The Construction of *Auðunar þáttr Vestfirzka: A Case of Typological Thinking in Early Old-Norse Prose*

Introduction

Of the so-called Old-Norse *þættir*, or short sagas, few have received greater scholarly attention and praise than *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*. The interest in this brief tale of honesty, courage and persistence is easy to understand. *Auðunar þáttr* blends a seemingly simple tale with psychological insights, humour and pathos. Recent studies have adopted diverse approaches to the text. Thus William Ian Miller, in his monograph on *Auðunar þáttr*, applies cultural contextualization to explore the *þáttr's* embedded codes of value, especially in relation to honour and gift-giving (Miller 2008). Others have highlighted the work's Christian elements. Such readings point to *Auðunar þáttr's* kinship with didactic episodes of instruction or *exempla*: Auðunn's admirable conduct is recompensed with good fortune both in this life and the next (Ciklamini 1997, 74-76). In tune with recent trends in Old Norse studies, it has been shown how *þáttr's* preservation can affect our interpretation of it. In the thirteenth-century *Morkinskinna*, *Auðunar þáttr* prefigures the eventual peace between the warring kings, Sveinn Úlfsson (Estridsen) of Denmark (1047-1076) and Haraldr *harðráði* of Norway (1046-1066) (Ármann Jakobsson 2014, 96-100). In *Flateyjarbók*, a manuscript produced at the end of fourteenth century, the *þáttr's* emphasis on charity complements other episodes that focus on a comparable theme (observed in Rowe 1998, 22).

In what follows I do not seek to challenge these studies or their methods. Rather, my aim is to pursue a hitherto neglected line of research regarding the origin of *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*. More specifically, I am concerned with the *þáttr's* main narrative strands as well as its broader compositional context. Two assumptions are central to my approach. The first is that the text was written in the early thirteenth century either as an independent work or for inclusion in *Morkinskinna*. Although I find the former option more likely, my analysis can incorporate both scenarios. Further, I embrace the concept of 'intentionality' in the writing of *Auðunar þáttr.* The text is not a folk-tale or a recorded oral story but a carefully constructed narrative crafted by a single author who worked within a specific intellectual and literary context. I am interested in showing how significant aspects of *Auðunar þáttr* correspond to particular characteristics of saga

writing in this period.

The premise of this essay relies on historical and literary contexualisation and thus much of it will focus on texts other than *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka.* In the process I shall explore narrative features that have attracted relatively scant scholarly attention, namely how early saga writers applied a specific narrative device that ultimately originates in typological thinking.

Auðunar þáttr

We begin at an obvious place of departure. The following description is from *Hungrvaka* ('The Waker of Hunger'), a short episcopal *gesta* of *the* Skálholt diocese from the first decade of the thirteenth century.

En er Ísleifr var fimtøgr at aldri ok Ísland hafði eigi fjarri því at lengð kristit verit, þá var hann beðinn til útan ferðar ok valðr til byskups af allri alþýðu á Íslandi. Síðan fór hann útan ok suðr til Saxlands ok sótti heim Heinrek keisara Konráðsson ok gaf honum hvítabjǫrn er kominn var af Grœnlandi, ok var þat dýr in mesta gersemi. En keisarinn fekk Ísleifi bréf sitt með innsigli um allt veldi sitt. (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, 7-8).

When Ísleifr was fifty years of age and Iceland had not been Christian for long, he was chosen bishop of Iceland and asked by all the people of the country to travel abroad. Then he went south to Germany and visited Emperor Henry, son of Conrad, and gave him a polar bear from Greenland - that bear was the greatest of treasures. The Emperor gave Ísleifr a sealed letter for travel throughout his dominion.

Although the motif of an Icelander bringing a bear to a foreign dignitary is known in Old Norse prose, this is its earliest preserved manifestation. A correspondence between *Hungrvaka* and *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka* has been noted. For instance, A.R. Taylor suggests that Ísleifr's gift to the German emperor had supplied the author of *Auðunar þáttr* with a crucial idea for his tale (A.R. Taylor 1946-53, 94-95). Taylor also observes that in both accounts the beast is referred as *'gørsemi mikil'* ('a great treasure'). But apart from noting the broad thematic similarity and this single verbal correspondence, the discussion has not advanced far beyond noting that the two narratives involve 'an Icelander presenting a bear to a foreign dignitary'.

The parallels and differences between the episodes merit closer inspection. In *Hungrvaka* the motif is neither a mere quirky aside nor a humorous or decorative feature. It highlights a significant moment, namely the event that paved the way for the investiture of Skálholt's first bishop in 1056. Thus Ísleifr's gift of a polar bear to Emperor Henry III appears in what constitutes the foundation legend of the ‘Icelandic Church’. This legend explains how the Icelandic bishop elect successfully negotiated with the secular leader of

Christendom which educed a letter of confirmation from its spiritual head. Underlying this story is undoubtedly the wish to show that the Icelandic Church drew authority directly from the papacy rather than the Archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen.

Auðunar þáttr takes place around the time of Ísleifr's momentous journey and so during the prolonged conflict between Haraldr Sigurðarson of Norway and Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark. The episode's premise is that the conflict leaves travelers at the mercy of kings, especially someone as conspicuous as Auðunn with his bear. The *þáttr*'s first scene of suspense is when Auðunn refuses to give or sell Haraldr the animal. Auðunn´s position becomes still more precarious when he reveals his intention to present the bear to the king's longstanding foe:

Haraldr konungr segir: "Hvárt er at þú ert maðr svá óvitr at þú hefir eigi heyrt ófrið þann er í milli er landa þessa, eða ætlar þú giptu þína svá mikla at þú munir þar komask með gørsimar er aðrir fá eigi komizk klaklaust þó at nauðsyn eigi til?" (Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson 2011, 218).

