

**‘Þa syndi hann þeim mikinn skugga’: Unmasking the Fantastic in the *Postola Sögur***

**Phillip Roughton**  
(University of Iceland)

The majority of the sagas of the apostles in the earliest complete collections of apostles' and saints' lives surviving from medieval Iceland, AM 645 4to and AM 652/630 4to, both thirteenth-century manuscripts, are translations of Latin narratives contained in the *Historia Apostolica* of Pseudo-Abdias, a sixth- or seventh-century collection that became the most popular medieval collection of saints' lives prior to Jacobus de Voragine's twelfth-century *Legenda Aurea*.<sup>1</sup> The Pseudo-Abdian narratives, which are said to form an original cycle of apostolic romances ('Catholicized' versions of acts in Greek, Latin, or other languages), tell of the apostles' proselytizing missions into foreign countries following Christ's ascension. Although the apostles encounter exotically inimical obstacles, such as demons, dragons, and sorcerers, their primary activity consists of attempting to convince emperors and kings, earls, philosophers, handmaidens, servants, and the faceless masses to recognize and embrace true wisdom, to shun temporal diversions in order to participate in eternal life. The apostles edify by living as examples of the perfection that Christ displayed in his life, death, and resurrection, conveying in word and deed lessons on love, patience, fortitude, mercy, charity, and justice, among other virtues.

Most of the Pseudo-Abdian narratives are characterized by a bipartite division into *vita* and *passio* sections. The *vita* (the apostle's life and works) describes a conflict with an antagonist who is either defeated, in the case of demons or sorcerers, or converted, in the case of kings or earls, while the *passio* (martyrdom, conversion, and strengthening of the Church Militant) focuses on a conflict with an often stubborn or belligerent despot who is angered by the apostle to such a degree that he orders the apostle's death. The conflicts are punctuated by sermons focused on themes particular to each narrative, often in harmony with the character of their particular apostles, and the themes, which inevitably are linked back to the central Christian mysteries of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, are reflected in various ways in the narrative action itself, giving the narratives an often complex 'entwined' quality in which word and deed reflect and complement each other in service of the accounts' edificatory ends.

The edificatory intent of the Pseudo-Abdian narratives is best seen in the ways that the apostles' lessons on 'true wisdom' and other virtues are taken to heart by secondary characters (in many cases, servants or family members of rulers), whose conversion and subsequent example of righteous Christian living appears in many cases to be more important to the creators of these accounts than does the provision of an

<sup>1</sup> AM 645 4to is generally dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, and AM 652 4to, which is fragmentary, to the second half of the same century. AM 630 4to is preserved in full in AM 630 4to, a seventeenth-century copy. The present paper is based on Roughton 2002 and 2006, detailed studies of the stylistics and sources of the apostles' and saints' lives in these two manuscripts. The lives have been transcribed in Unger 1874 (cited hereafter as *Post.*). The edition of Pseudo-Abdias used for this paper was Faber 1560.

inspirational portrayal of a powerful saint. In the Pseudo-Abdian lives, the martyrdoms are often related very briefly (sometimes in one or two lines), and the narrative focus can shift at the penultimate moment of an apostles' life as an *imitatio Christi* to a secondary character.<sup>2</sup>

The Pseudo-Abdian narratives are also replete with typological 'dualism,' seen in both their structures and their themes and lessons (Christ is the 'new Adam' who repairs on the cross the sin that was committed by the first man upon the tree of desire, etc.), as well as a corresponding interest in figurative reading: the most fantastic or mundane elements, from demons to pebbles, are used to reveal, in the classic Augustinian configuration, the 'invisible things' of God (Augustine 10, Partner 1985:19). The predominant speculative mood of the narratives keeps them firmly focused in the edifying sphere, preventing them from crossing too far into the realm of the credulous or the excessively pious, with the saint an untouchable figure performing supernatural feats in constant battle with inhuman opponents (a quality that has in some cases justifiably earned saints' lives disdain and misunderstanding; the *Legenda Aurea*, for instance, whose author can justifiably be criticized for focusing too much on the 'martial' powers rather than the virtues of the saints, was called by Renaissance critics the 'silliest collection of silly lies,' and its author 'a man with a mouth of iron and a heart of lead,' Reames 1985:135 and 52). Even those Icelandic narratives that do tend toward encomiastic or aretological portrayals of apostles, that is, that are focused on the apostles' sublimity and characterized by a heightened rhetorical tone and a preponderance of fantastic elements,<sup>3</sup> tend to try to modify original texts to provide thematic unity and therefore heighten edifying effectiveness, as will be discussed below.

