

Saying goodbye to the old religion: Dreaming of the rejected object of worship

During the settlement period (c870-c920) Iceland was predominantly pagan. Of the chieftains arriving in the late ninth century from Norway and elsewhere only a handful were Christians and among the most famous of these was Helgi inn magri Eyvindarson, who, according to *Landnámabók*, still invoked Þórr before a sea-voyage, despite believing in the Christian God¹. Missionaries who came to Iceland in the tenth century met with some violent opposition and at the *alþingi* of the year 1000 (or 999²) Icelandic society was seriously divided, with recently converted Christians on one side and pagans on the other. However, civil war or the potential division of the commonwealth in two was averted at the *alþingi*, by the historic decision made by the lawspeaker Þorgeirr Tjörvason, which was that Christianity would be the official religion of all Iceland. Iceland never reverted to paganism, at least not entirely or officially. Gradually what residual paganism survived into the new millennium either became enshrined in superstition, or incorporated into the new religion. However, the old ways were not forgotten entirely. Saga authors, writing several centuries later, revisited the final days of paganism in order to gain a better understanding of Christianity. Pagan gods became the subject of literature once more, but from the perspective of the Christian writers.

In this paper I am looking at a particular type of dream, which demonstrates this point. In a number of sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders a dream-spirit appears to either a newly converted Christian or, soon to be converted, pagan in their dreams. The dream-spirit is an object of worship under the old faith and represents the old order. The object of faith may be a pagan god, but may also be a smaller spirit, perhaps a local guardian deity, such as a *landvættir* ('land guardian-spirit') or *bjargvættir* ('guardian-spirit'). It may even be a human, such as a witch or wizard, whose position and power is associated with paganism and is undermined or vilified by the new religion. I believe these dreams are an essential in understanding the spiritual mind of Icelanders in the centuries during which sagas were composed, some two to three hundred years after Þorgeirr's monumental decision.

Flóamanna saga is a post-classical saga. It is thought to have been composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and is preserved in two versions. In the saga, a man named Þorgils Örrabeinssjúpr has a total of five dreams about the god Þórr, who he had worshiped before converting to Christianity. In the first two dreams, Þórr criticises Þorgils' change of faith and threatens him. After each dream Þorgils wakes up to find one of his livestock slaughtered. The third dream occurs when Þorgils plans to make a journey to Greenland. In the dream, Þórr leads him to a cliff, where the sea dashes against the rocks, and tells Þorgils: *Í slíkum stormi skaltu vera, ok þó lengi í vólki vera, ok kveljast í vesöld ok háska, nema þú gerist minn maðr* ('You will be in such a storm, and long tossed to and fro, and suffer in misery and danger unless you become my man')³. The language Þórr uses to describe the forthcoming sea-voyage, is evocative of the language used to describe hell in Christian visionary literature of the time⁴. The even rhythm and alliteration are also suggestive of direct influence from a Christian text. Þorgils asserts that God will oversee his voyage, but Þórr is right, and Þorgils soon faces both misery and danger when the ship

¹ *Landnámabók* 1968, vol. II, 251 (*Sturlabók* ch. 218).

² Strömbäck 1975, 2 and references.

³ *Flóamanna saga* 1991, 279. All quotations from *Flóamanna saga* are taken from the longer, but fragmentary, version of the saga. All translations are my own.

⁴ E.g. Duggals *Leidsia* 1983, 25-82; *Guðmúndar saga A* 1983, 93-95.

becomes becalmed and the crew run short of provisions. At this point, Þórr appears in a fourth dream, but is driven away by Þorgils' harsh words. The rest of the crew want to call upon Þórr to rescue them, but Þorgils expressly forbids this. As autumn approaches Þorgils has one final dream of the god:

Þá dreymdi Þorgils enn eina nótt, at inn sami maðr kæmi at honum ok mælti svá: "Enn sýndir þú, hverr þú vart mér, þar eð menn vildu mik þýðast; hefi ek nú beint fyrir yðr, því at margir eru skipverjar þínir at bana komnir, ok enn muntu höfn taka á sjau náttu fresti, ef þú vill mik athýllast." Þorgils segir: "Þótt ek taka aldri höfn, skal ek þér aldri gott gera, ok ef þú kemr optar, skal ek gera þér rökkura skömm." Hann segir: "Þótt þú gerir mér ekki gott, þá gjaltu mér þat, er ek á ok þú hefir mér heitit." Þorgils hrakti hann með mörgum orðum, ok við þat fór hann á brott.

