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# Christian Influence in the *Fornaldarsǫgur Norðrlanda*

The forty or so sagas and *þættir* known collectively as the *Fornaldarsǫgur Norðrlanda*[1] do not at first glance appear to contribute much to the discussion of Christianity and West Norse literature. The majority seem to have been written after the middle of the thirteenth century, though some may be later works, but they concern legendary, or at least reputedly legendary, Norse heroes and are set in the Viking Age or earlier. In most cases the introduction of Christian themes or values into these sagas would have been anachronistic, as their audience would be fully aware. Only a few of their heroes are even said to have been Christians, and then there is usually some particular reason for this; the typical hero is the man who follows no gods and relies on his own strength. Yet the written *Fornaldarsǫgur* were composed in a society that was thoroughly Christian and are based to a large extent on oral tales that had circulated in this same society, Christian for nearly three centuries. The fact that the religious influence is not more obvious, and compared to the influence from secular romance it is very subdued, may be attributed to the desire of the authors to recreate, though in idealised form, the world of the past, which was heathen. Even so, attitudes and beliefs had naturally been much influenced by the centuries of Christianity, while the authors were thoroughly acquainted with religious works that circulated at the time, in particular the Bible. As a result a fair amount of influence from contemporary religious belief, from Church practice, and from particular religious tales, may be discerned in the *Fornaldarsǫgur.*

In this paper I wish to give examples of influence of this kind. It is not possible to examine the possible influence of Christian ethics or codes of conduct on these sagas without reference to Icelandic literature as a whole, and even then little will be deduced from the *Fornaldarsǫgur*. Some of the sagas in this genre are based on legendary tales which appear to have been well known in Scandinavia; these sagas are tragic in tone, are concerned to a large extent with revenge and may be compared to the *Íslendinga-*

sogur. They are in a minority; most sagas in the genre are light-hearted works composed to entertain rather than to edify. The nearest we get to a moral discourse is in the Prologue to Gongu-Hrólfs saga[2], which is probably loosely based on the solemn Prologue to the Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar of Oddr munkr, but in which we are told we should enjoy the story, no one needs to believe more than they want, and what is more, people do not think on sinful matters while they are enjoying the entertainment. This sets the tone for the other works in the genre. There is nothing in them that conflicts with anything in the established moral order - apart from the three obscene episodes in the frequently expurgated Bósa saga ok Herrauðs[3], which may have been regarded as objectionable but scarcely as morally corrosive. The view of society given in the Fornaldarsogur is simple in the extreme; the heroes live in a world in which they triumph over sub-human villains, who are too evil to be accorded any sympathy.

Christian influence in the sagas is manifest in four major ways. Firstly it may be obvious in certain expressions used, in references to contemporary Church practice, or in three didactic þættir which were included in the Óláfr sagas in Flateyjarbók. It is secondly found in an overall attitude to a particular character or theme, and is less obvious. Thirdly, it may appear in episodes partially derived from religious works, and fourthly in the attitudes implied when one particular theme is used, the visit of mortals to the otherworld.

Examples of the first type of influence include the use of the such expressions as the biblical þjónn þinn, "your servant", in Yngvars saga víðforla[4], or the description of a priestess as the abbess of a temple in Bósa saga[5]. Also in Bósa saga and again in Sturlaugs saga a character is told that he will endure the pains of Hel,[6] implying a Christian rather than heathen conception of that realm. A further example of such verbal influence comes in Sorla saga sterka, in which the fifteen-year-old hero demands a ship and crew from his father, declaring that he will gain little fame staying at home like a monk in a cloister or a marriageable maid[7] - another of the very few references to the religious life in the Fornaldarsogur - it was not considered an alternative way of life for members of either sex.

In Norna-Gests þáttr, one of the three didactic Fornaldarsogur contained in Flateyjarbók, an aged man arrives one evening at the court of Óláfr Tryggvason just as the king is about to hear evensong. Gestr, who has been primesigned, stays at the court for a time and gives information about the heroes of the past, for he has long outlived the normal span of life as he cannot die until a certain candle he possesses has been consumed. He is baptised and agrees when Óláfr suggests it, to burn the candle. Before dying he asks, anachron-

