



# The Jew Who Wasn't There: Studies on Jews and Their Absence in Old Norse Literature

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*The Jew Who Wasn't There:*  
*Studies on Jews and their Absence in Old Norse Literature*

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures  
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores certain attitudes towards Jews and Judaism in Old Norse literature. Regardless of an apparent lack of actual Jewish settlement in the Nordic region during the Middle Ages, medieval Icelanders and Norwegians frequently turned to the image of 'the Jew' in writing and in art, sometimes using him as an abstract theological model, or elsewhere constructing a similar kind of ethnic Other to the anti-Semitic tropes we find in medieval societies where gentiles really did live alongside Jews. The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the differing histories and functions projected onto the absent Jew in medieval Scandinavia.

## The Jew Who Wasn't There: Studies on Jews and their Absence in Old Norse Literature

Chapter 1: Introductory Problems of History, Nomenclature and Absence	pp. 1-40.
Chapter 2: Learned and Popular Knowledge of Jewish Culture	pp. 41-95.
Chapter 3: Proto-racial thinking and its application to Jews in Old Norse literature.	pp. 96-118.
Chapter 4: Snorri Sturluson and the Jews	pp. 119-36.
Chapter 5: The Importance of Elsewhere: Iceland, <i>Judenreinheit</i> , and Homotopia.	pp. 136-73.
Chapter 6: Brandr Jónsson, a Philo-Semite between Iceland and Norway	pp. 174-231.
Conclusion: On “Thinking with Jews”, or “-Semitisms”	pp. 232-47.
Appendix I: An Analysis of AM 685d 4to, 30v-31r	p. 248.
Appendix II: N 248 & N A362 - Echoes of the <i>Sefer HaBahir</i> ?	pp. 249-55.
Appendix III: Moyses in Bergen, 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 1340.	pp. 256-57.
Bibliography	pp. 258-300.

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Richard Cole  
Newtownards, Ulster. St. Hunegund's Day 2014.

## List of Figures and Tables (excluding Appendices)

**Fig. 1.** Jewish settlements and expulsions during the Middle Ages, from: Dan Cohn-Serbok. *Atlas of Jewish History*. (London: Routledge, 1996)

**Fig. 2.** Carl Gustaf Hellqvist. *Valdemar Atterdag brandskattar Visby*, 1882, oil on canvas, 2 x 3.3m, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

**Fig. 3.** *Ecclesia, Vita, Synagoga, Mors* from the *Gunhildkors*. Illustration adapted from Langberg, 1986.

**Fig. 4.** DR 373.

**Fig. 5.** Spurious Hebrew characters in the *First Grammatical Treatise*.

**Fig. 6.** AM 685d 4to 30v-31r.

**Fig. 7.** Deathbed scene from the *Teiknibók* 17v.

**Fig. 8.** Malchus struck by St. Peter, *Teiknibók* 9r.

**Fig. 9.** Bald, hook-nosed Jew helps apply the crown of thorns. *Teiknibók* 6r.

**Fig. 10.** Jew with effeminate eyelashes from Crucifixion, *Teiknibók* 6v.

**Fig. 11.** Detail from Crucifixion, *Teiknibók* 6v.

**Fig. 12.** Dark-skinned Jew? *Teiknibók* 6v.

**Fig. 13.** "Sechz", "Enos", "Eroas" *Codex Upsaliensis* 25v.

**Fig. 14.** Illustrations on *Codex Upsaliensis* 25r.

**Fig. 15.** "Jew" with tally? *Codex Upsaliensis* 25r.

**Fig. 16.** Female figure on *Codex Upsaliensis* 26r.

**Fig. 17.** Jews from Passion scene (detail), Ål Stave Church. Photograph by: Eirik Irgens Johnsen.

**Fig. 18.** Malchus detail, Ål Stave Church.

**Fig. 19.** Detail from Last Supper, Ål Stave Church.

**Fig. 20.** Blind Synagoga with St. Paul. From Kinnsarvik Church, Norway. c. 1200.

**Fig. 21.** "ríða þaðan Muspells synir"? Actually a depiction of the Red Jews from: *Der Antichrist* 14v (1480).

**Fig. 22.** Some metonymic strata in *Sverris saga*.

**Fig. 23.** Territories of the Icelandic clans in the first half of the thirteenth century. From: Gunnar Karlsson. "Frá Þjóðveldi til Konungsríkis" in *Saga Íslands*. vol. 2. ed. by Sigurður Línal (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélagið & Sögufélagið, 1975).

**Fig. 24.** A Victorian-era table schematising the various races of mankind according to skull size and therefore assumed intelligence.