Then Þorgils dreamed one night, that the same man came to him and said this: "Again you showed your attitude towards me, when men wanted to pay homage to me. I have now helped you, in such a way that many of your crew are dying, but you will reach harbour again in seven nights if you will side with me." Þorgils says: "Even if I should never reach harbour, I will never do you good and if you come often I shall do you some shame." He says: "Even if you do me no good, then you can pay me that which belongs to me and you have promised to me." Þorgils abused him with many words and with that he went away.

Flóamanna saga, ch. 21, p. 280-281.

Upon waking Þorgils remembers that there is an ox on board, which he had given to Þórr while it was still a calf. He has the ox found and proposes to throw it overboard. Þorgerðr Þórðardóttir protests about this and offers to buy the ox, but Þorgils is resolute:

Þorgils hirðir ekki um orð hennar ok lét skjóta útbyrðis oxanum ok kvað eigi kynligt, þótt illa færist, er fé Þórs var innanborðs.

Þorgils pays no attention to her words and had the ox thrown overboard and said that it was not strange that a journey should go badly when Þórr's property was on board.

Flóamanna saga, ch. 21, p. 281-2.

Rid of this unwanted cargo, the ship eventually reaches Greenland. The rest of the trip is not a success, but from this point forward there is no indication that anything that goes wrong is due to the evil influence of Þórr.

Þorgils' dreams of Þórr show the way in which conversion was considered to be a change of faith or trust, rather than of belief. After his conversion Þorgils does not cease to believe in Þórr, nor does Þórr cease to exist. It is merely the case that Þorgils wants nothing to do with Þórr. He transfers his faith, that is the deity in whom he places his trust, from Þórr to God. Almost any religion requires an exchange. Veneration is offered up by the worshiper; this is principally in the form of prayer under Christianity, usually in the form of sacrifice under paganism. In exchange, the object of veneration will offer some sort of protection or reward; Christians receive eternal salvation, whereas pagans benefited more materially or immediately. The contract between Þorgils and Þórr, in which sacrifices were made in exchange for material rewards or protection, has been abandoned and replaced by the contract between Þorgils and God, in which prayers are offered in exchange for eternal salvation. Þórr continues to exist, he continues to be powerful, but he must not be paid and nothing can be accepted from him. The contract between Þorgils and Þórr has been rescinded. This is shown by the fact that Þorgils refuses to allow the animals which die after the first two dreams to be eaten. Similarly, after his last dream, Þorgils refuses to allow anyone to buy the ox, as this would mean that he has received reward through Þórr. He is quite adamant that the ox must be thrown overboard, putting an end to the god's hold over him and the trouble that the animal

has inadvertently caused. This act of catharsis might be compared to the killing of the horse Freyfaxi in *Hrafnkels saga*⁵.

It is also possible to see Þorgils' dreams in terms of a conflict between Þorgils and the devil. Traditions of the devil appearing in the guise of a pagan god are not uncommon in Norse literature⁶. Þorgils' journey from Iceland to Greenland could be compared to Christ's time in the wilderness. Satan offers Christ all the kingdoms of the world, should Christ pay Satan homage. Þórr offers Þorgils safe passage to harbour, if he should pay Þórr homage. Christ replies to Satan: "Begone, Satan! Scripture says, 'You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone.'" (*Matthew* 4:10). Þorgils says to Þórr: *far þú burt, inn leiði fjandi!* ('Go away, O' vile fiend')⁷. However, the equation between Þórr and Satan should not be over emphasised. There is little in the saga to suggest that Þórr really is the devil in disguise. He is not offering Þorgils world domination or tremendous riches, merely the resumption of his protectorship and safe passage to harbour. It seems the real relevance of Christ's words in the wilderness to the saga is not to equate the pagan deity, Þórr to Satan, but to warn against divided loyalty. If we return to the idea of Helgi inn magri, the Christian who supposedly invoked Þórr prior to a sea voyage, no harm appears to have befallen him for dividing his loyalty and placing his faith in both Þórr and God. Þórr even assists on his voyage to Iceland⁸. However, *Flóamanna saga* implies quite the reverse. Þorgils has inadvertently divided his loyalty by retaining the ox dedicated to Þórr. Only once the ox has been given up and all ties with the pagan god severed entirely, will Þorgils be safe. Given the probability that the *Flóamanna saga* author knew a version of *Landnámabók*, it even seems possible that he had Helgi inn magri in mind when he composed the passage. What was acceptable practice for an Icelander of the settlement period was not acceptable for a post conversion Icelander, such as Þorgils, and certainly not for the thirteenth or fourteenth century saga readership.

