

## Elements of the Pagan Supernatural in the Bishops' Sagas

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The *Byskupa Sögur*, or Bishops' Sagas, tell the stories of the earliest Icelandic bishops, who reigned from 1056 to 1331.<sup>1</sup> Elements of the pagan supernatural appear in the lives of three bishops in particular: Þorlákr, Jón and Guðmundr. Þorlákr of Skálholt (reigned 1176-1193), the patron saint of Iceland, was canonized at the Althing in 1199; *Þorláks saga* is thought to have been written between 1202 and 1211. Elements of the pagan supernatural appear not in this saga but in the *Oddaverja þáttur*, an account of Bishop Þorlákr's fight with the chieftain Jón Loftsson which was written after 1222 and is absent from his official *vita*. The next person to be canonized at the Althing was Jón Ögmundarson, the first Bishop of Hólar. He reigned from 1106 to 1121 and had, in fact, been dead for nearly 100 years by the time *Jóns saga* was composed. A third—and unsuccessful—candidate for canonisation was Guðmundr Arason, also of Hólar (reigned 1203-1237); the earliest version of *Guðmundar saga* is thought to date from the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

*Guðmundar saga* is the only work in which unambiguous references to the pagan supernatural are found: in both *Jóns saga* and the *Oddaverja þáttur* the pagan incidents could have been inspired in part by Christian writings. Let us take the case of Jón's burial. Jón's corpse cannot be transported to the grave until his mislaid episcopal ring is returned to his finger:

Líkit varð svá þungt, at þeir máttu engan veg hræra, er til váru settir út at bera. ... Þeir tóku þá gullit ok drógu á hönd honum, ok eftir þat gengu til inir sömu menn sem fyrr ok tóku þá upp líkit léttliga ok báru til graftar. (*Bysk. II*, 113)

*The corpse became so heavy that those who were to carry it could not move it at all... Then they took the ring and drew it onto his hand, and after that the same men as before went and picked up the corpse easily and carried it to the grave.*

The immovable corpse is a not uncommon motif in hagiography. To quote Grant Loomis:

The saint, particularly after his death, impressed his will on people by refusing to let his body be lifted or his coffin to be moved unless the carriers went in a certain direction. (1948: 56)

Koppenberg (1980: 133) derives the scene in *Jóns saga* from an incident in the *Martinus saga*, in which St. Martin stops a group of people from moving by making the sign of the cross over them because he suspects them of transporting a heathen

<sup>1</sup> In the Bishops' Sagas (*BS*), references are to volume and page; translations are my own. Quotations from the Sagas of Icelanders, the *Landnámabók* and the *Heimskringla* are taken from the *Íslensk fornrit* (*ÍF*) edition (Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933--); references are to volume and page; translations are from *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*. *IS* refers to the *Íslendinga Sögur*; references are again to volume and page.

<sup>2</sup> For further details of dates and manuscripts, see Ásdís Egilsdóttir (1993).

idol. When an inspection reveals that their burden is nothing more than a corpse on its way to burial, he makes the sign of the cross again and the procession proceeds. There are, however, several notable differences between the two incidents. First, St. Martin, not the corpse, is responsible for the immobility. Second, it is not the corpse which becomes heavy but its bearers who are 'frozen' by the saint. Third, the corpse in itself is not important; the bearers could equally well have been transporting a sack of grain.