**Fig. 25.** *Judensau* from Uppsala Cathedral, c. 1350. Photograph by: Stephen Mitchell.

**Table 1.** The Sons of Muspell compared to the Red Jews.

**Table 2.** Geographical Settings in which Jews appear in the Old Norse corpus.

## A Note on Sources and Translations

Translations from Latin, Hebrew, Yiddish, and the medieval and modern Scandinavian languages are my own unless stated otherwise. I have generally retained the orthography of cited editions, other than two cases where, at the time of writing, the available editions were close enough to being fully diplomatic that it was presumed to be easier for the reader if I standardised the spelling along the lines of *Íslenskt Fornrit* or Michael Barnes in *A New Introduction to Old Norse*. These two cases were Dybwad's *Messuskýringar* and Mundt's *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. When referring to Old Norse, I have always provided my own translations. When I was discussing particularly well-known Latin texts, e.g. St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos*, I saw little point in 'reinventing the wheel' and so reproduced the most commonly used translated version. For less widely studied works, such as the thirteenth century Norwegian *De Spinea Corona*, I have provided my own translations.

The focus of this thesis is on Old Norse, really meaning Old West Norse (i.e. Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian), and what I call the 'Old Norse-speaking world', in this context meaning medieval Iceland and Norway. The cut-off point after which I considered works no longer to represent medieval tradition was 1499, a date as arbitrary as most other periodisations. I have therefore not included any texts from the sixteenth century or later, unless in a couple of rare instances where I felt that I had good reason to suppose they contained earlier, medieval content. Similarly, I have mostly not referred to the rich tradition of East Norse material concerning Jews, so ably studied by Jonathan Adams. Where I have discussed artefacts from Denmark and Sweden (e.g. the *Judensau* from Uppsala Cathedral) it is intended to be comparative in the same manner as material presented from elsewhere in Europe, not as being the product of West Norse culture.

## Chapter 1: Introductory Problems of History, Nomenclature and Absence

The constructors froze, forgetting their quarrel, for the machine was in actual fact doing Nothing, and it did it in this fashion: one by one, various things were removed from the world, and the things, thus removed, ceased to exist, as if they had never been. The machine had already disposed of nolars, nightzebs, noacs, neacs, nallyrakers, neotremes and nonmalrigers. At moments, though, it seemed that instead of reducing, diminishing and subtracting, the machine was increasing, enhancing and adding, since it liquidated, in turn: nonconformists, nonentities, nonsense, nonsupport, nearsightedness, narrowmindedness, naughtiness, neglect, nausea, necrophilia and nepotism. But after a while the world very definitely began to thin out around Trurl and Klapaucius.

- Stanisław Lem. *The Cyberiad*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historical contacts**

From the time of the Romans until the end of the Middle Ages, Jewish communities were established in almost every corner of Europe. As the centuries wore on some flourished, while others suffered violence and expulsion. Jewish populations with vibrant intellectual and cultural traditions, and broad international horizons, established themselves in England, Germany, and the Baltic.<sup>2</sup> The Scandinavian peninsula was neighbored by Jewish communities to the East, West, and South. The North might have provided refuge for Jews in times of persecution, and its rulers could have benefited in turn from their linguistic and technical skills<sup>3</sup> as the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden sought to transform themselves into mainstream European polities. But this is not what happened: there is no concrete evidence of Jewish settlement anywhere in the North prior to the year 1592, when one Jochim Jøde obtained citizenship of the Danish town of Helsingør. From Iceland in the West to Sweden-Finland in the East, the religious and cultural history of Scandinavia is marked by nearly six centuries of Jewish absence.

This is not to say that Jews did not occasionally head North during the Middle Ages. It has been suggested that prior to Jochim, Jews might well have come to Denmark under assumed identities,

1 Stanisław Lem. *The Cyberiad*. trans. by Adele Milch (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) pp. 5-6.

2 The sources for dating medieval Jewish settlement in the Baltic are patchy. Jews had been admitted to Poland since a decree by Bolesław the Pious in 1264. Lithuania seems to have had a number of urban Jewish communities by the late fourteenth century. Sources indicate Jewish visitors to Estonia during this period, but no settlement until after the Middle Ages. There is no evidence for Jewish presence in either Finland or Latvia at this time. See: Karen Auerbach. "Poland" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture*. ed. by Judith R. Baskin. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 488. Eiki Berg. "The peculiarities of Jewish settlement in Estonia", *GeoJournal*, 33, 4 (1994) p. 488. Simon M. Dubnow. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*. (Bergenfield: Avotynu, 2000 [1918]) pp. 24-25.

3 For concise overviews of these competencies, see: Robert Chazan. *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000-1500*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 117-118, 216-219.

perhaps as merchants,<sup>4</sup> although there is no real evidence of this. A Viking Age runestone from Lövstalund in Sweden (Sö 296) commemorates one Ernfast *son Gyðings*<sup>5</sup> – literally meaning “Ernfast Jew's son”. However, this would be an exceptionally early date to encounter Jewish settlement in Northern Europe; Sweden could not even be regarded as a Christian polity in this period. Thus it seems prudent to agree with the suggestion that this is a rare variation on the personal name Gøðingr, rather than a case of a Jewish father in a Swedish household.<sup>6</sup> Turning to more concrete sources, we might note that one of the earliest historical travelogues to describe Scandinavia was probably written by a Jew. Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb, whose account of the town of Hedeby from 965 famously describes the singing of the Danes “like the baying of hounds, only worse”<sup>7</sup> is largely considered to be more properly named Abraham ben Jacob, a Sephardic Jew from Tortosa.<sup>8</sup> While such visitors, concrete or conjectured, are important for qualifying any notion of “Jewish absence” in medieval Scandinavia, they do not seem to have left any imprint on the popular discourses on Jews and Judaism we discover in the central Middle Ages.