Þórr is one of the most famous pagan gods (among medieval and modern audiences alike), however we can find similar dreams where the rejected object of faith is less famous. Bárðr Dumbsson in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* is human on his father's side, but his mother's family are trolls. He is associated with paganism in the first chapter of the saga when he dreams of an enormous tree growing from the hearth of his foster-father. The tree in Bárðr's dream (as with several other similar dreams⁹) represents the royal family of Norway. In Bárðr's dream, one particularly bright and beautiful branch represents the coming of Christianity to the north and the rule of Saint Óláfr Haraldsson. Bárðr is said to find this dream distasteful, presumably on account of its representation of the Christianisation of Norway. Later in the saga Bárðr moves to Iceland and increasingly becomes a god-like figure. At the very end of the saga Bárðr's son Gestr finds himself in a tight spot when he battles the undead King Raknarr. He calls upon his father, Bárðr, for assistance, but Bárðr cannot defeat Raknarr. Then Gestr calls upon the missionary King Óláfr Tryggvason, promising to become a Christian should he leave Raknarr's tomb alive. Óláfr helps him in the battle and Gestr defeats King Raknarr. Upon his return to court Gestr is baptised, but shortly after is visited by his father in a dream:

Ina næstu nótt eftir er Gestr var skírðr, dreymdí hann, at Bárðr, faðir sinn, kæmi til hans ok mælti: "Ílla hefir þú gert, er þú hefir látit trú þína, þá er

The following night, after Gestr was baptised, he dreamed that Bárðr, his father, came to him and said: "You have done wrong, when you have put

⁵ *Hrafnkels saga* 1950, 124.

⁶ Perkins 1974-77, 203-205 and Foote 1974, 97-98.

⁷ Perkins 1974-77, 202..

⁸ *Landnámabók* 1968, II, 251 (*Sturlabók* ch. 218).

⁹ See Perkins 1974-1977, 222-232; Schach 1954 and 1971; Turville-Petre 1988.

langfeðgar þínir hafa haft, ok látit kúga þik til síðaskiptis sakir lífilmennsku, ok fyrir þat skaltu missa bæði augu þín.” Tók Bárðr þá at augum hans heldr óþrymlliga ok hvarf síðan.

aside your belief, that which your patriarchal ancestors had had, and let yourself be cowed to a change of faith for the sake of meanness and because of that you will lose both your eyes.” Then he touched his eyes somewhat roughly and then disappeared.

Bárðar saga, ch. 21, p. 169-170.

Upon waking Gestr suffers from terrible eye-ache, and his eyes soon burst from their sockets causing his death. Although not strictly speaking a heathen god, Bárðr has become a guardian-spirit to his descendants, offering them protection in the same way as Þórr wishes to protect Þorgils. With the coming of Christianity Bárðr finds his family turning elsewhere for protection. The superior power of this new faith is demonstrated in the dramatic scene in Raknarr's mound, where King Óláfr (and by extension Christianity) prevails, where Bárðr (and by extension the old religion) has failed.

In *Bárðar saga*, as in *Flóamanna saga*, this transferral of faith does not result in the non-existence of the old object of worship. The demi-god Bárðr does not cease to exist, nor does he cease to be powerful. In *Flóamanna saga*, Þórr was able to kill Þorgils' livestock and delay his voyage, but seemed unable to do injury to Þorgils himself. This is not the case in *Bárðar saga* where Bárðr is able to injure Gestr in his dream. This injury manifests itself in the waking world and is the cause of his death. Gestr, of course, dies a Christian and a martyr and therefore is rewarded in the afterlife. However, the dream reminds the reader of the seriousness of the process of conversion. To early converts, abandoning their gods and idols would have required bravery. They may have had very real fears of reprisal from the former object of faith, particularly since the object of faith did not cease to exist as a result of not being worshipped. The wound to Gestr's eyes is suggestive of religious torture and persecution and again reminds the reader of Gestr's martyrdom (as does the fact that he dies still wearing his baptismal robes). It also fits a broader motif found in a number of saga dreams, where a dreamer's eyes are wounded in their dream. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, Þormóðr dreams of his former lover Kolbrún¹⁰. In the dream she touches his eyes and he wakes to tremendous eye-ache, which is only alleviated when he admits that a poem, which he has composed, is indeed about her and not his other lover Þórdís Grimudóttir. Similarly Þorsteinn Ingimundarson is wounded by a dream-woman touching his eyes in *Vatnsdæla saga*, albeit for his own protection¹¹. It seems possible that the eyes as sensory organs were seen somehow as connecting the dreaming and waking world, so that a wound received to one's eyes in a dream could prove fatal in the real world.