istically, for Extreme Unction.[8] Toka þáttr, which is modelled on the same tale though it lacks the candle motif, also concerns the baptism of the main character.[9] The two þættir are not typical of the sagas known as the Fornaldarsǫgur, and serve mainly to highlight the virtues of the two King Óláfrs. A third work, Heðins saga ok Hǫgna[10] is in contrast a traditional tale, or collection of tales, the main one of which is a version of the Everlasting Fight. This was known to Saxo as a purely secular tale.[11] The gist is that Hǫgni and Heðinn fight over Hildr, the daughter of Hǫgni, who has been abducted by his erstwhile friend Heðinn. In Saxo's account the combatants are constantly revived by the spells of Hildr, but in the Icelandic saga the fight has been brought about by the gods and will end only when a Christian man is brave enough and has enough of the gifta of his monarch to enter the battle and slay the combatants. This finally happens, when a follower of Óláfr Tryggvason consents to the request of Heðinn.

Attitudes towards the heathen deities were naturally shaped by Christianity. In the Fornaldarsǫgur, as in other genres of Icelandic literature the old gods are rarely depicted as evil, but they are seen as beings whose authority has been usurped and who are best treated with respect as they still have the ability to help or harm the individual. In addition the Fornaldarsǫgur authors often treat them with levity. When Oðinn appears in Vǫlsunga saga bearing the sword that will bring tragedy to the Vǫlsungs he is the traditional deity, a frightening and unpredictable figure.[12] The Oðinn of Ketils saga hængs is quite different; in this work the villain Framarr, a diligent sacrificer and follower of Oðinn, fights a hólmgang with the hero who follows no gods, and who naturally defeats his enemy.[13] Still further removed from the traditional Oðinn is the figure in Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana. The lusty troll Arinnefja sleeps with Oðinn in order to obtain a magic shirt in his possession. She names him the prince of darkness, hǫfdingi myrkjanna, a name usually applied to Satan, but this Oðinn is far too undignified for this title to be taken seriously.[14] A similar flippancy is found in Friðþjófs saga frækna in which two brothers reigning jointly as kings place their sister for safekeeping in a temple dedicated to the most innocuous of the heathen gods, Baldr, before themselves going off to war. Here the hero visits her, and before her brothers' return remarks that this breach of sanctuary and of the prohibition on sexual relations in the temple does not seem to have annoyed Baldr bóndi, an indication that the deity is seen as at least ineffectual and possibly non-existent.[15] In Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum the entire pantheon is treated flippantly when human characters are likened to them, the king

who asks the questions being likened to the Miðgarðsormr.[16]
Such treatment of the gods has no parallel in Saxo Grammaticus' Gesta Danorum.

If the gods have little power in the Fornaldarsǫgur, other characters do. A large number of the villains have supernatural powers, as do some friendly but unmarriageable female characters such as trolls and foster-mothers. Magic-working villains of either sex are slain by the heroes without compunction, but the assistance of the friendly characters is usually accepted. Magic is required for the plots but it is not taken very seriously; though it would be unmanly for a hero to indulge in its practice it is acceptable to benefit from it. The only example we are given of a spell, in Bósa saga, is, we are told, powerful magic and not suitable for Christian mouths, but actually it is quite harmless and unlikely to have given offence. Its inclusion is in keeping with the bombast of this particular saga. Witchcraft scarcely seems to have been regarded seriously at this stage.

Apart from trolls, witches, foster-mothers and the occasional lower-class woman the only other females in the sagas are marriageable ladies. Whether or not Christianity has influenced their position in the Fornaldarsǫgur is difficult to determine. No opposition is voiced to the few who are warriors before marriage, in spite of their living lives like the men's and wearing male clothing in breach of Christian and secular custom. There are few such characters however, and women in the Fornaldarsǫgur are largely prizes for heroes and are inclined to be passive. No permanant career other than marriage is envisaged, and apart from the warriors only Ingigerðr in Sturlaugs saga starfsama has any occupation before marriage; she has a reputation as a good doctor and treats all who come to her.[17]

Ingigerðr's behaviour is novel to the genre and some foreign source may be suspected. This need not be a written one, for treating the sick, including lepers (and Ingigerðr's suitor comes to her disguised as a leper), features among the virtuous acts ascribed to aristocratic women saints - Elizabeth of Hungary and Margaret of Scotland spring to mind. In certain other cases the influence from Christian practice and even from the borrowing from literature, can be seen more clearly.

Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga is a highly sophisticated work with a totally secular plot, which was composed by an author who was widely read and completely capable of using in an ostensible viking saga material, and to some extent also values, derived from both secular romance literature and religious literature and custom. His sources, both those he refers to and those he uses silently, testify to his wide reading while the structure is more complex than in other Fornaldarsǫgur and may be based on a French model. The saga also owes a particular debt to Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar

by Oddr munkr. Unlike the other Fornaldarsǫgur it uses consistently an abstract theme, that of truth-telling. This first emerges when the good-natured but backward hero Hrólfr is on the way to Garðaríki, where dwell a king, Eiríkr, and a lady, Ingigerðr, whom Hrólfr hopes to obtain as wife for his leigelord Þorgnýr. He falls in with a dubious character named Vilhjálmr, and one night Hrólfr gets drunk in a house where they have been given hospitality. He awakes in the night to find himself naked and bound to a stake in the middle of a fire. He is freed when he agrees to act as Vilhjálmr's servant until he wins Eiríkr's sister.[18] Hrólfr keeps his word, and even after their agreement has terminated Vilhjálmr asks for mercy and to be taken back into Hrólfr's service. Hrólfr acquiesces and is cheated again, but this does not stop Vilhjálmr again asking for mercy, though on this occasion he is by common consent hanged. Throughout Hrólfr, and later Ingigerðr, keep their word to the treacherous Vilhjálmr, though whether Hrólfr's later behaviour stems from Christian magnamity or mere stupidity is open to question. The initial scene in which Hrólfr is bound to a stake in a fire may perhaps have been suggested by the burning of heretics abroad, common after 1197 in continental Europe. Later in the saga another character asks if he may prove that he is telling the truth by undergoing ordeal by hot iron.[19] It is also possible that stories concerning souls in purgatory who were permitted to return to the world for some particular reason, may have influenced the depiction of the dead King Hreggviðr, the father of Ingigerðr, a remarkably well-disposed ghost, who is permitted to leave his mound three times. A clearer example of a religious tale transformed for use in a purely secular context is the story of the marvellous hart seen by King Eiríkr and his men, and followed at his behest by Vilhjálmr and Hrólfr. Its antlers are covered in gold and between them is a spike of silver on which are two gold rings.[20] The source appears to be the legend of Placidas or Saint Eustace, which was known in Iceland in translation.[21] The heathen Placidas follows a stag between whose antlers is a crucifix. When he has outstripped his companions the stag, who is Jesus, turns and speaks to him. Placidas becomes a Christian, and he and his family undergo a number of subsequent adventures. Only the opening is used in Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga and the story is then combined to the "Midwife to the Fairies" tale.

Ǫrvar-Odds saga[22] is also heavily influenced by religious thought, but in this saga it is more obvious. Oddr starts life as a godless man, who refuses while still a youth to take part in proceedings arranged by his foster-father at which a vǫlva prophesies the future of those individuals present. Nonetheless she predicts, or curses him with, an abnormally long life, but tells him that he will be slain in that same place and by a horse that is currently in the stable there. Oddr attempts to avoid the prophecy, but eventually it comes true. At one stage in his wanderings Oddr, accompanied by two kinsmen, arrives in

Aquitaine. Here the three of them are instructed in Christian teaching, and are baptised, in Oddr's case somewhat reluctantly. Their instructors are eager to keep their converts with them, but Oddr leaves one day. On the road he witnesses the killing of an old man and promptly slays his murderers, only to find that he has avenged his instructors' bishop. After this event they are even more eager to keep him with them - for exactly what reason is not specified - but Oddr slips away. His new-found faith is sufficiently fervid to take him on a pilgrimage to the Jordan, in which he bathes, stripped of all his clothing, even a magic protective shirt he has acquired previously, but after this he goes back to his adventuring, and we hear no more, until much later, of his Christianity. This later reference occurs in an episode in which Oddr is confronting a magic-working priestess. The two chant verses at each other, and Oddr declares that he cares nothing for the wrath of the gods; he believes in one God, and the implication is that this is a weapon in their combat. Oddr's Christianity is manifest at his death only in that he asks some of his men to make a stone sarcophogus for him as he is dying, while other of his men are deputed to listen to his _ævidrápa_ which he now composes in heathen fashion, though it does refer in passing to the events in Aquitaine. Following his instructions once he is dead and placed in the sarcophogus like any important Christian, he is cremated like a heathen.