King Haraldr said "Are you so stupid that you have not heard about the war between these countries? Or do you consider your luck so great that you will be able to get there with the treasure where others, who have more important business, are an unable to do so without hindrance."

The paradox is that Auðunn is allowed safe passage through Haraldr's realm precisely because he refuses to gift or sell the bear to the king. Had Auðunn played to expectations he would doubtlessly have been amply rewarded, perhaps with a ship for a fine return to Iceland. Haraldr, however, knows Auðunn will not change his mind and that confiscating the animal will reflect badly on his person. But by granting his guest a safe passage Haraldr initiates a complex exchange with his Danish counterpart, the nuances of which William Ian Miller has so perceptibly illuminated.

Conversely, in *Hungrvaka* Ísleifr plays out his role and presents the bear to the emperor. In return the bishop elect is rewarded with a safe conduct to his next destination – Rome – just as Auðunn is allowed to travel unhindered to Sveinn. Both Auðunn and Ísleifr set out for Rome, the former provisioned by the Danish king and the latter with a letter from the emperor securing his passage. Both return with gifts of spiritual significance: Auðunn to the Danish court with his soul enhanced, whilst Ísleifr extracts from the pontiff a foundational document of the Icelandic Church which is addressed to the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen.[1] From Germany and Denmark the two return to

[1] The author of *Hungrvaka* has the letter issued on Pentecost, or the day that was generally seen to mark the foundation of the Church.

Iceland: for one awaits a life of honorable obscurity in the Western fjords; for the other a distinguished place in history as effectively the founder of the Icelandic Church. The differences are as noteworthy as the similarities.

I assume that *Hungrvaka* was familiar to learned Icelanders of the thirteenth century. The most prestigious native texts of the time were those like *Hungrvaka* and Ari Þorgilsson's *Book of Icelanders* that focused on outstanding events in Iceland's history, namely the conversion and the establishment of the Church. To this list of 'public' writings can be added the hagiographic sagas of the two saints of Iceland, Þorlákr Þórhallson (d. 1193) and Jón Ögmundarson (d. 1121), whose cults were officially recognised around the turn of the thirteenth century.

An Episode from *Jóns saga Ögmundarsonar*

Soon after Jón Ögmundarson's local canonisation in 1200 a *vita* was composed in his honour. Its author was Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a brother at Þingeyrar Abbey and an industrious writer in both Latin and Old Norse. Although Gunnlaugr's original Latin text is lost, the work forms the backbone of the Old Norse version of *Jóns saga helga* from the first half of the thirteenth century (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, fyrri hluti, 2003, ccxii-cclviii; cclxxxiii-ccxcii). Gunnlaugr no doubt recorded and reshaped oral stories about Hólar's first bishop. Written sources, however, were in short supply and, in particular, little seems to have been known about Jón's pre-episcopal career (Foote 1993, 345). The hagiographic tropes could of course be applied to this period of the saint's life, but these still has to translated into concrete historical contexts.

This considered, the court of King Sveinn Úlfsson offered a setting that allowed Jón Ögmundarson's saintliness to be highlighted and his future glory foretold. The saga recounts that Jón's parents took the toddler to the Danish court where his mother slapped his grasping hands, only for Sveinn to tell her off: "Do not slap these hands, for they are the hands of a bishop" (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote 2003, sögutextar, 179). For our purposes Jón's second encounter with Sveinn Úlfsson is of greater interest. Here the inspiration is biblical imagery familiar from medieval art. Jón tells the king about a dream-vision he had experienced the previous night where he found himself in the choir of an unidentified cathedral ("í nǫkkurri hǫfuðkirkju forkunnar virðuligri í kórnum kirkjunnar"). In the bishop's seat, or the *cathedra* ("í byskups rúmi") he saw Christ enthroned. King David sat at his feet playing "his harp with great skill and beautiful sound" (*Ibid*,

186). Jón also comments that he can remember some of the music that David had performed in his dream. On Sveinn's instruction a harp is fetched and Jón plays it with great beauty.

As Peter Foote briefly noted this scene was likely prompted by the image of King David playing on his harp or lyre for Christ seated in Majesty (*Ibid.*, 187). But it is also worth noting how the translation of the image into a specific historical time and place – the court of King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark – creates an intricate web of typological associations. The first level involves David playing the lyre and singing the Psalms in Christ's honour. In medieval literature and art David often pre-figures Christ. For example, in a Würzburg psalter from 1240-1250 the illuminated image divides into two: in the lower half and enthroned David plays the lyre surrounded by musicians whereas the upper half features Christ enthroned (Kren 2009, 20-21). This essentially is the image of Jón's dream.

Jón relates to Christ in two ways: as a saint he imitates or reflect his qualities but as a bishop he will act as Christ's substitute on earth. The image of Christ on the episcopal throne underlines both notion. At the level of earthly time, however, the image of King David playing the harp for Christ in Majesty is mirrored in Jón playing for Sveinn whose rulership links with the notion of Davidic kingship. The embedded irony is obvious. For the reader of *Jóns saga* the dream-vision and Jón's re-enactment of David's music prefigures his episcopal role and saintly glory. But from the king's perspective the Icelander performs a flattering act in the fashion of skalds; the Psalms were commonly seen as David's praising (and lamenting) to God. The regal association between King Sveinn and David introduces the element of royal honour.[2] Thus the episode involves an ingenious adaptation of a scene from one context – visual, a-historical and typological – to a very different one: a context that presupposes familiarity with Norse courtly culture.