In a rather pedestrian sense, the fantastic in the apostles' lives can be said to include characters or things that are exaggerations of the already rather exaggerated reality of hagiographical narrative, which, it should not be forgotten, is based on mystery (the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the fall and redemption of mankind): demons, sorcerers, sensational miracles, magic objects, extended martyrdoms, scenes in which an apostle's 'superhuman' qualities are in the foreground, or even passages that have been rhetorically enhanced to increase drama. An excellent example of how the Pseudo-Abdian narratives incorporate these fantastic elements into their edifying schemes (before I make any further comments on the nature of the fantastic in these texts) is found in the saga of the apostle Bartholomew, whence I derived the quotation for the first part of the title of this paper. This saga, which is a close translation of the Pseudo-Abdian *Passio Sancti Bartolomaei Apostoli*, has the characteristic bipartite structure of the Pseudo-Abdian romances, yet displays to a far greater extent than any of the others a

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the saga of James the Greater, the focus of the martyrdom is less on the apostle and more on Josias, a Pharisee who had betrayed James to Herod and is beheaded along with him: *Josias var algerr i tru drottens vars Jesu Cristi oc þegar haggvonn með Jacobo postola, oc gerþesc saþr þiningarvatr goþs, oc foru þeir baþer a einne stundo til drottens...* (Post. 529:22-25).

<sup>3</sup> The sagas contained in 645 and/or 652/630 that are characterized by heightened rhetorical or sensationalistic features are the sagas of Andrew, John, Matthias, and Philip and James the Less. All of these sagas are written as homilies and are presumably later additions to the tradition, since their style has a bombastic quality typical of later medieval Icelandic hagiography, for example in the *Codex Scardensis*.

contextual dualism, seen on the structural level on separate conflicts between the apostle and a pair of rulers (the kings Polimius and Astriges), and on the thematic level in an excessive typological or circular reasoning. This characteristic dualism is also reflected in the saint's conflict with a demon in each section: in the *vita* section, the demon Astaroth is 'persuaded' by the apostle to leave, while in the *passio* section the apostle destroys the idol inhabited by the demon Balldath.

The saga shows Bartholomew as Christ's agent in the struggle against and defeat of Satan's subterfuges, and all of the sermons and narrative action support this thematic core. Bartholomew's main sermon in the first part of the *vita* derives its lessons from Satan's temptation of Christ in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13): Christ's threefold refusal defeated Satan thrice, and Satan was defeated again through Christ's death and resurrection, when the son of the virgin overcame the one who overcame the son of the virgin (the first virgin, earth), rendering void the wiles that Satan successfully used against Adam and freeing mankind from the 'exile' of death (see *Post.* 747:10-748:26). In the narrative action, Bartholomew imitates Christ's redemptive work of exposing and defeating Satan's wiles when he first exposes the true means by which the demons, Satan's agents gain control of humans' souls (by first hurting the worshippers' bodies, and then pretending to cure by merely letting off hurting, thereby inspiring further worship), and then exposing Astaroth's true appearance (through the agency of an angel) before banishing him:

þa syndi hann þeim mikinn skugga hræðiligan hrafni svartara; nef hans var hvast oc skegg hans var sitt, har hans tok allt a fœtr niðr; elldr brann or augum hans, en gneistar flugu or munni hans sem af gloanda iarni, en brennusteins logi rauk or nösnum hans; fiadrar hans voru sva sem þynnar, en hendr hans voru bundnar a bak aprt með elldigum böndum (*Post.* 761:5-10).<sup>4</sup>

The description of the demon's grotesque appearance, given just prior to his departure and the shifting of the saga to the *passio* section, is not only a literal enactment of the theme of the exposure of Satan's wiles, but also provides typological unity, since it is paralleled structurally and contextually with the extended description of Bartholomew given just prior to his appearance at the start of the saga: his nose is straight, his hair curly, his beard long, his height average; he wears white clothing adorned with purple and gems, and his clothing never becomes soiled or torn; his voice is like a terrible trumpet, he is always cheerful, and he knows all things and understands all languages; angels serve him and tell him all things (*Post.* 757:32-758:15).