In addition to the specifically Christian incidents in the saga one particular episode appears to be derived at least partly from biblical sources, although it is used in a purely secular manner. This is the episode found only in the longer version of the saga in which Oddr, while on his way with an army to the land of the villainous priestess and her equally villainous husband, meets an army led by their son Víðgripr. The two armies camp for the night and Oddr goes secretly to the enemies' camp. He stands outside the tent in which Víðgripr is sleeping and by a ruse gets into the tent and finds where Víðgripr is lying. He marks the place, goes outside, draws Víðgripr's head out, lays it on a piece of wood holding the tent in place, and hacks it off. He then goes back to his own camp with the head. There is much consternation in Víðgripr's camp the next morning, and they try to cover up his death, but when Oddr produces the severed head before they join battle, Víðgripr's followers decide to change allegiance.[23]

To slay an enemy by a ruse, and in particular at night is by Norse standards not only unheroic but murderous. It has no close parallels elsewhere in Old Norse literature, but it is remarkably similar to the slaying of Holofernes by Judith, and to a lesser extent to the slaying of Sisera by Jael. It is certainly very odd that parts ascribed to women in the Bible should be used as models for the part of a male hero, unless the

author is poking fun at Oddr - in an incident preceding this episode, found in all versions of the saga, Oddr is given a woman warrior to protect him in battle, but throws her into a fen when he sees her hesitation at jumping over a bad patch. It is also possible that he was not conscious of what his sources were. In the Book of Judith the heroine arrives at the camp of the Assyrian leader Holofernes with a plausible story and manges to pass in and out of the camp each day unmolested. Holofernes invites her to a banquet in his tent, after which he intends to sleep with her, but he falls asleep drunk. Judith cuts off his head, and takes it and the canopy over his bed, passes out of the camp without arousing suspicion, and returns to her own people. Holofernes' head is hung on the battlements, and the Israelites attack the Assyrians. Holofernes is discovered to be dead and his army falls into disarray. In the Book of Judges (4:17-21) the Canaanite leader Sisera takes refuge when in flight from the Israelites in the tent of Jael, who drives a tent-peg through his head while he sleeps. This incident may have suggested Oddr's chopping off his enemy's head on the tent-block.

Another episode in the longer version of *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* may be traced to the *Physiologus*, the medieval Bestiary, in its Icelandic form. Oddr and his crew journey towards the west. One day they pass between two great rows of cliffs and the next day they find a ling-covered island. Five men go ashore but the island sinks and drowns them. Oddr's son Vignir explains that what they have seen are two great sea creatures. The first, of which only the jaws were visible, swallows men, ships and whales, and all that comes near her. The island is the greatest whale in the world.[24] In the *Physiologus* the whale is given two descriptions. Firstly it appears like an island, according to the Icelandic *Physiologus* its back is grown like a forest, and when sailors land on it and light a fire it sinks and drowns them. Secondly, when it is hungry it opens its mouth and a sweet savour issues from it, which attracts the small fish, which it swallows. One of the twelfth-century manuscripts of the Icelandic *Physiologus* gives two illustrations of the whale, one based on each description, and it may be that this is the reason why two separate creatures appear in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*.[25] The moral interpretations provided in the *Physiologus* are not used in the saga.

The whale as the embodiment of evil is a concept found in the Bible and and common in the Middle Ages. In the *Fornaldarsǫgur* evil characters sometimes appear in the form of whales, which attack the ships of the heroes, notably in *Friðþjófs saga frœkna*, *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ǫlvis* and *Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga*.[26] That other embodiment of evil, the dragon, is surprisingly little in evidence in the *Fornaldarsǫgur*, while sea-monsters, whether related to the *Miðgarðsormr* or the biblical Leviathan, are represented only by the great monster of the longer *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, where it has influenced the second description of the whale.

When heathen religious practice is described it is done in terms that are hostile but not virulently so. In Bósa saga and Sturlaugs saga heathen temples are raided and destroyed, as they are in the sagas of the christianising kings of Norway. In the two Fornaldarsǫgur the temples stand in Bjarmaland, the home of a northern people noted for their use of magic. In Sturlaugs saga the temple is described. It stands on low-lying ground and seems to light up the surrounding land, for it is covered in gold and precious stones - a description which tallies with that of a chapel seen in Paradise in a vision in Maríu saga.[27] The temple is dedicated to Þórr, Óðinn, Frigg and Freyr. In the centre is a statue of Þórr and before it an altar on which stands the poison-filled horn which Sturlaugr has been sent for. But inside the door is a ditch full of poison, and there are three slabs set in the floor with poison between them, and on these Sturlaugr has to leap to make his way to the horn, which he takes. The temple is well equipped; the altar is inlaid with silver and there are rich hangings.[28]