The Jón's dream prompt the playing out of these typological associations at Sveinn Úlfsson's court. Gunnlaugr Leifsson's fellow monk at Þingeyrar, Oddr Snorrason, had presented a comparable transposition in his saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason. Oddr applies the familiar pairing of John the Baptist and Christ to Norwegian history in respect to Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. The essence is that of topological fulfillment: John the Baptist foreshadows and is fulfilled in Christ (Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, 125; Zernack 1998; Wellendorf 2014). This corresponds with St Óláfr completing the missionary work

[2] Ailnoth of Canterbury, writing in Denmark around 1120, compared King Sveinn to King David (Gertz1908-1912), 83.

begun by his predecessor, Óláfr Tryggvason. But the pairings in *Jóns saga byskups* obviously does not function in this way for it would presuppose King Sveinn augmenting St Jón Ögmundarson. Contextually, of course, this makes limited sense.

The *Jóns saga* episode follows from a still longer description of how the saint impressed the Danish king. Before arriving at his court Jón had been to Norway and Denmark. From Denmark he had travelled as a pilgrim to Rome, a journey about which nothing further is told. On his return Jón seeks out Sveinn and, on Palm Sunday, he finds the king at Mass. As Jón enters a priest is reading the Passion in a long-winded manner to a less than appreciative congregation. As the priest becomes an object of ridicule, Jón steps in and his reading of the same text elicits great admiration from all present. Sveinn is so taken by Jón's performance that he invites him to remain at court (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, sögutextar, 2003, 183-186).

There are obvious similarities between Jón's second introduction to King Sveinn Úlfsson and Auðunn's second arrival at the same king's court. And these parallels are not constricted to narrative elements common to foreign journeys (*útferðarsögur*). Apart from Auðunn's excursion to Greenland, the itineraries are identical (Iceland-Norway-Denmark-Rome-Denmark-Iceland). Moreover, both Jón and Auðunn arrive at Sveinn's court with the king at Mass. Auðunn enters at Easter (presumably Sunday) whereas St Jón arrives on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. Both show up as outsiders during Mass but then prove their worth to the king: Auðunn through his humility and suffering; Jón through his deportment and mellifluous voice which elicits admiration from King Sveinn. The presence of courtly ridicule in the two accounts is also noteworthy. Auðunn is ridiculed at a decidedly low point after his arduous pilgrimage, whilst in *Jóns saga helga* a somewhat pathetic priest is the object of mockery. In both cases King Sveinn sternly rebukes a hostile audience and sides with the object of the scorn. The choice of Palm Sunday for Jón's arrival is likely not coincidental in its evocation of Christ's entry into Jerusalem. In fact the linking of this feast day with victory or triumph was not a novelty in Old Norse literature (see Poole 2012, 271). Auðunn's entry at Easter after his difficult pilgrimage is also appropriate. Pilgrimage is an act of atonement that is traditionally associated with Lent which is culminates in deliverance on Easter Sunday. The king's clothing of the destitute Auðunn with new robes evokes baptism and the purification associated with this feast.

Central features of *Auðunnr þáttr vestfirzka* seem to originate in two works from the turn of the thirteenth century: *Hungrvaka* and *Jóns saga helga*. In the former a gift of

a bear allows a free passage through hostile territory which leads to the investiture of the first Icelandic bishop. From the latter *Auðunnr þáttr* appropriates the protagonist's arrival at Sveinn's court during Holy Week and the humiliation and restoration at Mass. The main point of interest is how *Auðunnr þáttr* reshapes the narrative elements. In particular, we observe how essential features are reversed or inverted: Auðunn refuses to give the bear to Sveinn for protection yet Ísleifr presents the beast to the emperor for the same reason. Although both receive praise from King Sveinn at Mass, Auðunn's nervous and humiliating appearance contrasts with Jón’s assured and dignified disposition. One takes place at the beginning of Holy Week and the other at its culmination. The outstanding element of inversion, however, is the juxtaposition of a poor man from a decidedly modest background with the first bishops of Iceland's two dioceses: Ísleifr Gizurason of Skálholt and Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar.

Central to my analysis of *Auðunar þáttr* is the observation saga authors transposed and inverted episodes from near-contemporary texts. Such a narrative device – a conscious inversion of elements in a narrative scene or episode – may at first sight seem out of place in medieval literature in general and saga writing in particular. The remainder of this study will demonstrate that this is not so.

An Episode from Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*

We have seen how an episode in *Jóns saga helga* seemingly inspired a central scene in *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*, namely the saint's arrival at the court of Sveinn Úlfsson at Easter. The adoption of this episode in the *þáttr* entails both transposition and inversion. But where did the author of *Jóns saga* – which was likely Gunnlaugr Leifsson – draw *his* inspiration for the episode in question? We have already seen how he modeled one scene at Sveinn's court on a fairly common, yet typological charged, image of David performing for Christ in Majesty. We might well suspect a specific source for Jón's 'arrival at court' episode.

Writing around 1200 Saxo Grammaticus appears have known relatively little about King Sveinn and his rule. This, however, did not prevent Saxo from recounting in his *Gesta Danorum* a string of stories that are set at the king's court (Friis-Jensen 2015, 803-819). Above all these episodes illustrate the ideal balance or harmony between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, where King Sveinn represents the former with the bishop of Roskilde, William (*ca*. 1060-1073/74), and his successor Sveinn Norman (1074-1088)

representing the latter. Most strikingly perhaps, Saxo transposes to Sveinn’s court the familiar story of how St Ambrose chastened Emperor Theodosius for his Thessaolonican massacre. This episode has a Danish king publicly repenting before his bishop (Friis Jensen 2015, 807-819).