Not all rejected objects of faith are as malevolent as Þórr or Bárðr. *Þorvalds þátr víðfjrla* is a short tale describing events prior to the conversion of Iceland¹². The *þátr*, which is preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, is thought to have been part of Gunnlaugr Leifsson's lost Latin saga of Óláfr. Whether the *þátr* ever existed separately is not known; nor is it clear the extent to which the stories were remodelled in the process of compilation. Among the stories included in the *þátr* is the account of the visit of Þorvaldr and Bishop Friðrekr to the home of Þorvaldr's father, Koðrán. Although Þorvaldr has become a Christian while abroad, Koðrán is still a pagan and worships a spirit that lives in a stone. This spirit, which he refers to as a *spámaðr* ('soothsayer'), offers Koðrán and his livestock protection and makes predictions regarding the future so as to allow Koðrán to better plan his life. Both

¹⁰ *Fóstbræðra saga* 1943, 175-177.

¹¹ *Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 95-96.

¹² Friðrekr, the missionary Bishop whose travels are described in the *þátr*, is thought to have been in Iceland between 981-986, though details of this mission are at sketchy in almost all other sources (Jón Jóhannesson 1974, 125-126).

Porvaldr and the Bishop disapprove of Koðrán's dedication to the *spámaðr* and persuade Koðrán to allow him to be put to the test. Over three consecutive days the Bishop visits the stone in which the *spámaðr* lives and consecrates it with holy water, saying prayers and singing psalms over it. Over three consecutive nights, Koðrán dreams of the *spámaðr*. On the first night the *spámaðr* appears to be upset and complains that his children are being hurt by boiling water running from the ceiling of their bedroom. The *spámaðr* is adamant that the boiling water, which corresponds to the holy water being poured over the stone in the waking world, cannot harm him, though he does criticise Koðrán for inviting the Bishop to stay. In the second dream, the *spámaðr* appears bedraggled and tells Koðrán to make the Bishop and his retinue go away. He admits that the boiling water is causing him some pain, but stoically claims that he will not be moved. By the time the *spámaðr* appears to Koðrán in a third dream he is in a pitiful state:

En sá inn ilgjarni andi sýndisk bónda um nóttina eptir it þriðja sinn með hryggiligu yfirbragði ok bar upp fyrir hann þess háttar kvein með snoktandi roddu ok sagði svá: "Þessi vándr svikari, biskup kristinna manna, hefir af sett mik allri minni eign. Herbergi mínu hefir hann spillt, steypit yfir mik vellanda vatni, vætt klæði mín, rifit ok ónýtt með þilu. En mér ok mínu hyski hefir hann veitt bóttlausan bruna ok hér með rekit mik nauðgan langt í brott í auðn ok útleög. Nú hljótum við at skilja bæði samvistu ok vinfengi ok gerisk þetta allt af einu saman þínu dygðarleysi. Hugsa þú nú hver þitt góz mun heðan af varðveita svá dyggiliga sem ek hefi áðr varðveitt. Þú kallask maðr réttlátr ok trúlyndr, en þú hefir ombunat mér illu gott." Þá svarar Koðrán: "Ek hefi þik dýrkat svá sem nytsamligan ok styrkan guð meðan ek var óvitandi ins sanna. En nú með því at ek hefi reynt þik flærðarfullan ok mjök ómeginn, þá er mér nú rétt ok útan allan glep at fyrirláta þik en flýja undir skjól þess guðdóms er miklu er betri ok styrkari en þú." Við þetta skildu þeir með styggð en engum bljúskap.