Emphasis is placed in the description not only on Bartholomew's physical characteristics, which are quite sublime, but also on his omnipotence: physically, the gemstones and purple of Bartholomew's indestructible and unsoilable clothing are contrasted with the black, thorny, fiery appearance of the demon, while Bartholomew's omnipotence is contrasted perfectly with the demon's impotence (symbolized by his hands being bound behind his back with fiery bonds). The apex of typological unity is achieved in this contrast by the fact that the two opposing forces 'expose' each other. It is the demon Berith who gives the description of Bartholomew, in consternation and fear of his presence, which is in fact maintained at a steady level throughout the saga even

<sup>4</sup> Bartholomew's saga is found in defective form in AM 645 4to and AM 652 4to, and complete in AM 630 4to (cited here).

though Bartholomew is curiously 'disembodied': he appears to the king in his bedchamber at *loknum durum* (*Post.* 746:10) and smashes Astriges' idol Balldath to pieces although he and the king are debating elsewhere. Conversely, the saint exposes what used to shine in gold and silver and the wealth of the world as merely a shade: Astaroth is a representative of the temporal wealth that deceives, the *stokka eðr steina* in which we foolishly put faith, thereby losing sight of heavenly reward. Bartholomew's revelation of the demon's true 'face' crystallizes the saga's didactic lessons on the predominance of eternal power and truth over temporal 'diversions' or desires, and ultimately, Christ's redemptive power and defeat of death.

The demons, like many of the other fantastic elements in these sagas, function primarily as tools for the propagation of Christian dogma, since their presence allows for the manifestation of miracles and attendant sermonizing, and thus can be seen as vital elements in a scheme in which evil is a necessary part of good. In other words, they are 'felix culpa' elements in the sagas' edificatory schemes, although their portrayal as operating by means of deception and illusion is very much in keeping with medieval conceptions of the real nature of demons.<sup>5</sup> Although hagiographical narrative might employ the fantastic on the surface, its goals, and the goals of the conflicts that it describes, are clear: to dispel error.<sup>6</sup> There is none of the hesitation that is said to be one of the main characteristics of the genre of the fantastic in Todorov's latter-day formulation; in fact, adopting Todorov's vocabulary briefly, one could say that in the realm of the saints' lives, we have already entered the realm of the marvelous (as he says, once one chooses between explaining an event that cannot be explained by the laws of this world as either an illusion or as possible, one enters the realm of either the uncanny or the marvelous; 1973:25-27). As mentioned above, the heart of hagiographical narrative is mystery, yet the goal of the saint is to reveal both the marvelous in the mysterious and the reality of the marvelous (the acceptance of the wonders performed by a supernatural power), using concrete lessons to dispel hesitation, doubt, and error.<sup>7</sup> The best tool for performing this act, for repelling the 'illusory' attacks of demons and other anti-Christian entities, was in fact the miracle. The miraculous manipulation of the laws of this world by God is a reassurance, a reminder of God's providence and his plan for the world, a tool used to reveal the truth of what we see now in *enigmaté*, as Paul states it in his classic conception of our postlapsarian state (1 Corinthians 13). In the Icelandic saga of St. Thomas (*AM* 652/630 4to), Thomas firmly reiterates the miracle's place in the realm of the real, and of its function in teaching the real:

<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Walker Bynum states that when twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians wrote about the nature of demons, marvels and the miraculous, they tended to repeat Augustine, who asserted that demonic control and transformation was 'either illusion, produced by demons working on the imagination, or a double (a phantasm) made by demons' (Bynum 2001:102)

<sup>6</sup> As James the Less states explicitly in his saga, '*Ek tok a braut villuna, en synda ek hit sanna*' (*Post.* 740:8-9).

<sup>7</sup> A fine example of the apostles' work of transforming the fantastic into the marvelous is found in Andrew's saga, when Andrew teaches the mysteries of the cross to the proconsul Egeas. Egeas complains that it is madness to call a torment (the cross and crucifixion) a glory, but Andrew is persistent in declaring the cross's greatness, even proclaiming its beauty in an address to it just prior to his martyrdom: '*Þu goðr kross, er tekít hefír fegrð ok pryði af líðum drottins, lengi fýsiligr ok af öllum hug elskaðr...*'; see *Post.* 338-341.