Of special interest is an encounter between Sveinn Úlfsson and Sveinn Norman (Friis Jensen 2015, 805-807). In this episode the latter is still only a priest and, perhaps due to his Norwegian origin, something of an outsider at court. Saxo writes that although Sveinn commands well his mother tongue, he 'was hampered by deficiency in the Latin tongue'. At Mass, with the king present, Sveinn's fellow court clerics trick him into reading a defective missal. At the point in the Mass where the missal should refer to the king as God's 'assistant' the hapless Sven reads out 'ass'. This triggers among the courtiers a 'joyful heaves of merriment until their faces dissolved into unrestrained laugher'. Sveinn inspects the missal and notices their tampering with the manuscript. Scolding his courtly clerks the king complements the unfortunate Sveinn Norman and promises to sponsor his education, and so in a sense he foresees his namesake’s success.

This scene in *Gesta Danorum* and our episode *Jón saga helga* are both set during Mass at the Danish court and includes an inadequate delivery of a liturgical text in King Sveinn's presence. The episodes also share the element of courtly ridicule. Further, both scenes feature Jón of Hólar and Sveinn Norman of Roskilde sometime before their elevation to the episcopacy. For Saxo Grammaticus Sveinn’s attention to the stuttering cleric shows the king’s prescient qualities and, as noted, it foreshadows an important theme for the remainder of *Gesta Danorum*: the harmonious relations between royal and episcopal power which coalesces in the concord between king and bishop. Conversely, in *Jóns saga* the episode illustrates Jón's inherently noble bearing, learning, and commanding presence. Like in the 'David playing the lyre' scene Jón is here effectively *written into* a pre-existing narrative/visual template.

We note here the saga author's ability to retain essential elements of an existing scene or episode while inverting other features to highlight a particular point. The Palm-Sunday setting in the *Jóns saga* episode is an understandable addition. The transposed story does not feature an embarrassed protagonist, whose honour is saved by the king, but rather a confident, majestic St Jón whose qualities are admired by the same authority. In other words, the scene in *Jóns saga Ögmundarsonar* represents an inversion of key elements in Saxo’s episode. Whether Gunnlaugr Leifsson derived his story directly from Saxo's work or through an intermediary source is impossible to assess.

Svaða þáttr and *Arnórs þáttr kerlingarnefs*

The early thirteenth century was a formative period in writing Old Norse prose which generated a wide variety of texts. Biographies of kings and native saints were composed in both Old Norse and in Latin, whilst the period saw the earliest Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*). This was a time of experimentation when oral and written material was creatively incorporated into narratives of remarkable variety. The composition of shorter narratives, *þættir*, had already commenced in this early phase. Indeed *Morkinskinna*, which preserves the earlier known version of *Auðunar þáttr*, is the most impressive witness to the production of such shorter pieces. These focus prominently on Icelanders, often skalds or even future bishops, who improved both their material and/or social standing at (primarily) the Norwegian court by showing their talent and wit. *Auðunar þáttr* represents a variation on this theme.

But not all *þættir* adhered to the *útferðar* pattern. For instance, some are set entirely in Iceland and are notable for their Christian elements of instruction. In this respect *Svaða þáttr* and *Arnórs þáttr kerlingarnefs* are of especial interest (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, sögutextar, 2003, 149-166). Both take place in the same region of northern Iceland just before Iceland's official conversion to Christianity in AD 999/1000. In both, religious motifs or themes are transposed from a Christian source to a particular point in the country's history. Indeed they should be read as a single *þáttr* consisting of two thematically related sections (Harris 1975, 43). Preserved in *Óláfr saga Tryggvasonar* in *Flateyjarbók*, Peter Foote agrees with earlier scholars who have attributed the *þættr* to Gunnlaugr Leifsson. (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, fræði, 2003. ccii). My discussion does not, however, rest on this attribution.

Svaði, a powerful farmer, abuses the poor and hungry people of his region by enticing them to dig a ditch with the promise of food. After they complete this task, Svaði locks the workers in a shed and declares that they will be killed in the morning and thrown into the pit. The same night Þorvarðr, a Christian, travels through the region and hears the wailing of the trapped paupers. Þorvarðr offers them a deal: should they become Christian they will be freed and brought to a farmstead and fed. Not surprisingly the paupers accept the offer and follow Þorvarðr to his abode where they are baptised and cared for. Svaði then receives his deserved punishment:

> En er hans illska ok vándskapur fell honum sjálfum í họfuð, því at jafnskjótt sem hann reið hvatt fram hjá grọfinnni fell hann af baki ok var þegar dauðr er hann kom á jọrð. Ok í þeirri sọmu grọf er hann hafði fyrirbúit saklausum mọnnum var hann, sekr heiðingi, sjálfr grafinn af sínum fylgðamọnnum ok þar var með honum hundr hans ok hestr at fornum sið (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote, sögutextar, 2003, 149-166).
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> But his evil and badness struck his own head. As soon as he rode past the ditch he fell from horseback and was dead as he hit the ground. And in the same ditch he had intended for innocent men he himself, a guilty heathen, was buried by his followers. There buried with him, according to ancient custom, were a horse and a dog.

It has been noted that Svaði's death seemed modeled on Psalms 7:15-17 (John McKinnell 2001, 174):

> ... behold he hath been in labour with injustice; he hath conceived sorrow, and brought forth iniquity/ He hath opened a pit and dug it; and he is fallen into the hole he made/ His sorrow shall be turned on his own head: and his iniquity shall come down upon his crown' (Dhouay-Rheims Catholic Bible).