This description may owe something to Adam of Bremen who describes the temple at Uppsala as embellished with gold and dedicated to Þórr, Óðinn and Freyr, of whom Þórr is the mightiest and occupies a throne in the centre.[29] But it also appears to owe something, independently of Adam, to the description of the temple of Solomon in 1 Kings:6-7 and 2 Chronicles:2-4. Solomon's temple is covered with cedar wood while the Bjarmian temple is made of the dearest wood, and both are covered with gold. The ditch of poison might have been suggested by the "sea" in Solomon's temple, a huge container of water used for sacred purposes. The thirty priestesses who serve this temple have little in common with the very few priestesses we know of from Scandinavia, but they may correspond to the male clerics who would serve an important Christian church. The temple in Bósa saga is not described in detail as the emphasis is on the sacrificial meal the inhabitants are preparing when the heroes arrive. The theft of ritual objects and the burning of temples may have been traditional feats but their inclusion might have been reinforced by the similar events in the Bible, although these take place in a very different context.

When journeys are undertaken by heroes to unpleasant heathen temples their heroism is sufficient to protect them and they do not need to be acquainted with Christianity. This is not the case when they undertake journeys to delightful otherworlds inhabited by friendly supernatural characters who include marriageable women. In the sagas in which this ~~this~~ theme is used the heroes are, or become, Christians, a feature also found when the theme is used by Saxo. Their faith gives

them protection against a world the Norse authors regarded with some unease.

Many cultures have tales of a delightful otherworld to which a mortal may journey, and in medieval Europe this was often identified with the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise of the Bible. The Church Fathers regarded this as a physical place, distinct from the heavenly Paradise and located in the East in or near India.[30]

The otherworld is the Earthly Paradise in one of the Fornaldarsogur, Eiríks saga víðforla,[31] but we also have descriptions of a secular otherworld to which a mortal hero journeys. In Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns[32] and Helga þáttr Þórissonar[33] this land is named Glæsisvellir and is ruled by the king Guðmundr. In Þorsteins þáttr Guðmundr is the vassal of Geirrǫðr, the giant known from the poem Þórsdrapa, in which he is slain by Þórr. Saxo Grammaticus depicts Guðmundr and Geirrǫðr as brothers in Book Eight of the Gesta Danorum.[34] His version of the tale is a confused combination of the myth of Þórr and Geirrǫðr and the tale told in Þorsteins þáttr, further clouded by his disapproval of the otherworld depicted. Guðmundr and his land Glæsisvellir appear again in the Hauksbók version of Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks.[35] Here we are told that when the Turks and the men of Asia came to the northern lands they found giants and half-giants living there for some giants took wives from Mannheimar, and some married their daughters there. This explanation may owe something to Genesis 6[1-4] which tells us that the sons of God married the daughters of men and from them are come the mighty men of old. Guðmundr rules at Glæsisvellir in Jǫtunheimar and he and his people live through many generations of humans. Therefore heathens believed that in his land was Ódáinsakr, the fields of the undead, or more loosely, the land of the undying, where sickness and old age leave all who come there, and none may die. Immortality is a feature, though not stated as such, of the land portrayed by Saxo, while in Þorsteins þáttr it has been rationalised; the king of Glæsisvellir always takes the name of Guðmundr. The name Undensakre was known to Saxo for he mentions it in passing in another context.[36] And in Eiríks saga víðforla, which retains many of the characteristics of the journey to a pagan otherworld, the heathen hero swears an oath to find the place that heathens name Ódáinsakr and Christians jǫrð lifandi manna or Paradise. The last term is purely Christian and refers to the terrestrial Paradise while the second may be a translation of the Vulgate Bible's terra viventium, the land of the living, a term used, though not exclusively, with the meaning of Paradise.[37] It is possible that the name Ódáinsakr is derived from this, although the description is of a heathen

otherworld.