### Encounters between Jews and Scandinavians Abroad: In The West

A perceived capacity for trade and travel is a trait shared by the medieval Jew and Scandinavian alike. Thus, if meetings between the two parties were rather rare in the North itself, we can assume they were relatively likelier elsewhere. Gertraud Rothlauf notes that Scandinavians serving in the Varangian guard would most likely have encountered Jews in Constantinople,<sup>9</sup> despite a lack of any explicit documentary evidence thereof (there are no Jewish characters in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* or any other source recounting the exploits of the *væringjar*, for example). Jonathan Adams points out that *jøder havde ... levet i Normandiet siden romertiden, og der er ingen grund til at tro, at de forsvandt derfra under de danske vikinger eller normanniske bertuger...*<sup>10</sup> – “Jews had ... lived in Normandy since the Roman period, and there is no reason to believe that they disappeared under the rule of the Danish vikings or Norman dukes”. On this theme, the *Annales Bertiniani*, for the year 848 reports that: *Dani Burdegalam Aquitaniae, Indaeis prodentibus, captam depopulatamque incedunt*<sup>11</sup> - “The Jews betrayed Bordeaux in Aquitaine to the Danes,

4 Karsten Christensen. “Jochim Jøde i Helsingør i 1592”, *Dansk Jødisk Historie*, 24 (1987) pp. 11-16. Per Katz. “De første jøder i Danmark” in *Judisk liv i Norden*. ed. by Gunnar Broberg *et al.* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1988) p. 96.

5 Accessed via Rundata 2.5. Available online at: <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>

6 Lena Peterson. *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon*. (Uppsala: Institutet för språk och folkminnen, 2002) p. 80, 86. Available online at: [www.sofi.se/1765](http://www.sofi.se/1765)

7 Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb. “Ibrāhīm ibn Ya‘qūb on northern Europe 965” in *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness. Arab Travellers in the Far North*. trans. by Paul Lunde & Caroline Stone (London: Penguin Books, 2012) p. 163.

8 Eliyahu Ashtor. *The Jews of Moslem Spain*. vol. 1. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973) p. 344. For the minority position that al-Tartushi was not Jewish, see: Peter Engels. “Der Reisebericht des Ibrahim ibn Yaqub (961-966)” in *Kaiserin Theophanu. Begegnung des Ostens und Westens in die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends*. ed. by Anton von Euw & Peter Schreiner. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1991) p. 416.

9 Gertraud Rothlauf. “Vom Schtetl zum Polarkreis. Juden und Judentum in der norwegischen Litteratur” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universität Wien, 2009) p. 50.

10 Jonathan Adams. “Grumme løver og menstruerende mænd.”, *Rambam*, 21 (2012) p. 79

11 *Annales Bertiniani*. Ed. by G. Waitz (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1883) p. 36.

they captured [the town], massacred the people and burnt it down”. Such a convenient alignment of two non-Christian enemies, Jew and heathen, and the echoes of the common trope that the Jews had invited the Moors into Spain, make this a very dubious record. Indeed, while it might be beneficial to work with an invading group bent on conquest, encouraging a band of marauders into the city would be just as suicidal for its Jews as its Christians. Hrólfr Jarl eventually took control of Normandy in 911, but we find no sources describing the relationship between the Norman Jews and their rulers until the reign of Duke Richard II, where one Jacob ben Yekutiel resisted the Duke's attempts at forced conversion.<sup>12</sup> By this stage in the early eleventh century, of course, it is doubtful how Scandinavian the Normans really were. Dudo of St. Quentin, who tends to emphasize the “Dacian” heritage of his people, admits that Richard's father was probably the last Norse-speaking duke, and even then he had learnt the language in Bayeux rather than from his family.<sup>13</sup>

A similar documented case where people arguably better described as “Scandinavian Diaspora” rather than Scandinavians proper encountered Jews comes from York. The city had been ruled by a succession of Norwegian kings during the tenth century, and the influence of Norse-speakers can be seen in its toponymy to this day. Like many urban centres in England, the city was racked with violence against its Jewish population from the coronation of Richard the Lionheart in 1189 until his departure for the crusades in 1190. The lists of those convicted of crimes during the massacre that occurred there in March of that year is peppered with Scandinavian names<sup>14</sup> (e.g. Wulfisi = Ulfr, Turkill = Þorkell, Turstin Galien = Þorsteinn Galinn?) but the attestation of these names as elements within clearly Anglo-Norman patronymics shows that the perpetrators had not been born in Scandinavia. The extent to which such people retained a connection to Norse speakers elsewhere is dubious. That said, other locations in England would seem to be likely candidates for Scandinavian-Jewish contact. The Icelandic *Orkneyinga saga* (c. 1230) relates how in c. 1115 Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, then of Agder in Norway and later Earl of Orkney, travelled to Grimsby, and that *[þ]ar kom mikit fjölmenni, bæði af Orkneyjum ok <af Nóregi ok> Skotland ok svá ór Suðreyjum*<sup>15</sup> - “a great deal multitude went there, both from Orkney and from Norway and Scotland and also from the Southern Isles”. The first evidence of a Jewish population in Grimsby dates from c. 1182, but if Rognvaldr or twelfth-century traders like him did not encounter Jews there, later Norwegians almost certainly would have done, as sources indicate

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12 Norman Golb. *The Jews in Medieval Normandy. A Social and Intellectual History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 3-4. See also: Chazan, 2010. pp. 122-123.