Another correspondence has been observed in Ecclesiastics 10:8 (Joseph Harris 1975, 43): "He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it: and he that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him." But from a broader perspective Svaði's fate is essentially an historical rendering of a well-known Old Testament trope where the evil and sinful fall into a cavity or the deep sea which signifies a descent into hell (the fate of the Pharaoh representing one archetype for such a fate). This biblical *topos*, where the poor and distressed plead for God's deliverance, connects with Satan's fall. For instance, Psalm 9:9-18 links the deliverance of the poor and wretched, signifying wayward humanity, with the punishment of the wicked who are ensnared in the work of their own making. This passage agrees well with *Svaða þáttr's* premise. Linking the saving of the wretched with the rejection of pagan idols, which is the devil's bondage, and the embracing of the true religion. This is a cry of despair that corresponds to the state of desolation of poor imprisoned people. Thus fittingly, considering heathenism's imminent demise, the symbol of hell is marked by grave-goods in the shape of a horse and a dog. In short, here a familiar biblical notion (rather than a single event or a passage) is manifested in a specific historical setting. Svaði, Þorvarðr, and the paupers play their roles in a story that prefigures Iceland's deliverance from Satan's imprisonment and the expectation of redemption.

The sister episode, *Arnórs þáttr kerlingarnefs*, is also set in Skagafjörður during the pre-conversion famine. A decree had been issued that the old and helpless should not be fed and sheltered. The mother of Arnórr, the local chieftain, protests against this

cruelty which prompts Arnórr to gather the needy from the neighbourhood under his protection. Arnórr then assembles the local farmers and exhorts them to feed the poor. Arnórr concludes his speech by stating that from now on they should believe in 'the true God who has created the sun'. The effect of Arnórr's words and its positive reception is dramatic:

> Þá var inn snarpasti kulði ok frost, sem langan tíma hafði áðr verit, ok inir grimmustu norðanvindar, en sveilli ok inu harðasta fjarni var steypt yfir alla jǫrð svá at hvergi stóð upp. En á næstu nótt eptir þenna fund skiptisks vá skjóttvum með guðligri forsjá ýmis leikr loptsins, at um morgininn eptir var á brautu allr grimmleikr frostsins, en kominn í staðinn hlœr sunnan vindr ok inn bezti þeyr (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, Peter Foote 2003, sögutextar, 154).

> Then there had been for a long time sharp cold and frost and the cruelest of northern winds. The hardest of ice and sheet covered the earth so that nothing stood out. The night after the meeting, through God's command, there was such a sudden change in the weather's fortune, that the following morning all the cruelty of the frost had gone, and instead there came a warm southern wind and a fine breeze.

Thus the deliverance of the poor from danger turns the weather from the bitter north wind to the warm southern wind. On the metaphoric level, of course, the south wind heralds Christianity and the destruction of paganism, which represents the devil's ploys to mislead humanity. The symbolism here derives less from one specific biblical passage or incident and more from a general scriptural understanding where the North denotes the devil's domain (see, for example, Jermiah 1:14). From there it is but a short step for Nordic authors to equate the coldness of the North with the devil's freezing of human hearts which are thawed by the warmth of the true Gospel. This idea is, for instance, succinctly expressed in the proem to *Passio Olavi*, a late twelfth century Norwegian Latin work which was translated Old Norse around the turn of the thirteenth century.[3]

Arnórs þáttr Kerlingarnefs and *Svaða þáttr* show how early thirteenth-century writers translated material from one context, in this case a biblical one, into familiar. historical settings. The two *þættir* strikingly adapt Old Testament concepts and tropes into an Icelandic context. The accounts are set within historical time and they work in a

[3] 'From its face Jeremiah saw a seething pot; and in Isaiah there is the boaster who says, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." But the great and praiseworthy Lord, who builds his city on the sides of the north, scattered the rigour of the north with the mild wind of the south and at last softened the stubborn and fierce hearts of savage peoples with the warmth of faith. They heard of the teaching of the Lord, and he sent messengers to them as heralds of his word.' (Phelpstead 2001, 26).

figurative relationship with the coming event: the conversion of Iceland to Christianity or when the devil's work is discarded and suffering humanity released. Auerbach's familiar observation is especially applicable here: 'the earthly event is thus a historically real prophecy, or *figura*, or a part of a divine reality that will occur in the future and will at that point be perfected in all its immediacy' (Auerbach 1984, 70-71). In other words, the *þættir* not only refer back to the biblical archetype but also into the immediate future that holds Iceland's conversion and points forward to the fulfillment of the New Dispensation. But for my purpose, however, the *þættir's* religious dimension is of lesser concern than the manner in which the authors shift perspectives and construct seemingly simple, yet artful, tales of instruction.

A comparable transposition from ecclesiastical sources, namely *Hungrvaka* and *Jóns saga helga*, played an important role in the construction of *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka*. But two features still need accounting for. One is the obvious difference between transposing from a near contemporary (and in this case Icelandic) source rather than the Old Testament. The second is the curious phenomenon of inversion in the process of transposition.

The Dialogues of Gregory the Great

Transposition and inversion of familiar Christian scenes feature in thirteenth-century sagas. Let us briefly examine three episodes from the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, a work that was known in Iceland from the twelfth century onwards (Boyer 1971; Wolf 2001; Crook 2001; Grønlie 2009).

In *Egils saga*, chapter 44, the eponymous hero finds himself in Norway at the farmstead of a certain Bárðr. The host shows distinct lack of hospitality until the arrival of King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr who are offered better fare (Sigurður Nordal 1933, 106-111). Noting the insult, Egill imbibes copious amounts of ale and recites a stanza in which he highlights earlier examples of Bárðr's stinginess. Bárðr responds by supplying him with poisoned ale that Gunnhildr had brewed. Egill receives the horn but, instead of downing the mead, he carves a runic charm on it with his own blood and recites a stanza. The vessel immediately cracks and concoction spills out. Later in the evening Egill kills Bárðr and flees.