There is, however, one feature of this scene which is not a commonplace of hagiography:

This immobility has nothing to do with increase of weight. Rather it seems to be a kind of paralysis which seizes the agents who attempt to oppose their will to the saint's. (Loomis, 1948: 56)

The heaviness of Jón's corpse seems, therefore, to be a 'native' feature. If we turn to the Sagas of Icelanders, a close parallel to the incident—in particular the increased weight—can be found in *draugar*-stories. For example, in the *Eyrbyggja saga* Þórólfr bægifótr's corpse becomes heavier as time progresses. Just after the old man dies, the saga says of his son Arnkell 'ok varð hann at kenna aflsmunar, aðr hann kæmi honum undir' (*he had to exert more force than he expected in order to move him.*) (IF IV, 92) A little later on, 'Þórólfr var þá svá þungr, at þeir fengu hvergi komit honum talsvert' (*Thorolf was by now so heavy that they could hardly manage to lift him at all.*) (IF IV, 95) After he had embarked on his hauntings and was dug up again, he was heavier still:

Ok er þeir vildu hræra hann, þá fengu þeir hvergi rigat honum. (IF IV, 170)  
*When they tried to move him, they could not budge him.*

Similarly, in *Grettis saga*, once Glámr has been killed by the monster in the fells, all attempts to bring him to church or the priest to him fail: not even oxen can drag his body along once the ground stops sloping downwards (IF VII, 112). Immovability, a corpse and a ring also appear in mythology, in Snorri's account of Baldr's burial, although in this case it is the ship/funeral pyre which will not move for some unspecified reason; in addition, there is no relationship between the ring which Odin lays on Baldr's funeral pyre and the immobility of the ship. In fact, the main purpose of the scene appears to be to illustrate the impotence of the old gods, who have to call on the giantess Hyrrokkin to move the ship (*Gylfaginning* 49).

Yet another possible source for Jón's immovable corpse is an actual event. If a bishop did not bequeath his ring to one of his followers, as happens in *Þorláks saga* (BS I, 69) and *Laurentius saga* (BS III, 144), the ring seems to have been buried with him, as was the case with Guðmundr (BS II, 436). As Jón's body was on its way to burial, could somebody have noticed that his ring was not on his finger and held up the funeral procession while the ring was fetched? It would not take much imagination of the part of the faithful to attribute the lack of movement to divine rather than clerical intervention. As for the heaviness of the corpse, did the author of *Jóns saga* borrow the idea from traditional ghost stories? Or did he invent it and have his idea borrowed by the authors of *Eyrbyggja* and *Gretla*? Could Snorri, trying to find a reason for Hyrrokkin's presence at Baldr's funeral, have been inspired by the incident too?

The same ambiguity applies to incidents in the *Oddaverja þátr*. After pursuing and catching Bishop Þorlákr, Thorsteinn is unable to deliver the fatal blow:

Hann mátti henni eigi fram höggva, ætlandi þat, at guðs krafrir hefði hann tálmat...Hann var þá spurðr hvi hann hjó eigi fram óxinni. Hann sagði stirðna handleggina. (BS I, 148)

*He was not able to strike the blow, thinking that God's power had hindered him...He was then asked why he had not struck with his axe. He said his arm had stiffened.*

There are two possible sources for this event: the *herfjöturr* of Germanic mythology and the story of Sanctulus in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (III, 37). The *herfjöturr*, or war-fetter, was a type of paralysis which made warriors unable to deliver the intended blow. A belief in the war-fetter seems to have been common to all the Germanic peoples; references to it are found in the ninth-century German *Merseburg Charms*, as well as in Old English and Old Icelandic. In Norse mythology, Ódin is credited with applying it:

Óðinn kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinir hans blindir eða daufrir eða óttafullir, en vápn þeira bitu eigi heldr en vendir. (IF XXVI, 17)

*In battle, Ódin could make his enemies blind, or deaf, or full of fear, and their weapons bit no more than willow twigs.*

Has the author taken the motif from pagan mythology, transferring one of Ódin's attributes to the Christian God? Or is his source the *Dialogues*? At first glance, the latter seems a slightly more likely source, since Gregory also talks about the executioner's arm stiffening. There is, however, the possibility that the incident is a conflation of the two traditions: if the story was passed down orally, having as its source Thorsteinn's excuse to his leader for not killing the bishop, then the origin of the motif could be the *herfjöturr*; the stiffness would then be a clerical accretion. It should be noted, too, that the claim of supernatural intervention is put into the mouth of one of the characters in the saga and is not an authorial comment.

