga. Kaupmannahöfn. 1903-1910. vol.I p. 102; G.Turville-Petre : Dreams in Icelandic tradition, in Folklore 69, 1958

The answer may be that it overlapped much easily with the Christian notion of guardian angel. By the way, through the intermediary of such anglo-normand texts as Henri d'Arce's Vitas Patrum (1) we see quite clearly how the two notions can be confounded. And for the rest, the Icelanders have known very soon the notion of fylgjuengill. It could facilitate the eradication of the pagan image.

What we may conclude of the study of this section is that the Church had brought with itself in Iceland a lot of stories and instances which could coincide with or replace the ancient Northern beliefs into the other world. The ground was firm : there was in both fields the same certainty that the other world existed and was inhabited. Judging from the samtíðarsögur, one must very often wonder whether the details dealing with the other world are not in fact taken from Latin or continental sources, vitae in latin, tales of miracles, "scientific" writings and so on... Even in the case of what may seem to be genuine, one feels authorized to speak of superimprints, as would photographers say; on an old Northern pattern, the Church has suggested or imposed new images and stories, and the last ones only, probably, were visible to the contemporaries of samtíðarsögur's authors.

IV. Witchcraft and magic.

If we now study witchcraft and magic, I am aware of the fact that we are on the border of religion proper, and that such a study is far more difficult than the previous ones. For this is a field where religion and faith do not necessarily play a prominent part. On the other hand, E.Ó.Sveinsson remarks judiciously that the Church brought with itself "the witchcraft or sorcery of the whole world" (2). And it is true : it is very difficult, in many cases, to do the distinction between practices which may be properly Northern and the sorcery of the Western world.

. We shall begin with a very important constatation : all the practices that we have the right of considering as genuinely pagan, such as seiðr, galdr, gandreid, snadingr, níðsstöng are totally absent in the samtíðarsögur. The thing ought to be surprising for everyone who has read the Íslendingasögur or the Landnámabók.

The only passage in the samtíðarsögur which may bring some light on the matter is Jóns Saga Helga I ch.24 (or the parallel text in II ch.12)

(1) lines 5960-5961

(2) Um íslenzkar Þjóðsögur op.cit. p.67

where it is said that bishop Jón Ógmundarson (1106-1121) fought against all the bad habits (óháttir), witchcraft (fjölkyngi ok forðæðuskapr), magic (galdur ok gerningr), ocular delusions produced by spells (sjónhverfiligan kukklaraskap) and esoteric practices (forneskja) + Jóns Saga Helga II adds here idolatry, blótskapr -. This enumeration, in its alliterated form, does not taste genuine: monk Gunnlaugr must have translated here a Latin formula. Jóns Saga Helga I gives instances : bishop Jón forbade superstitions (hindrvitni) such as those devoted to the moon, the names of the days, he denounced dansar and mansöngur ísur. It is very little, and rather deceptive. Let us try to see, by a closer examination of the texts, if they can give us more.

. We can begin with the runes, since their magic value is generally admitted (1). They intervene three times in Sturlunga (Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch.13, Íslendinga Saga ch. 112 and 150) and twice in Hákonar Saga Hákonarsonar (pp. 123 and 191). But the comparison with Egla or Grettla is eloquent : never in Sturlunga are their so-called magical virtues mentioned. In three of these five examples, runes is the exact equivalent of writing and Íslendinga Saga ch.150 seems decisive : Oddr Sveinbjarnarson sends to Snorri Sturluson a letter written in stafkarlalettr, that is a kind of cryptogram (the text does not speak of runes). But nobody was able to read them! On the contrary, we see in Sturlu Þáttr ch.3 how Sturla Þórðarson uses runes in a derisive way.