The model for this episode is Gregory's *Dialogues* book 2, chapter 3 (de Vogüé 1978-1980, 2.4, 142-144; Grønlie 2013, 13-14). At one monastery the brothers plead with St Benedict to succeed their recently deceased abbot. Benedict accepts the

invitation but soon the monks regret their choice when the saint imposes a stricter and more regulated life. They conspire to kill Benedict by poisoning his wine, but when he blesses the cup with the sign of the cross the chalice bursts, revealing the deadly liquid. Benedict gently reproves the monks and tells them to seek a new abbot. The moral of the story, as Gregory relates to his pupil, is that Benedict would have diluted his own devotion should he have continued leading monks who had chosen the path of iniquity.

The juxtaposition of the saintly, mild-mannered, St Benedict and the pagan, rage-filled, Egill Skallgrímsson is the outstanding element of *Egils saga's* use of the *Dialogues* episode. For a knowing audience this would have added a humorous dimension to the incident. The attempted poisoning of St Benedict's comes about due to his insistence on a life of holiness, whereas Bárðr's and Gunnhildr's plot against Egill directly relates to his earlier insults and excesses. The latter scene, it should be stressed, occurs during festivities of less than Christian nature. In *Egils saga* the potency of Egill's pagan charm contrasts with the ritual of blessing the abbot's wine with the sign of the cross; both though are effective within their own historical context. Inversion is clearly the outstanding feature in this transposition. Although it does not convey any religious or moral message, the translation of a Christian *exemplum* into a quite different context displays a conscious moulding of the original material. The juxtaposition of the poor, undistinguished Auðunn with his distinguished contemporaries, Iceland first two bishops, represents a comparable case in point.

Another examples narrative reversal appears in the so-called *Legendary saga* of St Óláfr, *Helgisaga Óláfs Helga* (Heinrichs, Janshen, Radicke, Röhn 1982, 56-57). This text, which is preserved in a single mid thirteenth-century manuscript, is a Norwegian reworking of an otherwise lost Icelandic saga on St Óláfr from the turn of the thirteenth century – the so-called 'Oldest saga of St Óláfr'. Just before Óláfr's return to Norway he hears of a hermit in England with the gift of prophecy. Óláfr sends a servant clothed in royal garb to visit the anchorite to test his prescience. The hermit sees through the ruse and asks the servant to obey his lord. Later the same day Óláfr appears before the hermit but is told to visit the following morning when the holy man will reveal to him what he came to hear. On that occasion the hermit foresees that Óláfr will not only become a king of Norway in this temporal life but for

all eternity.

A celebrated story in Gregory's *Dialogues* describes St Benedict's encounter with Totila, the king of Ostrogoths (AD 541-552). On hearing of the saint's reputation, Totila is keen to test whether he is filled with the gift of prophecy. Because of his 'wickedness' Totila sends his servant dressed in royal attire to Benedict's monastery. But Benedict is not deceived and tells the servant to cast off the clothes as those are unfitting for his social status. When Totila prostrates himself before the saint, Benedict delivers a rebuke and prophecy which foretells that the Ostrogoth king will conquer Rome and rule for nine years, and in the tenth he will leave the earthly life (de Vogüé 1978-1980, 2.14-15, 284).

Although the parallels between the two episodes are obvious (and these have been noted before), the differences are equally interesting. Most significantly, in the *Legendary saga* the focus is on Óláfr whereas in the *Dialogues* it is St Benedict who holds the centre stage. That the hermit recognises the servant does not demonstrate his power but highlights Óláfr's saintly status and future role in Norway's conversion. Contrastingly, in the *Dialogues* the focus is not on the visiting king but St Benedict who, because of his saintly powers, sees through Totila's machinations. Totila plays the subservient part as he penitently prostrates before the saint. Totila is otherwise depicted as a barbarian *rex iniquus*, whose adherence to the Arian form of Christianity places him beyond the pale. Although the *Dialogues* notes that the king became less cruel after meeting Benedict, the prophecy is still that of demise. Totila will enter Rome but the city will survive and the tyrant die not long thereafter. The survival of Rome from Totila's onslaught signifies the survival of the Church in these turbulent times. A subtext to Totila's end is his likely fate of damnation as the encounter with St Benedict continues a tradition of unjust rulers meeting prophets that extends back to biblical examples (for instance, Saul-David, Eljhah-Ahab) (de Vogüé 1993, 84).

In the *Legendary saga* the hermit foresees a glorious future for Óláfr who, like Totila, is a warlord but whose fate contrasts with the Gothic king's. Óláfr is not at the beginning rather than the end of his career: he will assume power in Norway, establish the Church, and gain everlasting glory as the kingdom's eternal saint. The inversion of Totila's encounter with St Benedict episode should be clear.

Finally, an inversion of an episode in Gregory's work features in *Njáls saga*. This is in the well-known episode of Flosi's dream following the burning of Bergþórshváll (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 346-348). It has long been recognised that Flosi's dream of a figure emerging out of Látrabjarg (a massive sea-side cliff), who proceeded to call out the

names of the arsonists, is modeled on a chapter in the second book of Gregory's work. This episode relates how the brothers of a monastery near Rome heard a voice emanating from above a sheer cliff that dominates their monastery. The voice called out the names of monks who, like the men called out by the mysterious figure in *Njáls saga,* would soon die (de Vogüé 1978-1980, 1.8, 70-77).

What should be noted is that the relation between the two scenes is one of reversal or inversion. Instead of angelic voices descending from the sky there is conspicuously Óðin-like figure, emerging *out* of the mountain utter the prophetic message to Flosi. This character, clad in goat-skin, is effectively a type of the devil. Instead of a private dream which Flosi keeps secret to all but one of his followers, the vision in the *Dialogues* is communal and experienced by all the brethren involved. Whereas in *Njáls saga* the named men are recent killers of women and children, in the *Dialogues* they are venerable monks who have lived piously and performed good works. It follows that the fate of the respective groups are diametrically different: for the monks the calling of their names is a joyous occasion as it denotes their imminent entry into Paradise; for the burners of Bergþórshváll it signifies a judgment of damnation which is further illustrated in the apocalyptic Battle of Clontarf where the majority of them perish.