And that evil spirit appeared to the farmer during the night for a third time with a sad appearance and let out a loud wailing in a sobbing voice and said this: "This evil traitor, Bishop of Christians, has deprived me of all my possessions. He has destroyed my room, steeped boiling water over me, wet my clothes, torn and spoiled them entirely. And to me and my household, he has been done an incurable scalding and with this driven me reluctantly far away into the wilderness and exile. Now we are obliged to part both our lodging together and our friendship and all this is happening entirely from your faithlessness. Now, consider who will look after your possessions henceforth, as faithfully as I have previously done. You call yourself a righteous man and faithful, but you have rewarded me with evil in exchange for good." Then Koðrán answers: "I have worshiped you as a useful and strong god while I was unaware of the truth. But now with this I have proved you deceitful and very impotent, then it is right for me, without any crime, to give up on you and flee for shelter of this godhead which is much better and stronger than you." With that they parted in discord and with no friendship.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, vol. I, ch. 132, p. 287-288.¹³

As in both the previous examples, the *spámaðr* represents a figure who provides protection and advice in return for worship, but whose position is under threat from the new order. Again, the Icelander's conversion does not involve ceasing to believe in the former object of faith, but the rescission of the contract between them. The series of three dreams can be seen as an allegory both for the personal conversion of Koðrán and the larger political conversion of Iceland. The gradual deterioration of the *spámaðr* – from arrogant anger in the first dream, to pained defiance and finally to pathetic defeat – may be seen as representing the gradual replacement of pagan tradition and values with Christian faith. Although there was initial resistance to Christianity, from Icelandic pagans, this soon broke down and paganism was driven out as *spámaðr* was driven from his stone.

However the passage is more complex than this interpretation alone can allow. Saga narrators are generally thought of as impartial, at least superficially so, yet in the chapter

¹³ References to *Óláfs saga* are from Ólafur Halldórsson's 1958-2000 edition. I have normalised this text.

dealing with Koðrán and the *spámaðr*, the narrator of *Þorvalds þáttur* refers to the *spámaðr* as *fiandinn* ('the fiend'), *inn flæðarfulli spámaðr* ('the deceitful *spámaðr*') and *inn illgjarni andi* ('the ill-willed spirit'). Far from being impartial, the voice of the narrator is distinctly biased. However the words of the *spámaðr* himself echo this pious tone. He refers to the Þorvaldr and his companions as those men *er á svikum sitja við þik* ('who plan to betray you') and Bishop Friðrekr as *þessi vándr svikari* ('this evil deceiver'). He claims that they seek to rob Koðrán of the positive things the *spámaðr* can offer and to strip him of the *spámaðr*'s protection. Just as the *spámaðr* is an agent of evil for Þorvaldr and the Bishop so they are to him. Furthermore there is some truth in the *spámaðr*'s complaints to Koðrán in his final dream. The *spámaðr* has provided protection and advice, Koðrán admits as much when he describes the arrangement to his son; but still Koðrán deserts him by transferring his faith to the Bishop's god. There is never any real doubt as to who is right and wrong in the passage, just as there is never really a question as to whether the *spámaðr* will be able to withstand the piety of the Bishop's prayers. However the character of the *spámaðr* is given a more prominent voice in the text than is really necessary and a greater justification for his complaint. It is as if the writer wanted the reader to dwell for a moment on the *spámaðr*'s plight, to truly consider what it meant not only to be taking the new faith, but also to be leaving the old behind¹⁴.

The motif of the rejected object of faith can be found in dreams throughout the sagas and *þættir* of Icelanders. It can be used to demonstrate the piety of converts. At the end of *Laxdæla saga*, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir becomes a nun and anchoress. In an episode reminiscent of Koðrán's dreams of the *spámaðr*, a dream-woman appears to Guðrún's granddaughter, Herdís, complaining that she is being burned by drops falling on her¹⁵. In the morning the church floor is dug up in the place where Guðrún kneels in prayer and a *vǫluleiði* ('sibyl's barrow') is found. The sibyl is not actually aggressive or violent towards Herdís. Her time has passed and she is impotent against Christianity. The extent of this impotence is highlighted by the fact that Guðrún's piety disturbs her without Guðrún even being aware of her existence and also by the sibyl's inability to confront Guðrún herself. The sibyl requires Herdís to intercede for her, almost in the way that a sinner might pray to the Virgin Mary to ask for absolution.

One pagan spirit in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, not only expresses regret for the deterioration of pagan beliefs, but also bemoans that pagan spirits such as he cannot be baptised¹⁶. The fact that the *jarðbúi* ('earth-dweller'), Brynjarr, (who appears in Þorsteinn Ívarsson's dream), cannot be baptised demonstrates that there is no place for pagan spirits within the new order. In fact Brynjarr circumvents this, at least partially, by asking Þorsteinn to name his first son after him, so that the name at least might receive baptism.