Also in the *Oddaverja þáttur*, Þorlákr is twice saved from his enemies by impenetrable darkness descending. On the first occasion, as Sveinn and his men are preparing to attack Þorlákr, fog comes upon them. The bishop and his men, on the other hand, continue to enjoy clear weather. When the darkness finally clears from around the would-be attackers, they realise they have gone astray (BS I, 145). Jón Loftsson and his followers have a similar experience when pursuing the bishop:

Ok er þeir kómu yfir eystri Rangá, sýndist þeim í Odda sem þykka þoku legði ór háfi upp, svá at nær sá ekki. Endist hon þar til at byskup ok hans menn váru ór augsyn. (BS I, 147)

*It seemed to the men of Oddi that a thick fog had come up out of the sea, so that hardly anything could be seen. It lasted until the bishop and his men were out of sight.*

In neither of these cases is it said that there is anything supernatural about the unexpected darkness; on the contrary, it is attributed to a natural cause—thick fog. The fog does, however, roll in at the most opportune moments, and the faithful are left to decide for themselves whether a miracle has taken place or not.

Attributing a natural phenomenon to a natural cause is in direct contrast to what happens in the Sagas of Icelanders. In these sagas, impenetrable blackness is depicted as being conjured up by people with magic powers. For example, in the *Reykdalelaga saga*, Ísgerðr, who is described as 'mykill fyrir sér ok fjölkunnig mjök' (*very skilled in*

*magic and a great sorceress*), brings down darkness to help a young man whose beloved is about to be married to another (*ÍF* X, 192). In *Harðar saga ok Holmverja*, a witch waves a cloth above her head and impenetrable darkness falls (*IS* 12, 259). Witches in the *Íslendinga sögur* are also depicted as being responsible for natural disasters. In *Gísla saga* a vengeful witch sends down an avalanche on the farm of the man who had fought with her son (*ÍF* VI, 59-60), and in *Vatnsdæla* another witch causes a landslide (*ÍF* VIII, 96). Even the first Christians in the *Íslendinga sögur* attribute natural disasters to magic; an example of this can be seen in both *Njáls saga* and *Kristni saga*, when Galdra-Heðinn is accused of making the earth open up under Þangbrandr the missionary's horse:

...þá kaupa heiðnir menn at þeim manni, er Galdra-Heðinn hét, at hann fellði jörð undir Þangbrandi ... þá fell hestr Þangbrands í jörð niðr, en hann hljóp af baki ok stóð á bakkanum heill. (*IS* 1, 257)

...Then heathen men paid the man called Galdra-Heðinn to split open the earth under Thangbrandr... Then Thangbrandr's horse fell down into the earth, but he leaped off its back and stood safe on the edge of the chasm.

After the Conversion, there are indications that believing such phenomena to be due to anything other than natural causes is regarded as smacking of heathenism. When Óláfr Tryggvason is preaching the faith in Norway, it is the pagans who attribute the bad weather at that time to the action of the old gods (*ÍF* V, 118). When a volcano erupts as Christianity is being preached in the *Kristni saga*, the pagans attribute this to the anger of the old gods, a notion which the more enlightened men of the time dismiss as nonsense:

Þá mælti Snorri góði: 'Um hvat reiddust goðin, þá er hér brann hraunit, er nú stöndum vér á?' (*IS* 1, 270).

Then Snorri góði spoke: 'What were the gods angry about when the field we're now standing on was molten?'