. We may content ourselves of speaking only en passant of the very numerous details about prophecies, second-sight and the like. There is practically no important character in the samtíðarsögur who is not gifted with this special power. I have studied elsewhere the question (2). Of course, this faculty could belong to Northern antiquities and even could show remnants of shamanism. But we must remember that this is , par excellence, the attribute of saints and martyrs in medieval hagiography. And, to give a more precise source, it is a set theme in Pope Gregory's Dialogs where it occurs in all possible opportunities. Heilagra Manna Sögur and Postóla Sögur show that this kind of literature was fairly well known in Iceland and there is no use of insisting on the point here. The situation with such features is exactly the same as with dreams, another conventional point in the sagas and probably of same origin : they appear to be a rather obliged theme or device, which is given a purely literary utilization. Here, we are far from Völuspá or Fáfnismál! For the rest, the characters who are the most endowed with prophetic gift are the three saint bishops of Iceland!

I am not saying that there are no pagan magical practices in the samtíðarsögur : they are certainly present and have been duly recorded elsewhere(3). I am simply pointing out that a lot of these features could be Christian

(1) G.Turville-Petre : Origins of Icelandic literature. Oxford. 1953. p.17;
L.Musset : Introduction à la runologie Paris. 1965, does not agree

(2) in : The influence of Pope Gregory's Dialogues... op.cit.

(3) cf chiefly N.Lid in Nordisk Kultur XIX, 1935

as well or could have been imported with christianism.

For instance, one has written much about the famous sólarsteinn which is mentioned several times (in Hrafns Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar ch.11, 19, Íslendinga Saga ch.30 and even Guðmundar Saga Arasonar by Arngrímr Brandsson ch.26)(1). As Th.Ramskou points out, it may have been a kind of leidarsteinn to guide navigation, and be accordingly a genuine Northern discovery. But scientific works such as recorded in Rím I were not unknown to Iceland and it is simply reasonable to think that sólarsteinn goes back to Plinius the Elder or to Isidore of Sevilla. The latter, to be sure, had been read by Icelanders in the XIIIth century.

. We can imagine, on the contrary, that the popular medicine, such as practised, for instance, by the famous laeknir Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, could use more or less magical ways of doing. It is true that this violent and quarrelsome society of Iceland was much exposed to wounds and we have many an example in the sagas of treatments and healings which, astonishing for us as they are, must have been effective. Of course, it is not necessary to invoke magic to get a satisfying explanation of these results. Such realistic and matter of fact people as the Icelanders of the Sturlung Age could as well have drawn benefit of their sense of observation and of their well-known manual skill. What remains to be said is that the samtíðarsögur and particularly the jarteina bækr of the biskupa sögur do not show traces of especially strange practices (See Hrafns Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar ch.5 and 7, Jóns Saga Helga I ch.44, Prests-saga Guðmundar Góða ch.6, Íslendinga Saga ch. 81, Svínfellinga Saga ch.3, Porgils Saga Skarða ch.7). We must therefore concentrate our attention on Hrafn's doings. There is no sign of professional magic or occultism in his behaviour and if there is a non scientific instance of acting, it consists (in ch.5) of the recitation of five Pater before beginning an operation. As for his science, several studies - and most recently Jónas Kristjánsson's thesis Um Fóstbraedrasögu - have demonstrated that he faithfully followed the teachings of the Salerno school, either directly or through Montpellier which he is supposed of having personally visited when travelling abroad (2). And the popularity of the famous Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum was as great in Iceland as in the rest of medieval Europe.

. One last detail : much has been written also about a curious passage in Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða ch.6 where a boat threatened by shipwreck tries to avoid the danger by so-called magical means : the crew tries to find whether there should not be a man who could know "the highest name of God"

(1) see for instance P.G.Foote : Icelandic "sólarsteinn" and the Medieval Background, in Arv 12, 1956

(2) see A.Tjomsland, the introduction of Hrafns Saga, op.cit.

(nafn guds it haesta), this being in their mind the only means to calm the tempest. Doubtless, in Northern paganism like in other primitive religions, the strength of sacred names must have been great (1) . But as far as guds nafn it haesta is concerned, it reminds us of a similar passage in the Roman de Flamenca (2), or could draw its origin from the Latin cantilenas so popular at the time, since it is said of King Sverrir, in Karl Jónsson's saga, that he sung the Alma chorus Dei during the Norðness battle in 1181 (3).

. . .