13 Dudo of St. Quentin. *History of the Normans*. trans. by Eric Christiansen. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998) pp. 97-98.

14 Sarah Rees Jones. “Neighbours and Victims in Twelfth-Century York: A Royal Citadel, the Citizens, and the Jews of York” in *Christians and Jews in Medieval England: Christians and Jews in Medieval England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts*. ed. by Sarah Rees Jones & Sethina Watson. (York: York Medieval Press, 2013) pp. 15-42.

15 *Orkneyinga saga*. ed. by Finnogi Guðmundsson. Íslensk Fornrit, vol. 34. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1965) p. 130, with MS variants.

further Jewish activity in the town during the thirteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Close by, Lincoln boasted one of England's most vibrant and prosperous Jewries,<sup>17</sup> first recorded in 1159, although if Aaron of Lincoln (c. 1125 – 1186) were born in the town rather than just based there then the settlement might well be older. St. Þorlákr (1133-1193) studied in Lincoln during the 1150s, as did Bishop Páll Jónsson (1155 – 1211) in his youth.<sup>18</sup> Presumably the presence of the Jewry would not have escaped the notice of these visiting Icelandic students or any like them. So too must there have been contacts in the south of the country, particularly in East Anglia. King's Lynn, for instance, would seem to be a place where Scandinavians and Jews would have worked alongside each other. Norwegians had begun visiting Lynn in the 1150s and continued to do so throughout the thirteenth century, while customs records demonstrate extensive Norwegian traffic well into the fourteenth century.<sup>19</sup> These merchants and seamen could hardly have been insulated from the bloodshed that may have extinguished the community there altogether.<sup>20</sup> As Joe Hillaby notes:

The first attack on a provincial community was at [King's] Lynn in January 1190. Here Jews from Rising had settled close to the new, Tuesday, Market. Lynn is of particular interest as a range of evidence explains why, even without castle and mint, it attracted Jewish settlement. Its port, now doubled in size, was booming, offering opportunities which could not be resisted. Here Norwegians and Flemings came to buy corn brought down from Cambridge and Huntingdon by water to the new market place.<sup>21</sup>

The Norse Diaspora must have been witnesses to - and as seen in the case of York, sometimes participants in - the aforementioned nationwide pogroms of the late twelfth century. The Icelandic *Annales Reseniani* (1310 – 1319) and the *Annales regii* (1300 – 1328) note that for the year 1188: *Drepnir allir gyfingar i Englandi*.<sup>22</sup> – “All the Jews in England have been killed”. For Norwegians and Icelanders, being visiting traders, students or other outsiders, this is very much how these dramatic events must have seemed. The process of transmission behind the annal entry can only be conjectured, but is potentially demonstrative of Scandinavians and Jews sharing an urban space. Naturally, there is little

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16 On Jewish settlement in Grimsby, see: Daphne & Leon Gerlis. *The Story of the Grimsby Jewish Community*. (Hull: Humberside Leisure Services, 1986) pp. 1-3. On continuing Norwegian trade, see: *Den Norske sjofarts historie fra de aldste tider til vore dage*. vol. 1. ed. by Alexander Bugge et al. (Kristiania: Steen, 1923) p. 183.

17 For a scholarly and often moving survey, see: Cecil Roth. *Mediaeval Lincoln Jewry and its Synagogue*. (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1934) p. 16.

18 Magnús Fjalldal. *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval texts*. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2005) p. 83.

19 Mikjel Sørlic. “Norske språkminner i engelske tollregnskaper fra 1300-årene.”, *Universitet i Bergen Årbok* (1948) pp. 3-39.

20 Vivian Lipman opines that the settlement was probably never re-established, although there is an isolated reference to the “Jews of Norwich, Subyri and Lenn” from the thirteenth century. See: Vivian D. Lipman. *The Jews of Medieval Norwich*. (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1967) pp. 9-10, 20.

21 Joe Hillaby. “Jewish Colonisation in the Twelfth Century” in *Jews in Medieval Britain. Historical, Literary and Archaeological Perspectives*. ed. by Patricia Skinner. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003) p. 30.