En til þess at menn tortryggi eigi kenning þessa, þa gaf sonr guðs oss þat vellði, sa er oss sendi til kenningar, at ver gefim i hans nafni heiðu siukum, en lif dauðum, at skynsamr maðr mætti skilia eða ætla fyrir ser, at eigi mætti slikar iartegnir fylgia, ef kenningin væri eigi sónn. Ek kallaða yðr til þess fyrra dags, at þa græddiz likamir yðrir, en i dag kalla ek yðr til þess, at andir yðrar græðiz af kenningu guðs orða (*Post.* 720:11-17).

The miracle is, in essence, a negation of the fantastic: it should work to move the participant in its power beyond the shadowy realm of hesitation into certainty; the fantastic, on the other hand, befuddles one into passivity and, perhaps, spiritual torment. The miracle is not intended to overawe: it invites, it confirms, and it edifies, providing comfort, healing, and positive evidence against uncertainty (once one sees 'true wisdom,' healing can begin).

In the Pseudo-Abdian lives, fantastic figures such as demons and sorcerers thus actually become tools for dispelling the fantastic; in other words, they exist in the narratives only to be done in.<sup>8</sup> Humbler entities, however, can occasionally be used for the same purpose (although not in the self-destructive sense), whether they are 'magic objects,' such as James' kerchief and staff in the saga of James the Greater or the glowing bones of Bartholomew found by a monk on Liparis in Bartholomew's saga, or objects not possessing any innate power, such as the gemstones, reeds, and pebbles in John's saga (AM 652/630 4to). In the latter case, the presence and figurative use of these objects significantly changes the tone of the saga, which is often highly encomiastic. At one point John is portrayed as a chivalric champion who leaps onto a horse and rides at full speed to the hideout of a band of notorious criminals (*Post.* 427:24-430:5), and at the end of the saga he is taken away in a bright light after delivering an eloquent prayer to God while standing with his arms raised to heaven in a grave dug in a church built in his honor (*Post.* 433:29-435:15). It is the Pseudo-Abdian account of the conversion of two brothers through miracles involving gemstones, reeds, and pebbles that brings to the narrative a more humble, edificatory tone, with real lessons on real virtues taught through the marvelous manipulation of these particular objects.

In chapter 7 of the saga (according to Unger's chapter divisions), a philosopher named Kraton lectures on despising the world, and urges two brothers to sell their inheritance, buy gems with the money, and then break the gems in a public display. When the brothers do so, John, who is passing by, chastises Kraton, telling him that such abandoning of the world is foolishness, since it neither better the condition of man nor heals the wounds of his soul; instead of spending his time craving renown for his own asceticism, Kraton would be much better off caring for the poor, following Christ's admonishments ('If he wishes to be a perfect man, he should sell all of his belongings

<sup>8</sup> Sorcerers in these sagas include Simon Magus (the sagas of Peter and Clement), the Manicheans Zaroos and Arfaxath (the sagas of Simon and Jude and Mathew), and Hermogenes (the saga of James the Greater). Although they are dangerous 'anti-saints' who can, like the demons, torture their victims (for instance, in the saga of Simon and Jude, Zaroos and Arfaxath render a group of philosophers mute and lame, in an infernal parody of the apostles' gifts of healing), they essentially operate in the same way as the demons: their 'power' is based on illusion, and they are generally exposed, or made to expose themselves, as 'shaggy with falsehood and evil' (as Simon Magus is described in Clement's saga, *lodde flørþ einne saman oc ilzco*, *Post.* 128:29-30).

and give to the poor,' Matthew 19:21). John then prays to God to repair the gemstones, appealing to *'sa er endrbátir brotinn heiminn fyrir girndartreit fyrir tre heilags kross'* (*Post.* 421:26-7), and conveying through the miracle lessons in charity, the eternal power of God, and the lasting value of eternal wealth. Kraton and the brothers are converted, and the brothers sell the gems and give the money to the poor, inspiring the noblemen of Ephesus to do the same (*Post.* 420:37-422:8).