Weather-magic, on the other hand, seems to be exempt from a charge of heathenism. Being able to alter the weather is an attribute of Christ (Mark 6: 47-51) and Odin (*ÍF* XXVI, 18), Christian saints and pagan witches. Jón's prayers bring about the end of a protracted winter (*BS* II, 49) and also put an end to a drought in summer (*BS* II, 50-51). Guðmundr prays for a breeze so that the young boys who have rowed him to Flatey can have an easy voyage home, and, sure enough, a strong and favourable wind blows up after a calm day (*BS* II, 242). His presence also causes a swollen river to subside long enough for the bishop and his party and those waiting on the other bank to cross (*BS* II, 249-50). Shortly afterwards, he saves a farm from the worst effects of a flood by diverting a river:

En Guðmundr prestur hafði til farit með helga dóma sína áðr um daginn, bæði með klerka sína ok líkneski Nikolai byskups, ok hafði hann sungit yfir ánni. En þá var áin horfin ór þeim farveg ok hafði brotit sér nýjan farveg austar um sanda. (*BS* II, 253)

But Guðmundr the priest had gone there the day before with his holy relics, with both his clerks and a likeness of Bishop Nicholas, and had sung over the river. And then the river had left its bed and had cut a new course east on the sands.

Interestingly enough, two pagan sorcerers in the *Landnámabók* are also able to make a river change its course (*ÍF* I, 304-06). On the other hand, in the *Dialogues* (III, 9) Frigidianus, Bishop of Lucca, reroutes a river, and Brigid, an Irish saint, is also reputed to have done the same thing (Bray, 2003: 142-43). Did the author borrow from Christian tradition, from the pagan traditions of *Landnámabók*, or simply record what really happened?—for a river in flood will normally choose the easiest course across the sands.

Although Guðmundr and pagans in this instance have the same ability, in the *Íslendinga sögur* Christian and pagan weather-magic are normally portrayed as diametrically opposed. This opposition is seen in three ways. First, pagan weather-magic is deliberately produced by the spells of *ffölkunnigr* men and women, whereas there is no human hand behind the meteorological phenomena of Christian times. Second, in parts of the *Íslendinga sögur* depicting pre-Conversion days, weather-magic is generally directed towards evil-doing: in the *Laxdæla saga*, for example, there is a description of a family of magicians conjuring up a storm to wreck the boat of the man who had had them outlawed; as it weathers the storm, an uncharted reef suddenly appears and sinks it (*ÍF* V, 99-100). Third, the weather conjured up by pagan magicians is usually stormy: in the *Eyrbyggja saga*, a betrayed husband pays a witch to conjure up a storm to prevent his wife's lover from visiting her (*ÍF* IV, 109-10), and in *Vatnsdæla* another witch saves her lover from a duel by conjuring up a blizzard (*ÍF* VIII, 89). Christian weather-magic, on the other hand, generally produces favourable conditions and is used for the benefit of its recipients. In the parts of the *Íslendinga sögur* set in post-Conversion times, the freak weather conditions which occur consist of mild spells in the middle of harsh weather which allow bodies to be brought to church for Christian burial; such is the case of Gestr Oddleifsson in the *Laxdæla saga* (*ÍF* V, 197) and possibly the foster-mother in *Fostbraeðra* (*ÍF* VI, 216). As for the bishops, they are not presented as performers of weather-magic but simply as men who explain the conditions necessary for the miracle of improved weather to take place, or else intercede with God on behalf of the people; never is it said that the bishops are directly responsible for the miracle. According to Sister Benedicta Ward (1982: 170), 'The assertion behind these differences is that it is still Christ who works miracles through his saints, not that they can work miracles in their own power.'

Although the story of the diverted river could have either a Christian or a pagan source, other references to the supernatural in *Guðmundar saga* are unambiguously Icelandic. One such incident concerns valuables—a sun-stone and a woman's dress with embroidered borders—which were originally a present from Guðmundr. They are about to be stolen:

En er þeir ætluðu hann á brott at taka, þá sýndist þeim sem þat væri svart fatstötturr ok köstuðu eftir, en sólarsteininn höfðu þeir til sjóvar. Þá sýndist þeim hann sem annarr fjörusteinn ok köstuðu niðr. (ch.66)