22 Gustav Storm. *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*. (Christiania: Grøndahl & Søns Bogtrykkeri, 1888) p. 22, 119.

reason to suppose that twelfth century *Jorvíkingar* should have had a direct channel of communication with Icelandic annalists. But it is possible that letters may once have existed from Norwegian (or less probably, Icelandic) traders to their associates back home, detailing the destruction they had seen. Epistolaries do appear to have been used as sources by the annalists, so an Icelander citing such a hypothetical letter is a plausible explanation for this entry.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, of course, while there is much convincing circumstantial evidence for Scandinavian experience of Jews in England, it should be highlighted that there are still no documented cases of specific interactions.

### **Encounters between Jews and Scandinavians Abroad: In The East**

It is the early medieval Arabic sources which provide the most concrete evidence of Scandinavian-Jewish contact. The khagnate of Khazaria was a multi-ethnic state which at various times during the early Middle Ages extended across Southern Russia and the Caucasus. There is considerable evidence that the ruling elite converted from their traditional beliefs to Judaism, although scholars have disagreed over to what extent the Jewish faith was adopted by the rest of society.<sup>24</sup> The Arab historian Mas'ūdī, writing in 943, notes that “The king, his court and all those of the Khazar race practise Judaism ... The Rūs and the Saqāliba, who are pagans ... served as mercenaries and slaves of the king”.<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere in studies of Arabic sources, the *Rūs* are generally identified with the “Volga Vikings” who travelled to the east during the tenth to the eleventh centuries, while *Saqāliba* can refer to any northern European people (the term did once refer strictly to Slavic-speaking peoples, but it is unclear when this distinction was lost)<sup>26</sup> so the fact that Mas'ūdī makes this distinction strongly suggests he was quite sure of the identity of the people he was describing, rather than haphazardly naming whatever European barbarians came to his mind.<sup>27</sup> That these Scandinavians were not yet Christians is made clear by Mas'ūdī's statement that in multicultural Khazaria they are specially permitted to stand trial under “pagan law, which is the product of natural reason”. We might note as an aside that this is an unusual inversion of the “Jew in European service” model we find elsewhere in medieval history.

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23 Eldbjørg Haug. “The Icelandic Annals as Historical Sources”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 22, 4 (1997) p. 271. Stephen Mitchell has also suggested to me the possibility of an oral source. This can in no way be discounted. Some entries in annals surely did have an oral, folkloric heritage, e.g. *Gottskálks Annaler* (16<sup>th</sup> century but with medieval sources) for the year 1382 records a cockatrice somewhere in Iceland: *hane varp egg og var brent bæði eggit og banin. en er [eggit] sprack i elldimm syndis þeim orms líki aa vnganum j eggim.* - “A hen laid an egg and both the egg and the hen were burnt, but when [the egg] exploded in the fire the body of a serpent appeared in the offspring in the egg”. (*Íslandske Annaler.* p. 365). It is this sort of vignette for which oral transmission feels more likely than diplomatic notification. Conversely, a report on foreign affairs seems marginally more at home in the realm of written correspondence, though no sure conclusions can be drawn.

24 For a thorough study of the relevant sources, see: Peter B. Golden. “The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism” in *The World of the Khazars.* ed. by Peter B. Golden *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 123-162.

25 Mas'ūdī. “Mas'ūdī on the Khazars.” in Lunde & Stone, 2012. pp. 132-133.

26 Cristina De La Puente. “Slaves and Slave Trade, Western Islamic World” in *Medieval Islamic Civilization. An Encyclopedia.* vol. 2. ed. by Josef W. Meri (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 760.

27 However, for a study in the anti-Normannist tradition which sees the Rus' as strictly Slavic, see: Vladimir Ja. Petrukhin. “Khazaria and Rus': An Examination of their Historical Relations” in *The World of the Khazars.* pp. 245-265

Ibn Khurradādhbih, in a report dated to around c. 830, seems to provide further evidence of fairly frequent contact between Scandinavians and Jews in the east. He notes that Radhanite Jews (*Rādhāniya*) and northerners (*Rūs*) were trading simultaneously in Baghdad. His account also contains further references to Scandinavians coming into contact with Jewish Khazars. As we have seen before, the *Rūs* are described as not yet having converted to Christianity. Although here, while a distinction between the *Rūs* and the *Saqāliba* is maintained, it is not with the same degree of clarity provided by Mas‘ūdī:

The Rūs, one of the Saqāliba people, journey from the farthest reaches of the land of the Slavs [Saq̄lab] to the eastern Mediterranean and there sell beaver and black fox pelts, as well as swords ... On their return they go by sea to Samkarsh, the city of the Jews, and from there make their way back to Slavic territory. They also follow another route, descending the River Tanais (Don), the river of the Saqāliba, and passing by Khamlij, the capital of the Khazars, where the ruler of the country levies a ten per cent duty ... Sometimes they transport their merchandise on camel back from the city of Jurjān to Baghdād. There, Slavic-speaking eunuchs interpret for them. They pretend to be Christians and, like them, pay the poll tax.<sup>28</sup>

Some non-textual evidence has been proposed in support of the Arabic sources detailing interactions between Scandinavians and Khazars.<sup>29</sup> Holger Arbman, the lead archaeologist during excavations at Birka, Sweden, during the 1940s commented on the large number of Khazarian artefacts, including grave goods.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the Birka finds, a number of Khazarian coins bearing the inscription “Moses is the messenger of God” have been discovered in hoards around the Baltic from Gotland, Finland, and Estonia. On the basis of genetic studies, it has even been hypothesised that the allele CCR5-Delta32 originated as a mutation amongst the Khazars, which was subsequently passed on via contact with Scandinavian traders to rest of Europe (this allele is still most common amongst Ashkenazi Jews, Icelanders, Swedes and Mordvins).<sup>31</sup> While such scientific evidence is appealing, and to some extent stands to reason, we should naturally be wary of putting too much faith in a method which is nonetheless an infant science – and one that is in reality just as prone to nationalist interests as other historical endeavours.