However, the brothers' subsequent envy of their own servants, who have received their masters' former wealth and are *...skrydda með silkiklæðum ok ganga fram skinendr i þessa heims dýrð* (*Post.* 422:14-15), is used by John to teach them that an outward show of charity is not enough; true faith and love of God should inspire one's works, just as the rewards of heaven can only be bought with faith, not worldly wealth. John has them bring him reeds and pebbles and prays to God to transform these things into gold and jewels, to show how the humble (people or things) can be exalted by the power of God (*Post.* 422:9-423:10). After the miracle is performed, John curiously tells the brothers to take the gold and jewels and sell them and keep the wealth, almost 'taunting' them to persist in their ignorance and lose eternal joy, and using a strikingly dramatic metaphor (the paling of roses):

*'Kaupit nu silkiklæði ok skinit um stundar sakir sem rosur, en er þær rotna, er ilmnr þeira (er) sem mest(r), þa falla þær enn braðliga. Þit andvörpuðut, er þit sað þræla ykkra auðga orðna en ykkv fatøka, ok syttuð því; verit nu blomgaðir, unz þit bliknit, verit nu auðigr stundliga, en at eilifu fatøkir'* (*Post.* 423:1-6).

John then gives the example of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 17:19-31) to prove the dangers of attachment to worldly wealth and neglect of the poor (*Post.* 423:11-36), and continues with a sermon on the worship of Mammon and the worldly vanity that leads only to cares, sorrow, and finally eternal torment (*Post.* 423:37-425:27). In the story of Lazarus, the rich man in Hell asks Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers of the life to come if they do not heed God's warnings, and in the next part of the saga the parable's figurative plea is literally answered when a man resurrected by John (Stacteus the Syrian) tells the brothers Atticus and Eugenius of the joys of heaven and the torments of Hell that he himself witnessed. The brothers and the gathered crowd are convinced and beg for forgiveness, but John refuses to convey their pleas to God (acting almost as Abraham does in the parable) until they have learned the truth of heartfelt repentance (as if their repentant attitude after hearing Stacteus' account is still only show, based on fear). John uses the gold and gems once again as metaphors for the brothers and the hold that worldly desires and appearances have over them: if they are truly repentant, if they have truly learned their lessons, God and his angels will rejoice and the power of God ('bought' by their own free will) will transform them back into the 'perfect' men that they were intended to be (back to their own true nature), just as he will transform the gold and gemstones back into reeds and pebbles.

These particular accounts of John's miracles not only display the somewhat complex thematic unity typical of the Pseudo-Abdian accounts, but also lack the overwhelming focus on the apostle's 'sublimity' that characterizes the rest of the saga; instead, the section ends by focusing on the secondary characters, those who have benefited from the apostles' lessons; in this case, it is the brothers, who share in the power of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit and use these gifts to cure the sick, the

blind, and demoniacs. However, the edificatory level attained here is not sustained throughout the remainder of the saga. John's saga is a compilation of several different sources (the gospels, Pseudo-Melito, and Pseudo-Abdias), and the translator/compiler does not appear to be as interested in manipulating all the parts of his text to enhance thematic and/or edificatory elements as he does simply to include as much as he can on John from a number of different sources. This method of hagiographical saga composition is more common to later collections such as the *Codex Scardensis* (see in particular Peter's saga in that collection), and thus John's saga can be seen as an excellent example of a 'medium stage' apostles' life, combining the Pseudo-Abdian edificatory style with a later encomiastic, even 'bombastic' style.

A saga that is stylistically similar to John's saga but that goes further in manipulating its source texts to ensure thematic unity is that of St. Andrew.<sup>9</sup> The basis for the *vita* section of the saga is the Pseudo-Abdian version of Gregory of Tours' Acts of Andrew (*Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli*, otherwise known as the *Liber de Virtutibus*), a loosely-connected collection of miracles. The Icelandic adapts the Latin text in places, including rearranging the order of miracles, in order to create an effect of a natural narrative progression and to highlight and unify certain motifs, such as the apostle's healing powers and his refusal to accept monetary reward. In doing so, the narrative is directed away from the 'miracle-book' style (in which the only real dominant theme is the power of God and his saint, or, in some cases, such as the Icelandic miracle book of St. Þorlákr, the efficaciousness of vows) toward the 'romance' style of the Pseudo-Abdian lives, and provides better unity between the *vita* and *passio* sections of the saga.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important adaptations made in the Icelandic version of Andrew's *vita* is the rearrangement of certain miracles just prior to the narrative's movement into the *passio* section. The Icelandic text follows the arrangement of Gregory's miracles in their Pseudo-Abdian version (excluding miracle 3 and miracle 6) until miracle 15, the curing of the tyrant Medias and the victims of his horrendous cruelty.<sup>11</sup> Following this miracle, the compiler reinserts miracles 3 and 6, which are both concerned with the curing of young boys, one an Egyptian who dies from a fever, and the other, a boy killed by demons. In this latter miracle, the Icelandic version manipulates the text to emphasize

<sup>9</sup> The saga is found in both AM 645 4to (the *passio* and a small portion of the miracle involving the nobleman's son Philopater) and AM 652/630 4to.