That Gregory's *Dialogues* served as a giving pasture for saga authors is perhaps not surprising. Because of their immediacy, as well as the dramatic and anecdotal nature of the stories, they were ideally suited to the kind of translations identified above. But above all, the *Dialogues* were extremely well known and a learned audience would have recognised and appreciated the skillful handling of the original material. It is from this perspective that we should view the appropriation in *Auðunar þáttr* of narrative themes or motives from *Hungrvaka* and *Jóns saga Helga*.

Yngvars saga víðfǫrla and Óláfr Tryggvason

Inversion as a narrative device first came to my notice while researching *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla,* an adventure about a Swedish Viking who travels south and east into exotic lands where he and his band succumb to a plague (Olson 1912). *Yngvars saga* is preserved in two late medieval manuscripts but is attributed to Oddr Snorrason, a brother in Þingeyrar Abbey around the turn of the thirteenth century.

What especially caught my attention was an extraordinary scene that takes place when Yngvar and his men reach their furthest destination, or the 'source of the river'

which, we are told, is located near the Red Sea (Olson 1912, 379-380). There the Vikings come to a mysterious hall and one of them, a pagan named Sóti, is assigned the task of staying the night there. What Sóti experiences is clearly an earthly manifestation of Hell of a kind. A demon in a human materialises and tells Sóti the history of this infernal hall. The tale is of a macabre family, which includes a father and three sisters, whose avarice leads to suicides and, 'some believe', their transformation into dragons. The demon informs that the sister who lived the longest had inherited the hall which now is filled every night with demons. The demon maintains that the other guardian of the place is a certain Haraldr, an otherwise unknown Swedish king who travelled to the Red Sea where he drowned with all his men in a whirlpool. As a proof the demon requests Sóti to bring Haraldr's standard back to Sweden. This episode can only be adequately understood within the context of *Yngvar saga* as a whole (Haki Antonsson 2012). But here it suffices to say that the scene evokes the King Haraldr's damnation in deliberate contrast to the likely salvation of Yngvar. The subtext is *Exodus* and Haraldr's drowning has its archetype in the Pharaoh's drowning in the Red Sea.

The scene of comparison features in the so-called 'Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason' which was compiled in the early fourteenth century (Ólafur Halldórsson 1958-1961, 342-348). The text in question, however, likely originates from Gunnlaugr Leifson's now lost Latin biography of King Óláfr Tryggvason.[4] The episode describes how two Norwegians, Gautr and Gauti, embark on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Having visited Jerusalem, they wish to see the Red Sea. On the way the two become lost in the desert which leads to Gauti’s death. His companion, seemingly in a hopeless situation, falls asleep by a river. A man appears to him in a dream who counsels him to cross the river the following morning. A boat ferries Gautr to the other bank where he sees a beautiful city presided over by a hermit who lives in a stone house on its outskirts. The mysterious man, speaking Norse, asks about news from Norway. The conversation steers towards the subject of Óláfr Tryggvason and his death in AD 1000 in the Battle of Svolder. The hermit asks the visitor what he believes what fate befell the king. Gautr suggestion that the king drowned is met with derision: Óláfr was a great swimmer and would not have ended his life in such a way. Gautr then proposes Óláfr was spirited to heaven in a blazing light, to which the hermit retorts that the king had committed too many sins in his Viking youth to deserve such a honour. It now dawns on Gautr that his

[4] For this dating and further discussion of this episode, see Haki Antonsson, 2012, 96-101, especially footnote 28.

interlocutor is Óláfr Tryggvason who confirms the identification and tells that he had long since abdicated his kingship. The two attend Mass but the following morning, as Gautr seeks out his compatriot, the former king he is nowhere to be seen. The subtext is, of course, that Ólafr has now completed his earthly penance and has been allowed to enter Paradise. A schematic presentation will help to highlight the similarities and contrasts between the two texts:

Time: 1040/41	Time: 1046/47
Location: Vicinity of the Red Sea	Location: Vicinity of the Red Sea
Place: Beautiful Hall - earthly manifestation of Hell	Place: Beautiful City - Antechamber to Paradise
Main Characters: King Haraldr of Sweden	Main Character: Ólafr Tryggvason
Fate of Character: Damnation (drowning)	Fate of Character: Salvation (ascending to Heaven?)
Final Wish: Bring Haraldr's royal standard to Sweden.	Final Wish: Óláfr's sword and belt brought back to Norway to verify the story and as a symbol of abdication.
Underlying Typology (archetype): Exodus	Underlying Typology (archetype): Exodus

These correspondences and inversions may, of course, be coincidental. But this seems unlikely considering the texts likely originate from two Benedictine brothers who were working in the same monastery around the same time and were interested in the same subjects (indeed at one point *Yngvars saga* directly compares Yngvar to Óláfr Tryggvason). Rather this case seems yet another example of two principal themes of this study: translation and inversion. Here we encounter a different mode of inversion from the ones already explored. Instead of a fairly straightforward point by point reversal of a set narrative pattern, the inversion is thematic in its reliance on the following two premises: the journey of Norse leaders/kings to the East in search of salvation and the typological potentials inherent in the story of Exodus.

Concluding Remarks

The mode of thought that allows such thematic and narrative inversion is guided by an essentially typological way of reading, writing, and shaping texts. The basic assumption was that figures or events in history post-Christ had types in the Scripture. As already mentioned, Oddr Snorrason compares Óláfr Tryggvason to John the Baptist who brings the message of the coming Saviour. Oddr then offers St Óláfr as

figuration of Christ in the sense that the king fulfills the promise of Norway's conversion.[5] For learned Icelanders around 1200 biblical typology was familiar, as illustrated by the allegorical section or addition to the Old Norse *Veraldar saga,* 'History of the World' (Jakob Benediktsson 1944, 79-86).