*But when they were about to take the dress away, it seemed to them that it was a black, tattered rag, and they threw it away, but they brought the sun-stone to the sea. Then it looked like any other stone on the beach to them, and they threw it down.*

What has happened here closely resembles a *sjónhverfing* or 'sight-turning', a process by which witches in the Sagas of Icelanders affect the eyes of the beholders so that

they see things as other than they are. An example can be seen in *Harðar saga ok Holmverja*, in which a witch makes the three men who are being pursued look like three ashen chests; after that she makes a herd of cattle look like advancing men to scare the pursuers (*IS* 12, 261-62). In the *Eyrbyggja saga* the witch Katla makes her son look like a spindle, a goat and a boar (*ÍF* IV, 51). What happens in *Guðmundar saga* is not, however, called a *sjónhverfing*. Moreover, Guðmundr, unlike pagan witches, does not cause men's eyes to be deceived; in fact, he is not even present when the 'miracle' happens.

At another point, Guðmundr saves a man from the Western Fjords from a *trollkona* or *flagð* which had attacked him when he was on his way to church:

En í því bili sýndist honum, at ljós mikit kæmi yfir hann. En ljósinu fylgdi maðr í kirkjukápu ok hafði vatnasstökkul í hendi ok stökkti á hana, en þá hvarf tröllkonan þegar, sem hon sykki niðr. (*BS* II, 246)

*And at that moment it seemed to him that a great light came over him. A man in a cope followed the light, and he had an aspergillum in his hand and he sprinkled the troll-woman and immediately made her disappear.*

With the exception of the troll-wife in *Grettis saga*, *flögð* do not normally appear in their own persons in the *Íslendinga sögur*. They do, however, seem to have existed in people's imaginations, because they reappear in the *fornaldarsögur*. In *Guðmundar saga*, there seems to be an implicit connection between the *flagð* and the devils of the Catholic Church: this creature is preventing her victim from going to a church service.

Elves do not appear in person in the the *Íslendinga sögur* either.<sup>3</sup> In *Kormáks saga*, reference is made to an *álfablót*, connecting elves to a pre-Christian religion, but no elves are seen (*ÍF* VIII, 288). However, like *flögð* they seem to have existed in people's imaginations, because the the author of *Guðmundar* informs us:

Þá váru sénir álfar eða aðrir kynjamenn ríða margir saman í flokki í Skagafirði, ok sá Án Bjarnarson. (*BS* II, 182)

*There were seen elves or other strange creatures riding many together in a band in Skagafjörð, and Án, the son of Björn, saw them.*

The author of *Guðmundar saga* seems not only to have made greater use of supernatural motifs from the *Íslendinga sögur* than the writers of the other *vitae* but also to have preserved elements from pre-Christian folk-traditions that the authors of the *Íslendinga sögur* scorn to use.

On the other hand, in the case of out-of-body journeys, the Christian and the pagan supernatural in *Guðmundar saga* seem to have become intertwined. There are two examples of such trips, one undertaken by Guðmundr himself, the other by a sinful woman, Rannveigr.<sup>4</sup> Rannveigr is punished because she was the mistress of two priests, because she wore fine clothes to attract men, and because she sewed on Sunday. The vision is also a not very subtle piece of ecclesiastical propaganda: she sees chieftains who had misused their authority in hell, dead Icelandic bishops in heaven, and dwelling-places prepared in heaven for Guðmundr and a holy hermit, both of whom are still alive.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of Old Norse elves, see Timothy Alaric Hall (2004: 30-54).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of this episode, see Carolyne Larrington (1995).