<sup>10</sup> Obviously, the narrative dynamic here and in the strict translations of the Pseudo-Abdian lives is quite different than that of lives of confessors and holy martyrs, which, like Andrew's *vita*, are for the most part loosely-arranged collections of miracles. One such text is the Icelandic life of St. Martin, found in AM 645 4to. Although the Icelandic translator makes adaptations to the texts of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita S. Martini* and *Dialogi* in order to streamline the narratives and make them more familiar to his audience, giving his text more of a semblance of stylistic uniformity, it still lacks, as pointed out by Regis Boyer, any 'internal linking,' beyond a type of 'deep structure' reflected in the author's desire to depict the force and victory of Christ. In fact, the 'typology' of medieval hagiography that Boyer derives from this particular text does not apply in full to the Pseudo-Abdian lives, and should be reconsidered in connection with the nature and development of Icelandic hagiography. See Boyer 1980, and, for a detailed comparison of Martin's saga with its Latin sources, Roughton 2002:370-421.

<sup>11</sup> Here I follow the numbering of the miracles as given in Elliott's abstract of Gregory's *Liber de Miraculis Beati Andreae Apostoli*; Elliott 1993:272-283.



the healthful results of a life dedicated to God and his apostle: first, the Latin's *Yesu benigne*' (Faber 24v:12) in Andrew's prayer to God that the boy be resurrected, is translated as *lofligr græðari*' (*Post.* 332:11), 'glorious Healer'; secondly, in Andrew's second prayer (following the boy's father's promise to dedicate the boy to Andrew and God), Andrew's request that those gathered might gain 'eternal life' (*vitam mereantur aeternam*,' Faber 24v:24-5) is changed to 'wholesome life' (*heilsamligu lifi*,' *Post.* 332:21), that is, that they might be healed as the boy is healed. Finally, when the boy goes with Andrew to Macedonia, the apostle is described as teaching the boy *þrifsamlegan fröðleik* (*Post.* 332:32), or 'wholesome wisdom,' continuing the boy's physical healing with the healing of his soul, in keeping with Andrew's former prayer that all involved in the miracle might forsake idols and be metaphorically resurrected, for the 'health of their souls' (...*til andarheilsu ollum*, *Post.* 332:19-20).

The thematic emphasis on healing displayed in the previous miracle is continued in the last two miracles of the *vita* section, which involve, respectively, the resurrection of forty drowned youths (Gregory's miracle 24) and the healing of the wife of the proconsul Egeas, the key player in the *passio* section and the man who orders the apostle's death (Gregory's miracle 30). The final miracle, while still concentrating on the apostle's healing powers, is included in the Icelandic version more as a transitional piece, since it introduces Egeas, and, using material interpolated from the transitional episodes in Pseudo-Abdias (Gregory's miracle 35), gives the reason why Egeas persecutes Andrew (the reason being typically encratic: his wife leaves him to follow the apostle). However, the miracle concerning the drowned youths can be seen as an appropriate conclusion to the *vita* section of the saga, since in its extended account of the apostle's powers over natural forces, culminating in the ultimate healing of the sons of noblemen, it reflects the culmination of the translator's arrangement of the Pseudo-Abdian miracles: the insertion of Gregory's miracles 3 and 6 into the narrative where they are (chapters 14 and 15 in Unger's edition) allows for the achievement of a kind of unity of themes and motifs, as the narrative progresses loosely from recounting miracles involving Andrew's power over natural and supernatural elements (demons and the sea) and his healing gifts to those that involve his healing of boys from sickness or death; these themes are all combined here in the way that Andrew commands the sea to cast up the bodies of the dead youths, and then extends to them, like the previous two boys, the ultimate form of healing, resurrection.