I believe the Norse tales of a visit to the otherworld to derive from a combination of the story of Geirrǫðr told in Þórsdrápa and Irish, or Celtic, tales of the journey by a mortal to an otherworld in which he settles a dispute between two rulers, acquires a wife, visits human lands and then returns to the otherworld to stay. An example of an Irish literary tale containing all these elements is Laoghaire Mac Crimthann[38], while a number of others contain partial analogues. The theme had been assimilated to orthodox Christian belief in early Ireland[39] and descriptions of the otherworld may be found in the religious literature, for example in the tale of the Voyage of Brendan in which the otherworld is equated with the Early Paradise. This work was translated into Norse, as Brandanus saga at an early date[40], and descriptions of the kind it contains may have reinforced the view of the otherworld derived from the Irish secular tales. These presumably reached Iceland in the viking period. Their Christian respectability did not survive there, for Saxo and the Icelandic authors were distinctly uneasy about their depiction of the otherworld.

Even in the most relaxed, and probably the most archaic, version of the journey to the otherworld, the main story in Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns, a certain tension is apparent. The hero is a retainer of Óláfr Tryggvason and a Christian. Armed with the hamingja of Óláfr and some magic objects including a ring that renders him invisible presented by a grateful dwarf in a previous adventure, Þorsteinn journeys north, goes ashore in a strange land and meets Guðmundr, who is on his way to pay homage to Geirrǫðr. Guðmundr agrees with some reluctance to take the Christian Þorsteinn with him. Þorsteinn wears the ring and while invisible assists Guðmundr and his men in various feats they perform at Geirrǫðr's court. Finally Þorsteinn enters the court visible, kills Geirrǫðr, and while escaping from this land meets the daughter of the earl Agði, a giant retainer of Geirrǫðr's, and asks her if she will accept baptism and leave with him. She agrees, and they return to Óláfr's court, where the king ensures that she becomes a Christian. Óláfr gives permission to Þorsteinn to return with his wife to the otherworld as long as he holds his Christianity, and when Guðmundr acquiesces to Þorsteinn's condition that he does not interfere with his beliefs, the hero accepts Agði's earldom and remains in the otherworld. Throughout Guðmundr has shown great respect for Óláfr.

The author of Helga þáttr was, like Saxo, considerably more uneasy about the otherworld, and like Saxo he contradicts himself in his depiction of Guðmundr and his realm. Helgi is abducted, not perhaps

with much reluctance on his part, by retainers of Guðmundr on behalf of his daughter Ingibjǫrg, with whom Helgi has already had dealings. At the request of Helgi's kinsfolk Óláfr Tryggvason prays for his return, and one year later Helgi arrives at court, with two of Guðmundr's men, who bear two horns as gifts for Óláfr. The king has these filled and blessed by the bishop before they are given to the two men to drink from first. They say that Óláfr has done ill by Guðmundr, whose intentions were honourable. The lights go out and the two men and Helgi disappear, leaving three men dead behind them. Óláfr is less convinced of Guðmundr's good will, and continues praying, until Guðmundr is forced to release Helgi. Ingibjǫrg, who can no longer approach him, blinds him and tells him that the women of Norway will not enjoy him for long. Helgi dies exactly one year later.

Like those men in Saxo's account who succumb to the blandishments of Guðmundr's daughters, Helgi is in danger of losing his soul. But he is well treated in Glæsisvellir and speaks highly of Guðmundr, though he also tells Óláfr that Guðmundr had intended treachery when he sent the horns as a gift. Helgi's comings and goings take place on the eighth day of Christmas, the feast of the Circumcision and the first day of the year.

Eiríks saga víðfǫrla, though structurally and thematically similar is not a traditional tale like Þorsteins þáttr and Helga þáttr but a religious tale with a hero created solely for the occasion. It is set in the period before the two Óláfrs, when Scandinavia is still heathen. One Yule Eiríkr, the son of King Þrándr of Þrándheim, swears to travel throughout the world seeking the land that heathens call Ódáinsakr and Christians jǫrð lifandi manna or Paradise. No reason is given for the swearing of this oath, which is sworn like other oaths during the drinking session, but we learn later that Eiríkr's guardian angel was nearby. Eiríkr sets out, with his foster-brother Eiríkr the Dane and other companions, and his angel directs him south to Byzantium, where the emperor instructs him in cosmology and Christianity, using such textbooks as the Elucidarius and De Imagine Mundi.[41] Eiríkr asks about the land of his destination, which he learns lies in the east and cannot be entered for it is separated from this world by a wall of fire. Eiríkr is undeterred and after remaining three years with the emperor and being baptised, he makes a pilgrimage to the Jordan like Ǫrvar-Oddr, and then sets out to the east. He eventually finds a fair land of temporate climate flowing with honey if not with milk and separated from him not by a wall of fire but by the River Phison, the Pishon of Genesis 2:11, which flows from Eden. Across the river is a bridge and on it a dragon. Eiríkr and one companion approach