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28 Ibn Khurradādhbih. “Ibn Khurradādhbih on the routes of the Rhādhāniya and the Rūs.” in Lunde & Stone, 2012. p. 112.

29 For an accessible study, from which the following examples are taken, see: Kevin Alan Brook. *The Jews of Khazaria*. 2nd. edn. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006) p. 34, pp. 75-80, 225-226.

30 Holger Arbman. “Einige orientalische Gegenstände in den Birka-Funden.”, *Acta Archaeologica* 13 (1942)

31 Marc M. Buhler, Marc M. & Anne Proos *et al.* “Could Admixture of the CCR5-Delta32 Allele into Ashkenazi Jews and Vikings Be Explained by an Origin in the Kingdom of the Khazars?”, paper presented at the XIX International Congress of Genetics (Melbourne, Australia, July 2003)

Just as in the case of potential encounters with Jews inside Scandinavia, there is absolutely nothing to suggest that any of these experiences (or any like them) consciously affected later reactions on the part of medieval Scandinavians to the Jews or their religion.

### **Jews in Medieval Scandinavia? Prospects and Problems.**

Turning from possible Scandinavian encounters with Jews outside of Scandinavia to the proposition of encounters “at home”, we will consider further the prospect of a nativised Jewry in the Nordic Middle Ages. As previously alluded to, the entirety of English Jewry was expelled in 1290, many fleeing from the Jewish hub of East Anglia, which was also the geographic point in England most proximal to Denmark.<sup>32</sup> In the middle of the thirteenth century German Jewry suffered numerous pogroms and expulsions; to quote Robert Chazan, “Nowhere in Europe ... was Jewish suffering as intense as it was in Germany”.<sup>33</sup> Yet neither of these developments seem to have prompted migration into Scandinavia (see **fig. 1.** on Jewish settlements and expulsions). Documentary evidence both in West and East Norse covers a fairly comprehensive range of social and political matters. Moreover, medieval Scandinavians appear to have had a special interest in non-Christian activity within their various polities; unsurprisingly, given the comparatively late date at which they converted to Christianity themselves. Icelandic saga writers returned again and again to the motif of the recalcitrant pagan magician, while Old Swedish sources furnish the historian with a number of legal cases linked directly to memories of the old heathen gods.<sup>34</sup> If a Jewish community in the North had ever come to the attention of a literate person, it would stand to reason that they would most likely have provided comment. It ought also to be noted that the establishment of a Jewry in a medieval Christian polity was a relatively complex political undertaking. According to the Anglo-Norman model, royal protection had to be afforded to the incoming migrants. Lodgings were to be acquired, as well as space for communal institutions such as synagogues or schools. Soon officials would be required who could interface effectively between the predominantly Hebrew-literate mode of Jewish bureaucracy and the Latin/vernacular-literate mode of the gentiles. There was also the possibility of intercommunal violence, where the resultant damage to the social fabric would have been the responsibility of governmental (and often ecclesiastical) power mechanisms. Put shortly, establishing and servicing a Jewish community would have generated no little degree of paperwork, and we have no evidence thereof for any of the Nordic countries, much less for Norway and Iceland in particular.

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32 For a study of the East Anglian Jewish community, see: Lipman 1967. *passim*.

33 Chazan 2010. p. 194.

34 Stephen A. Mitchell. “Odin, Magic and a Swedish Trial from 1484”, *Scandinavian Studies* 81, 3 (2009) pp. 263-86. See by the same author: *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) pp. 76-108.

## References to Scandinavian Locations in Jewish Sources

Indeed, so far as I have found, there is nothing in Hebrew or Yiddish sources from the Middle Ages to suggest a Jewish presence in the North either.<sup>35</sup> The appearances of Scandinavia and its peoples in the writings of pre-modern Jews generally have the ring of the fantastic and far-away. As David Simonsen observed, Denmark is referred to in the *Yosippon*, a Hebrew chronicle traditionally and unreliably attributed to Joseph ben Gorion or “Pseudo-Josephus”.<sup>36</sup> It was probably compiled in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in Italy, and was widely consulted by Jews both in Europe and the Arabic-speaking world.<sup>37</sup> There, we find the following pronouncement:

דודני הם עם דנישכי חיושבי תוך ערי לשונות ים אוקיאנוס באר דינאמכבא ובארדנא בתוך ים הגדול אשי  
נשבעו לבלתי יעבדו לרומניי ויתחבאו בתוך גלי ים אוקיאנוס ולא יבלו כי הניע שם ממשלת רומי עד אחרית  
איי הים<sup>38</sup>

The Dodanim are the *Daniskēi* who live in cities in the middle of the tongues of the sea in the country of *Din’amakva’* and in *’Ardanī’a* in the ocean. They swore never to serve the Romans, and rather would hide amongst the ocean waves than [do so], but they could not [resist], because the power of Rome reached to [all] the isles of the seas.