From this brief survey of a problem which, certainly, is far more difficult than it has been presented here, I think we may draw three conclusions

- First, the genuine pagan feelings and survivals in the samtíðarsögur appear to be insignificant. One remains impressed by the fact that the authors, either are perpetually trying to make couleur locale, probably for the sake of literature, or, more precisely, are engaged into a process of reconstruction. Their main problem does not seem to be what they have to say, but how they should say it. And the influence of the models of all kinds they had at their disposal played a very important part. I think this attitude is typical of a society which wants to create and elaborate its own past according to the idea they have made themselves of it in other texts. We have to remember constantly that Iceland, newly discovered and inhabited as it was, lacked very old traditions and that it had to create its own history. As time goes, this mental habit or this mentality grows and takes force.

- This is quite visible in the samtíðarsögur and could give the explanation of the evolution which will give birth to Íslendingasögur proper. As I have suggested two times before, it is very interesting to see that the text in Sturlunga which is the richest in survivals is also the most recent of the collection, Geirmundar Þáttr Heljarsskinns, probably written about 1300 to serve as a sort of introduction for the whole series of sagas. In its six pages - it is a very short text - this Þáttr gives informations (and in most cases, these details appear only here) about the condition of slaves, the scald Bragi, ways of living typical for Vikings (herfang, skotpenningr, fríðland), a man who was a great blótmaðr, another who was hamrammr, without speaking of the rowan-tree episode. More important : it is the only text where the anger of the pagan gods is illustrated (and it is worth saying that this point finds an exact parallel in Landnámabók). Now, such obvious mistakes as the precision

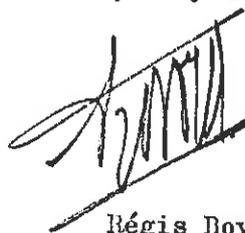
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- (1) see de Vries Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte op.cit. § 216 and B.Gröndal : Folketro i Norden, in ANOH 1863 pp.127 ssqq.
 (2) P.Meyer : Le roman de Flamenca. Paris. 1865 pp.316-317
 (3) see ÍF IX, Jónas Kristjánsson's Introduction p. LXV

about parity between gold and silver being 1 to 10 (instead of 1 to 8 as it must have been in the Viking Age) show that the author has tried to reconstitute the past, probably thanks to lost texts such as ^xHróks Saga Svarta and to oral traditions attached to Skarð. Here, it seems quite clear that Þórðr Narfason, if he is the author of this text, has endeavoured to recreate a society and an atmosphere such as he imagined they were. He is projecting on a rather loose historical frame his readings, his actual experiences or fancies.

- And this is the final observation I should like doing. Through their readings, directly or by the intermediary of the Church, possibly too on the model of Irish writings of the VIIIth and IXth centuries, the authors of samtíðarsögur initiate by their works a process of recreation of the past. This movement will reach its full blossom with the Íslendingasögur and then, enter an irreversible movement of devaluation and decay with the fornaldarsögur. It is not unworthy remarking that, the more we follow this succession : samtíðarsögur - Íslendingasögur - fornaldarsögur, the greater is the pagan revival, the more numerous are the so-called pagan survivals. A lover of Northern antiquities has, on the whole, rather little to learn from Íslendinga Saga, a deal more from Lyrbyggja Saga or Póstbraeðra Saga, and a real lot from let us say Gautreks Saga not to speak of Urvar-Odds Saga. How this movement begun is not so hard to retrace : in all fields, the Icelanders of the XIIth and XIIIth centuries undertook to gather, organize and then write down, on foreign patterns and after old remembrances, their laws first, then their general and particular history, and thence, their old personality, mentality, mythology and religion. Even though, not unfrequently, their ultimate source can be oral, their sagas and first of all their samtíðarsögur show, especially as regards the so-called pagan survivals, a deep literary impregnation.

This is a society which gives us the impression of a strong will of imposing to the posterity the image of his personality in terms understandable to contemporaries, to the contemporary world. This means that I want to say that which, to my eyes, makes the true price of these masterpieces is not so much the content of their works as the way they wrote them. But this is quite another history!

La Varenne, July 1973



Régis Doyer

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