Although Rannveigr's vision is based on the Christian tradition of voyages to Hell and Heaven, her journey has several features in common with those of shape-shifting witches. Her body is restless, like that of a pagan dreamer:

Hon kiptist við hart stundum,<sup>5</sup> sem henni yrði mjök sárt. (BS II, 230)

*She would jerk her limbs violently from time to time, as if she were in great pain.*

The injuries that she suffers on her Otherworld journey stay with her when she returns to this life:

Ok allt, þar er var ber, þá var hon brunnin, er hon raknaði við. (BS II, 231)

*And all of her that was bare was burned when she recovered consciousness.*

Similarly, in *Kormáks saga*, when a shape-shifting witch is injured in her walrus-form, the human form is also hurt:

Þessi hvalr kom ekki upp þaðan í frá, en til Þórveigrar spurðisk þat, at hon lá hætt, ok er þat sögn manna, at hon hafi af því dái. (ÍF VIII, 265-66)

*The animal did not surface from then on; and it was reported of Thorveig that she was dangerously ill, and people say she died as a result.*

There are, however, some differences between Rannveigr's journey and that of a pagan witch or shape-shifter: first, she does not travel in animal form; second, her journey is to the Otherworld, not to a terrestrial destination; third, unlike pagan dreamers, she is not asleep but unconscious; fourth, she does not travel of her own volition but is taken by fiends.

Guðmundr's out-of-body experiences are described slightly differently:

Hann lá í bekk hjá inum sjúka manni ok sofnaði á bæninni, at því at þeim sýndist, er hjá váru. Djákn hans lá í bekkinum hjá honum, ok hné hann á hann ofan, er hann sofnaði. En er hann hafði skamma stund sofit, þá kenndi djákninn ekki, at hann lægi á honum, en sá hann ok svá aðrir, at hann lá þar. (BS II, 246)

*He lay on a bench beside the sick man, and he fell asleep at his prayers, or so it seemed to those who were there. His deacon was lying on the bench beside him, and he sank down on him as he fell asleep. But when he had slept for a short time, the deacon did not feel that he was lying on him, though he and others too saw that he was lying there.*

This is the point at which Guðmundr's 'soul' is reputed to have gone to help the man attacked by the *flagð*. This is also not the only time Guðmundr makes an out-of-body journey:

Sjá djákni varð miklu oftast þessa var, því at hann hvíldi hjá honum, at hann þóttist eigi kenna hans í rekkjunni, en hann þorði þó eigi at þreifa til. En þá urðu ávallt nökkurar jarteinir í öðrum sveitum, þar sem hann var eigi sjálfr, af heitum manna ok kalli. (BS II, 247)

*This deacon became aware many times, although he was lying beside him, that he could not feel him in the bed, but he didn't dare to touch him with his hand. And then miracles always took place in other districts, where he was not present himself, when men called on him.*

<sup>5</sup> The expression used in the Sagas of Icelanders is *lét illa í svefni* (ÍF VI, 243), (ÍF XII, 155)

Guðmundr's experiences actually bear a strong resemblance to the examples of 'souls' leaving the body found in the native literature.<sup>6</sup> In the *Heimskringla*, for example, it is said that Óðinn was a shape-shifter who left his sleeping body behind:

Lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr ok fór á einni svipstund á fjárlæg lönd at sínum ærendum eða annarra manna. (*ÍF* XXVI, 18)

*His body lay as if in sleep or death and he became a bird or an animal, a fish or a snake, and in a trice he was in distant lands on errands for himself or other people.*

Both the *Landnámabók* and *Vatnsdæla saga* tell of Finns (Saami) who undertake an out-of-body journey from Norway to Iceland to locate Ingimundr's lost talisman (*ÍF* I, 218; *ÍF* VIII, 34-35). In the *Íslendinga sögur* there are two examples of witches who can send out their souls while asleep—Þórveigr, mentioned above, and Þórdís in *Fóstbræðra saga*. Þórdís tosses and turns, and when she finally awakens she says,

'Viða hefi ek gøndum rennt í nótt, ok ek em nú vis orðin þeira hluta, er ek vissa eigi áðr.' (*ÍF* VI, 243)

*I have ridden my staff far and wide this night, and learned of matters that I did not know before.'*

In the *Landnámabók*, a second-sighted (*ófreskr*) man can see two men who were quarrelling over grazing rights fighting in their animal form. (*ÍF* I, 355-56). The impression given by all these episodes is of a bodily envelope left behind, while a corporeal spirit or soul, usually shaped like an animal, although not necessarily so in the case of the Finns, travels around in the real time of the saga.