The plot of *Þiðrandi þáttur ok Þórhalls*, in which black *disir* ('goddesses') kill Þiðrandi Síðu-Hallsson, can be interpreted as rejected objects of faith taking one final sacrifice prior to the conversion of Iceland (though there is no direct implication that the killing occurs in a dream). This interpretation seems to be confirmed by a dream at the end of the *þáttur* in which the wise Þórhallr sees hills across the countryside opening up and spirits of all sizes departing¹⁷.

¹⁴ I use the word 'writer' here somewhat incautiously to refer to the genius that fashioned the text into its current form and, in particular, who gave voice to the *spámaðr*'s complaint. In the current paper I will not speculate as to whether this was Gunnlaugr Leifsson, or whether this fashioning occurred during the process of translation from Latin to Norse or a combination of the two.

¹⁵ *Laxdæla saga* 1934, 223-224.

¹⁶ *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* 1991, 354.

¹⁷ *Ólaf's saga en mesta* 1958-2000, vol. 2, 150.

There can be little doubt that all these dreams are essentially Christian. Their language is more similar to that of saint's lives and homilies than elsewhere in the sagas of Icelanders. The motif of God or, more commonly, his saints appearing to dreamers or visionaries, chastising them for their lack of dedication, is common in medieval Christian literature¹⁸. The same motif is rarely found in a pagan context, but in these sagas Christian writers apply the motif to pagan objects of faith. Pagan objects of faith are given voices in dreams, similar to the voices of the objects of the Christian faith. Furthermore, these voices are surprisingly persuasive. Although Þórr in *Flóamanna saga* is at least partially equated with the devil, he is given some justification for his actions because Þorgils has retained the ox previously dedicated to Þórr and therefore their contract still exists. Similarly, in *Bárðar saga*, although Bárðr's murder of his son is horrific, throughout the rest of the saga he is the hero. Most noticeably in *Porvalds þáttur*, the *spámaðr's* reprimand to Koðrán is more than mere rhetoric. The *spámaðr* is posing to Koðrán, and therefore the text posing the reader, a very real problem: how can he justify breaking the contract and abandoning the old faith that has served him so well?

I am not suggesting that the dreams are the result of some nostalgia for paganism or guilt over the setting aside of old traditions. By the time that these sagas were composed paganism was all but gone, preserved only vaguely in folk memory and eddic verse. However there remained a need to understand the passing of old religion, in order to understand the present. After all, if the previous religion had been cast aside so easily, could the same happen to the present one? Was faith something which could be exchanged every few years as if a passing fad?

These dreams answer some of these questions. They assert the superiority of the new religion over the old; while the converts themselves are presented as heroes daring to face the consequences of giving up their former traditions. At the same time the dreams avoid belittling those saga heroes who predate the conversion. There was undoubtedly a need to glorify the new religion. However, Icelanders would not stand to see their pagan heroes belittled as fools taken in by deceiving spirits, or portrayed as evil Satanists deliberately worshipping false idols (even if these very heroes were ultimately destined for hell¹⁹). Dreams of the rejected object of faith describe the conversion as a turning point in the social acceptability of pagan traditions. As Koðrán says in his response to the *spámaðr* in the dream, it was acceptable for him to sacrifice to such a spirit while he knew no better, however his increased knowledge allows him to break with the *spámaðr* without it being a betrayal and even requires that he should transfer his allegiance to a better, more powerful, spirit. Similarly, it was acceptable for the early settler Helgi inn magri to worship God, but sacrifice to Þórr prior to a sea voyage, however Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga* should know better and even having some of Þórr's property aboard proves dangerous. A saga glorifying a half human, half troll hero such as Bárðr as a demi-god, was acceptable provided that it was set in the years prior to the conversion. The author knowingly comments at the end of saga that no decedents of Gestr are recorded, therefore consigning the male side of the family entirely to history. Thus such dreams involve the rewriting and reinvention of the pagan past in order to justify the present. Paganism was not betrayed or unfairly abandoned as the *spámaðr* suggests. It was set aside as it had done its day. Having put the demons (literally) of the past to rest, the thirteenth century Icelander could then better understand the new faith, safe in the knowledge that it was not merely a passing phase.

¹⁸ Cormack 1994.

¹⁹ Foote 1974, 86.

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