The *passio* section of Andrew's saga contains the longest and most sensationalistic martyrdom accorded to any of the apostles: Andrew is tortured, addresses the cross, preaches a sermon from the cross, and is engulfed in light at the moment of his death. Yet Andrew's faith in the cross, his patience, and his willingness to remain a perfect *imitatio Christi* through his sufferings are important as concrete examples of the lessons that he tried to teach his tormentor, Egeas (when he explained to Egeas the five reasons Christ was martyred willingly and the five mysteries of the Cross), and the sensationalism of the martyrdom does not conflict with the edificatory value of the lessons being conveyed. That the Icelandic homilist realized this is shown explicitly in his closing remarks to the saga, when he reiterates Andrew's lessons and prays that he and his audience might be allowed to inherit them (*Post.* 343:10-14). These remarks are not found in the source texts, and they show the Icelandic writer's conscientiousness in



presenting a text that is unified contextually and thematically, even allowing for its variety of elements of encomium, sensationalism, and didacticism.

The Pseudo-Abdian lives that were the source for the bulk of the earliest medieval Icelandic apostles' lives contained their fair share of sensational, fantastic elements: after all, the apostles travelled into rather exotic realms of heathendom in order to engage the 'other', in their own way stepping beyond the walls of Ásgarðr, off the shores of Ithaca, into the currach with Brendan, or even into the longboat with Eiríkr rauði. Somehow, however, the apostles' encounters with the fantastic are kept on this side of the boundary of the 'unreal' or the chaotic. What they encounter are real representatives of infernal parallels to the apostles' sublime virtues and God's truth: among other things, demons and sorcerers who are as bound in error and illusion as the saints are unbreakable examples, both in word and deed, of Christ's truth, and whose illusions are deadly real, or emperors, kings and earls who have been deluded into idolatry, putting the things of this world before God. Characters such as these are exaggerations of sin, representatives of the mind that cannot choose for itself although it might behold 'true wisdom,' allowing itself to be deluded by promises of worldly security and wealth instead; such characters become tools used to edify, foils that give the saints the chance to preach the central Christian mysteries and the virtues that 'unravel' these mysteries and turn them into marvels.

The type of hagiographical narratives represented by the Pseudo-Abdian lives should be seen as humanistic, providing models of behavior for the individual and the community (as do the saints who are their subjects). Pseudo-Abdian narratives are deed-centered, and their fantastic elements are one among many types of challenges against which a character's deeds and moral choices might be viewed and judged. The fact that the lives contained in AM 645 4to and AM 652/630 4to are originally foreign texts need not cause us any grave concern that in discussing them we are not discussing Icelandic literature: in fact, further investigation into them can give us better ideas about what sorts of theologies medieval Icelanders were learning and propagating, the grammatical and rhetorical models (foreign or native) that they used for translating their texts, the dissemination and circulation of foreign texts in Iceland, and how their lessons and themes, which certainly carry over into the medieval Icelandic bishops' lives and homilies, might have carried over into other contemporary forms of literature. They may or may not reveal anything concerning medieval Icelanders' real beliefs in certain 'fantastic' entities, but they certainly do have much to reveal concerning medieval Icelandic translators' interests in figurative interpretation and in adapting texts for specific edificatory purposes, particularly with regard to developing and sustaining themes. The more that these texts are studied, the clearer the rather significant measure of their abilities in these areas will become.

**Works Cited:**

- Augustine. 1958. *On Christian Doctrine*. Trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. Liberal Arts Press, New York.
- Boyer, Regis. 1981. 'An attempt to define the typology of medieval hagiography'. *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium*. Ed. Hans Bekker-Nielsen et.al. Odense University Press, Odense.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, 2001. *Metamorphosis and Identity*. Zone Books, New York.
- Elliott, J.K. 1993. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Faber, Johannes. 1560. *Abdiae Babyloniae primi episcopi ab apostolis constituti, De historia certaminis apostolici, libri decem, Iulio Africano...interprete*. G. Guillard & A. Warancore, Paris.
- Partner, Nancy F. 1985. 'The New Cornificius: Medieval History and the Artifice of Words'. *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography*. Ed. Ernst Breisach. *Studies in Medieval Culture XIX*. Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.
- Reames, Sherry L. 1985. *The Legenda Aurea: A Reexamination of its Paradoxical History*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- Roughton, Philip. 2002. *AM 645 4to and AM 652/630 4to: Study and Translation of Two Thirteenth-Century Icelandic Collections of Apostles' and Saints Lives*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder.
- Roughton, Philip. 2006. 'Stylistics and Sources of the *Postola Sögur* in AM 645 4to and AM 652/630 4to.' *Gripla XVI*. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Reykjavík.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1973. *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York.
- Unger, C.R. 1874. *Postola Sögur*. Bentzen, Christiania.