Once again, there are several differences between Guðmundr's out-of-body journey and that of Odin and other pagans. First, Guðmundr does not assume an animal form; second, his sleep is not agitated; third, his bodily envelope becomes weightless; fourth, he appears not on the ground or in water, but in the air surrounded by light. Guðmundr's miraculous apparition bears a certain resemblance to the dream appearances of St. Óláfr and King Óláfr found in Christian parts of sagas. However, there are differences here too: Guðmundr appears in a waking vision, not in a dream; his 'soul' also appears to have travelled to the beleaguered man, leaving his bodily envelope behind. Nonetheless, it is curious that the journeys undertaken by the saintly bishop bear a strong resemblance to those of pagans and witches, whereas that of sinful Rannveigr is based on Christian literature.

Why does *Guðmundar saga* have so many more instances of the pagan supernatural than the other two sagas? According to Turville-Petre (1953: 202) and Stefán Einarsson (1957: 101) it is 'because of lingering respect for the critical tradition of Sæmundr and Ari' that the sagas of Þorlákur and the other bishops of Skálholt are 'saner' than those from Hólar. Turville-Petre's and Einarsson's reasoning does not, however, take into account the fact that *Guðmundar saga* preserves more of the pagan supernatural than the *vitae* of Jón and, later on, Laurentius, the other two bishops of Hólar.

<sup>6</sup> The practice is connected to Lappish shamanism by Mircea Eliade (1964: 224, 379-87; Dag Strömbäck (1935:161); Peter Buchholz (1968: 51ff.).



If we look at Heffernan's theory of the origins and development of 'sacred biography', another reason for the strong presence of the pagan supernatural in *Guðmundar saga* emerges:

The author for sacred biography is the community, and consequently the experience presented by the narrative voice is collective....The author is not the expert; rather the community is a collection of experts, and the narrative reflects this state of collective authority. (1988: 19-20)

The community which produced *Þorláks saga* was composed for the most part of educated and aristocratic members of Icelandic society, churchmen and statesmen in search of a national saint. The community giving rise to *Jóns saga* was similar, consisting of representatives of the diocese of Hólar who felt that they too needed a patron saint. Among the members of these communities, opinions about weather-magic and natural disasters appear to have been divided: some people thought it superstitious to believe that storms and volcanic eruptions could be caused by supernatural means; others apparently believed that the prayers of Christian saints could influence nature. *Jóns saga* and the *Oddaverja þáttur* are clearly made to appeal to both sceptics and believers; in the case of immovable corpses and sudden darkness, the authors merely narrate what happened and leave their listeners to decide if a miracle occurred or not.

Moreover, when *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga* were being composed, the idea that Iceland could produce saints who would perform miracles was just starting to permeate popular consciousness. It was only later, by Guðmundr's time, that the idea had taken root and people had started to make Christian magic part of their culture. Guðmundr's followers, drawn in large part from the poor and dispossessed, credited their bishop with the ability to perform miracles during his lifetime. Such people were also more likely than educated churchmen to believe in elves, *flögð*, *sjónhverfingar*, out-of-body journeys and weather-magic. It was they who integrated elements from pagan folklore into Christian tradition. Attributes of Odin and pagan witches were transferred to God and his saintly bishop, although in many cases subtle changes were made, perhaps by the clerical author, so that the attributes were not quite identical. By the time *Guðmundar saga* was set down in writing, these tales of holy magic were doubtless already anchored in popular tradition, and could only with difficulty be removed from his *vita*. The high incidence of the pagan supernatural in this saga is a reflection of the credulous audience by whom and for whom *Guðmundar saga* was composed.

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