Given the widespread respect in which the *Yosippon* was held by medieval Jews, it is fair to suppose that this brief reference to the *Daniskēi* would have been the most that many knew about Scandinavia.<sup>39</sup> The author's pronouncement is not wholly inaccurate nor discordant with other medieval opinions. The Dodanim stem from Genesis 10:4-5: “And the sons of Javan; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations”. As shall be seen, some Scandinavians traced themselves back to Javan too (as did other European peoples). The author also correctly recalls that Scandinavia was never subject to Rome. Writing in Italy, Roman tradition would presumably have been fairly accessible to him. So too is his geography quite reasonable. The image of Denmark being “in the middle of the tongues of the sea” seems to depict the Danish peninsula, braced by the Baltic on one side and the North Sea on the other. The notion that the *Daniskēi* populate more than one country, *Din’amakva’* and *’Ardanī’a*, is reminiscent of the medieval tendency to refer to all Scandinavians as “Danes”, while still recognising

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35 An ongoing research project by Anders Andrén may well overturn this situation, although at the time of writing none of his findings are in print.

36 David Simonsen. “Denmark” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. vol. 4. ed. by Isidore Singer. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1916) p. 522.

37 David Flusser. “Josippon” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*. vol. 11. ed. by Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2007) pp. 461-462.

38 *Josephus Gorionides, sive Josephus Hebraicus*. ed. by Johann Friedrich Breithaupt (Leipzig: Jacobus Mevius, 1707) p. 8.

39 Flusser 2007.

that there were geopolitical differences between them. However, for all its merits, the *Yosippon's* description is clearly beholden to wider European general knowledge. It does not betray any hint of actual Jewish experience in Denmark or to the north beyond.

There is a solitary reference to *Denemarkten* – “Denmark” in the oldest known Yiddish narrative of any substance, *Dukus Horant* (1300s). There, King Etene promises the eponymous duke: “*du bist zu Denemarkten ein herzoge genant, / dene scholdestu tragen di krone uber ale Denemarcker lant. / bringestu mir das schone megetin, / Denemarkten mus din eigen sin.*”<sup>40</sup> – “You are in Denmark a duke renowned / of all Denmark you should wear the crown / That fair maiden you should bring to me / and Denmark I will give to thee”. However, based as the text is on *Kudrun* and other Romances,<sup>41</sup> it would appear that Denmark here is simply standing as a far away exotic place rather than having any tangible 'real-world' resonances. The poem demonstrates no understanding of or interest in the realities of Denmark, and so this attestation re-enforces rather than undermines our premise regarding the remoteness between Scandinavians and Jews in the Middle Ages. The same is true of the only other reference to Scandinavia I have been able to find in medieval Jewish letters. In the Hebrew Arthurian romance *Melek Artus* (1279) a tournament is said in passing to be attended by the מלך שקוציה מלך ארלנדי מלך גליש מלך נורגוליש<sup>42</sup> *Melek Sgošiah melek 'Erlandi melek Golis melek Norgolis* - “[the] King of Scotland, King of Ireland, King of Gaul, King of Norway”. The Hebrew word for Norway here appears to be from the archaic Italian *Norgoles*, probably derived directly from the Hebrew translator's now lost Italian translation.<sup>43</sup> Norway has no connotations here beyond those of a far-away, fantastical namedrop.

There is also one *starrum* (from Hebrew שטר *štar*, a legally binding transaction issued by medieval Jews) which ought be mentioned. Aaron of Lincoln (c. 1125 – 1186), whom we shall briefly discuss later, announced in 1176 that:

Sciunt omnes legentes et audientes litteras has quod ego Aaron judeus de Lincollnia attestacione hujus mee carte quietum clamavia Willlmum Fossard de toto debito quod ipse vel pater ejus mihi debuerunt et testificor quod ipse est quietus de debito quod debuit vel mihi vel Josceo de Eboraco vel ceteris judeis subscriptis, scilicet Kersun, Elye, Samsoni, Ysaac judeo Pulcelle vel ipsi Pulcelle vel Deulecresse de Danemarche, usque ad festum Sancti Michaelis Arch[angeli] anno] incarnationis

40 *Dukus Horant*. ed. by P.F. Ganz, F. Norman & W. Schwarz. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1964) p. 141.

41 For a study of the sources of the *Dukus Horant*, see: Gabriele L. Strauch. *Dukus Horant. Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) pp. 9-27.

42 *King Artus: A Hebrew Arthurian Romance of 1279*. ed. by Curt Leviant (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003) p. 42.