it, are swallowed and pass through mist to find themselves in the land they have seen. This manner of entering Paradise is peculiar to this saga, though it may have been adapted from descriptions in vision literature of the torments of hell and purgatory. The description of the low-lying land of sweet-smelling grasses and many flowers is conventional enough, though the sweet smells are particularly Icelandic, and there is no reference to any trees, not even to the Trees of Life and of Knowledge, nor to the fountain from which the four great rivers of the world spring, although these elements are standard in descriptions of Eden. The two companions find a house in the air, similar to the chapel in Paradise in a vision tale in Maríu saga.[42] In the vision Mass is said here while in Eiríks saga víðforla it is represented by the sweet-smelling bread and a chalice of wine on a table.
The room is also furnished with couches, like the Upper Room of the Last Supper (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:13).[43] Eiríkr sleeps and his guardian angel appears and explains that he has reached jorð lifandi manna, but that no living person may come to Paradise, which is here interpreted in the heavenly sense. Eiríkr is given the choice of remaining here or returning home until his angel comes for him. He chooses the latter, and after ten years he is taken up, his body to be guarded by his angel in a place where will remain until Judgement Day, and his soul to Paradise. The snatching up of both body and soul may be based on 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 in which Paul speaks of a man who was caught up, whetherin the body or not Paul does not know, to the third heaven, the place already described in Eiríks saga víðforla as the dwelling-place of God.[44]

One other saga, Yngvars saga víðforla,[45] has a Christian hero. This work is structurally and thematically similar to the journeys to the otherworld, but it concerns a voyage of discovery on the rivers of Russia made by a historical character and his band of followers. The saga is a curious combination of a viking romance and a hagiographical work. The hero, a member of the Swedish royal family, is denied the title of king in Sweden and sets out to find himself a realm elsewhere and then to search for the end of a certain river. On the way he has some extraordinary adventures. But Yngvarr is also a Christian who uses consecrated fire to defeat his heathen enemies and who constantly warns his men to have nothing to do with the heathens they meet, especially the women. At one stage he comes to the land of the heathen queen Silkisif, who develops an interest in him and his Christianity, but he leaves her to continue his quest, which ends when he reaches the end of the river, in a land inhabited by dragons - this saga abounds in dragons - and where

there is a castle occupied by demons. On his way home Yngvarr is attacked by an illness sent by evil spirits and he dies. His body is taken charge of by the formidable Queen Silkisif. Some years later Yngvarr's son Sveinn arrives, with followers who include a bishop, to collect the body, but he is set to completing his father's work by marrying the baptised Silkisif and christianising her land. Silkisif builds a church and tells the bishop to dedicate it to Yngvarr. The bishop demurs, for no miracles have occurred to indicate Yngvarr's sanctity (miracles were required increasingly for formal canonisation during the thirteenth century), but he bows to her will, though he also has masses sung for the repose of Yngvarr's soul.

Yngvars saga, with its strongly religious, if not exactly devotional, tone, is a very different work from the legendary Vǫlsinga saga, or the totally secular Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar, or even from Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga, which for all its clerical flavour contains nothing specifically didactic and only refers to Christian belief in the epilogue. Yet they all portray what is ostensibly a viking world, though in a fictional not a realistic sense. In this world Christian beliefs and values are to a large extent irrelevant, and the authors have on the whole remained faithful to its depiction. When Christianity has been introduced it has usually been done with a light touch. When the authors include Christian customs and practices they are of course those of the thirteenth century, not of the tenth, and the sagas are naturally also permeated with medieval religious thought and expression, to such an extent that several stories of religious origin have apparantly been adapted, consciously or otherwise, to the secular settings of the Fornaldarsǫgur. The authors lived in a society that was secure in its beliefs and practices, and show unease only when one theme, the journey to the delightful otherworld, was used. But this was practically the only subject that was not fully assimilated, and the sagas, while they contain nothing that might conflict with church teaching, were not composed for moral edification but for the enjoyment of the audience. The other writers could say with the author of Gǫngu-Hrólfs saga: Hafi hverr þǫkk, er hlýðir ok sér gerir skemmtan af, en hinir ógleði, er angrast við ok ekki verðr at gamni.