From the church fathers onwards Adam was seen a type of Christ who represented the antitype. Both were conceived without human reproduction and both were appeared first: Adam in the Old Dispensation and Christ in the New Dispensation. This is the essence of classical or 'pure' typology which seeks similarities between the Old and the New Testament. Such correspondences attest to the unity of human history which culminates and is fulfilled in Christ. But this Adamic typology has the 'special feature of offering at one and the same time difference and similarity' (Danielou 1960, 30). For instance: Adam led mankind out of Paradise, whereas Christ leads mankind back to Paradise and salvation. The *Icelandic Homily Book* observes that both were tempted by the Devil but it was Adam who succumbed whereas Christ stood steadfast (Wisén 1872, 32). It is notable that within this paradigm inversion or contrast are only appropriate when the two examples share common characteristics. Thus Eve and the Virgin Mary are both similar and different. Mary latter was free from the sin committed by the former, yet both share a profound similarity in that – like Christ and Adam – the play a crucial role in ushering in the two stages of mankind: the Fall and the New Dispensation which were announced or effected by a dialogue with the serpent (the devil) and Archangel Gabriel respectively.

This inversion is expressed in a concrete, even visual, way in *Maríu saga,* a compilation of stories and miracles about the Virgin Mary from the first half of the thirteenth century: the Archangel Gabriel begins his salutation to Eve (or Eva) with the word 'Ave' which, in turn, contains the letters of Eve in reverse (Unger 1871, 359).[6] So essential is the presence of contrasts within a broader field of similarities or, in other words: '[type] and antitype need a similarity in which what is common and what is different are both represented' (Ohly 2005, 40) and 'from early on, the theory and terminology seems to have embraced key principles such as contrariety, inversion, and negation' (Paxon 1991, 368).

The narrative device of inversion could also underline the difference between two

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[5] Oddr here applies here a sort of 'double-typology'. Christ is the antitype for John the Baptist just as St Óláf serves as the antitype for Óláfr Tryggvason. But the former pair also function as archetypes for latter pair.

[6] This type of inversion goes back to the Church Fathers.

epochs in Nordic history, that is times before and after the coming of Christianity. Thus Anne Holtsmark observed how Snorri Sturluson applied in the *Prose Edda* 'association by contrast' ('assosiasjon ved kontrast') in his description of Óðinn as 'All-father'. Here important elements correspond to the Christian God whereas other ones are diametrically different in nature (Holtsmark 1964, 62-64; Beck 2013). A comparable mode of thinking perceives a correspondence and contrast between Óðinn's hanging sacrifice on the tree/wood in *Hávamál* (stanzas 139-139) and Christ's passion on the Cross (Males 2012, 106-112; Lassen 2009). Óðinn (denoting the devil) is an inversion of Christ, while his sacrifice still shares elements with the passion.

The examples from Gregory's *Dialogues* show saga authors extending this mode of thinking to non-biblical texts, albeit in this case a well known ‘canonical’ one. In each of the three examined instances the inversion draws out different effects: from an eschatological signification in *Njáls saga* to the humorous episode in *Egils saga*. It is arguably with the *Egils saga* example that *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka* has most in common; in both the impact of the inversion centres on the differing personal characteristics and social standing of the protagonists.

Ironic or humorous application of typological inversion is potent narrative device that presupposes a stock of shared cultural knowledge. One non-Norse example will have to suffice. Caesarius of Heisterbach popular *Dialogues on Miracles* (*Dialogus miraculorum*), composed around 1220, includes a story about a Cistercian brother who is shown the glory of Heaven. There he beholds members of other religious orders but non from his own. When he expresses his disappointment the Virgin Mary opens her cloak and reveals a multitude of Cistercians. The brothers of this order, the Virgin exclaims, are so precious that she keeps them constantly close to her. Caesarius' story became widespread in both prose and the visual arts (*Maria Misericordia*). But at the beginning of his Prologue to the *Summoner's Tale* Chaucer inverts the essence of this episode: a friar is escorted by an angel to Hell but there, to his surprise, he finds non of his rule brothers. The devil, however, lifts up his tale and from his anus emerge numerous friars (The Fleming, 1967; Richardson-Hay, 2005, 450-451). We note here, as in some of our previous examples, how the inversion depends on the binary nature of Hell-Heaven/damnation/salvation.

More broadly, such typological usage of the kind highlighted above has long been a topic of interest in the study of French and German Romances. Of particular interest is the appearance in these twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts of 'extra-biblical' typology,

that is when neither points of reference are biblical in origin. Here the link with Providential History has been severed and what is left is a 'secularised' version of the typological method. In other words, we are confronted with a mode that perceives the past thought a typological way of thinking, but which can be applied to underline aspects that may or may not include a religious dimension:

> Clerical exegetes read a divinely ordained pattern out of what otherwise appears to be the disorder of secular history, which is thus revealed as a meaningful salvation history. By contrast, romance authors work a typological pattern into their narrative to convey the meaning of their fiction (Green 2002, 112).

The typological thinking in *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka* is not religious in the sense that it serves a didactic or specific message about Christian doctrine or behaviour. But I suggest, it were precisely the religious origins of *Hungrvaka* and *Jóns saga helga* that prompted and justified the application of these episodes in the first place. With this the author of *Auðunar þáttr vestfirzka* acknowledged the canonical status of these early ecclesiastical works. In the process he elevated a seemingly playful story about one Icelander accruing material, social, and spiritual advancement abroad.

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