Notes

Biblical references are to the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

1. The entire corpus is printed in Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda, edited by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 3 volumes, Reykjavík 1943-4, hereafter Fas.
2. Fas II:357-461. The Prologue is not contained in all manuscripts.
3. FasII:463-97.
4. Fas III:361-94 (p.369).
5. Fas II:481.
6. Fas II:474; The Two Versions of Sturlaugs saga starfsama, edited by Otto J. Zitzelsberger, Düsseldorf 1969, $21^{34}$-$22^{1}$.
7. Fas III:191-228 (p.194).
8. FasI:165-87. The anointing of the dying, Extreme Unction, took the place of the anointing of the sick during the eleventh century.
9. FasIII:427-32.
10. Fas II:95-110.
11. Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, translated by Peter Fisher, edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson, 2 volumes, Cambridge 1979, I,147, 149.
12. Fas I:1-91 (p.7).
13. Fas I:243-66 (p.261).
14. Fas III:153-89 (p.178).
15. Fas II:247-70.
16. Fas II:111-34 (p.121).
17. Sturlaugs saga starfsama 26-28.
18. Fas II:386.
19. Fas II:412.
20. Heilagra manna sögur, edited by C.R. Unger, two volumes, Christiania 1877, II,193-210.
21. Fas II:388-92.
22. Fas I:281-399. The shortest version is edited by R.C.Boer, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 2, Halle 1892. Boer's earlier edition, Leiden 1888, contains a poorer edition of this version, and the other short version.
23. Fas I:379-81.
24. Fas I:352.
25. The Icelandic Physiologus: Facsimile Edition, edited by Halldór Hermansson, Islandica XXVII, Ithaca New York 1938, 10-11, 19 and illustrations (unnumbered).
26. Fas II: 258; Fas III:273-4; FasII: 424-5.
27. Maríu saga, edited by C.R.Unger, Christiania 1871, 536 (and 1163).

28. Sturlaugs saga starfsama $20^{15-20}$, $21^{5-30}$.

29. Adam of Bremen, History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, translated by Francis J. Tschan, New York 1959, 207.

30. In particular Augustine and Isidore of Seville. Their views and those of others were later expressed by Thomas Aquinas - see Aquinas, Summa Theologiæ, 60 volumes, Cambridge 1964-76, XIII, 182-95 and references there. See too Howard Rollin Patch, The Other World, Cambridge, Mass. 1950, especially pp. 135-74.

31. Eiríks saga víðforla, edited by Helle Jensen, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ Series B, volume 29, Copenhagen 1983.

32. Fas III:395-417.

33. Fas III:419-26.

34. Saxo Grammaticus 262-7.

35. Hauksbók, edited for Det Kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab [by Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson], Copenhagen 1892-6, 350-69 (p.350).

36. Saxo Grammaticus 100.

37. See Psalms 27:13; 52:5; 116:9; 142:5; Isaiah 38:11; 53:8; Jeremiah 11:19; Ezekiel 26:20. Augustine in his commentaries on the Psalms took the expression to mean heaven.

38. Edited by Kenneth Jackson, Speculum XVII (1942), 377-89.

39. See Proinsias MacCana, "The Sinless Otherworld of Immran Brain", Ériu XXVII (1976), 95-115 (especially p.99).

40. Heilagra manna sǫgur I, 272-5.

41. See Jensen's Introduction to Eiríks saga víðforla, pp. xxviii-xl.

42. Maríu saga 1163.

43. According to the Vulgate.

44. The "third heaven" is the abode of God, according to Eiríks saga víðforla, which here follows the Elucidarius - see Jensen's Introduction p. xxxii. The three heavens are again described in Páls saga postola II in a commentary on 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 - see Postola sögur, edited by C.R.Unger, Christiania 1874, 267-9. The text is taken from Skarðsbók. According to D.D.R.Owen the same passage, though it mentions only Paradise, had "dramatic consequences" for the development of the theme of the journey to hell in the Middle Ages - see The Vision of Hell, Edinburgh 1970, 2. The passage in Postola sögur also distinguishes between the Earthly and heavenly Paradise.

45. Fas III:361-94. For a discussion of the saga see Dietrich Hofmann, "Die Yngvars saga víðforla und Oddr munkr inn fróði", Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre, edited by Ursula Dronke and others, Odense 1981, 188-222.