43 I am grateful to Giorgio Lizzul for assuring me of the obscurity of this toponym. He found only one reference in the Italian corpus, a solitary reference to the *reame di Norgoles* by: Pier Franc. Giambullari. *Storia dell' Europa dal DCCC al DCCCCXIII*. Vol. 1. (Venice: Co' Tipi Del Gondoliere, 1840) p. 170.

May all who read or hear these letters know that I, Aaron the Jew of Lincoln, by this charter of mine have cried quits to William Fossard of all the debts which he and his father owe to me, and I testify that those debts are also acquitted who he owes to me or to Josceo of York or any of the remaining Jews listed, that is to say: Kersun, Elye, Samson, Isaac the Jew [who is married to?] Pulcella or indeed Pulcella herself, as well as Deulecresse of Denmark [de Danemarche] up to the feast of St. Michael the Archangel in the Year of Our Lord 1176.

Was Deulecresse a native of Denmark, as Aaron's quit-claim suggests? In his compendium of Angevin sources concerning Anglo-Jewry, Joseph Jacobs marked the epithet as an error.<sup>45</sup> Albert Montefiore Hyamson read *Danemarche* as a substitution for Ardennes.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, he was sufficiently confident in this interpretation that he did not express any of his reasoning theretowards. Perhaps it was predicated upon the shared *Den-* element in the two toponyms? The theory does not seem entirely convincing. Simonsen suggested that “the designation 'Danemarcia' can hardly refer to Denmark proper, but rather to a territory in Normandy subject to the Danes.”<sup>47</sup> Again, this explanation is not unproblematic. By the late twelfth-century, any vestige of a particularly 'Danish' as opposed to 'Norman' identity in Normandy must have long since vanished. Nonetheless, the aforementioned difficulties in establishing a Jewry, and the near-certainty that such a foundation would leave some historical record, make it hard to believe that Deulecresse really had been part of a supposed Jewish-Danish community. Any interpretation of Deulecresse's name can be categorised as belonging to four types of solution: 1) that the epithet is indeed a scribal error, 2) that *Danemarche* denotes somewhere other than Denmark, 3) that *Danemarche* does refer to Denmark, but that Deulecresse was not native there, and 4) that a medieval Danish Jewry did exist, but left no records other than this one attestation of Deulecresse's sobriquet.

Solution 1 is not at all unlikely: the original *starrum*, which may well have had a Hebrew version attached, does not survive. Instead, Aaron's declaration is quoted verbatim in a copy from 1197 (hence its Pipe Roll designation at 9 Ric I).<sup>48</sup> No Deulecresse of Denmark is mentioned in any other source, and I have not been able to find any Deulecresses without epithets with whom he might plausibly be identified. Solution 2 cannot be ruled out. Place names such as Dane Hill or Dane's Hill are not uncommon in England, including one near Carlby, about 24 miles from Lincoln. However, in general

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44 *Early Yorkshire Charters*. vol. 2. ed. by William Farrer (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson & Co., 1915) p. 391. My translation.

45 Joseph Jacobs. *The Jews of Angevin England*. (London: David Nutt, 1893) p. 58.

46 Albert Montefiore Hyamson. *A History of the Jews in England*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1928) p. 113.

47 Simonsen 1916. p. 522.

48 Farrer. Notes to *Early Yorkshire Charters*. vol. 2. p. 391.

this line of explanation seems flawed: why say Denmark when one means somewhere else? Neither Simonsen nor Hyamson could account for this. It is true that Jewish toponym-based names are not always what they seem to be. As Benzion Kaganoff pointed out, Jews sometimes adopted the surname “Mosbach” not because they had any association with the German town, but because it alliterated pleasingly with “Moses”.<sup>49</sup> Did Deulecresse feel the same about *Danemarche*? To raise another variant of this kind of solution, it is known that medieval English Jews occasionally gave each other somewhat jocular nicknames, e.g. Manasser Grassus (active 1190s) - “Manasser the Fat”, Mosse cum Naso (d. c. 1230) - “Mosse the Nosy”.<sup>50</sup> Was the title “de Danemarche” an in-joke, whose context we have now lost? Perhaps it was a reference to a perceived Viking-esque lack of manners, or a Danish-influenced dialect coming from York etc? Much supposition is required in order to entertain this sort of answer.

Solution 3 is quite plausible. An exceptional merchant who dared to cross the North Sea to a country without any infrastructure in place to cater to Jews might well thereby “make his name”. If it is to be accepted that this is not a scribal error or ironic moniker, and that Deleucresse really did have a relationship with Denmark, it is more sensible to assume that he was an occasional visitor rather than a native. At least in Lincoln – unlike Denmark - we know of a sizeable Jewry in which we can assume he was born and raised. Being able to put a name and a certain milieu to one of the rare Jewish visitors to the medieval North is an exciting prospect, albeit one that remains rather precariously based. The fourth and final potential solution must remain unconvincing, pending any further scholarly progress.

### **A Missed Opportunity?**

Given the previously stated advantages of establishing outposts in the North, why was it that Scandinavia apparently remained the only corner of Europe to be completely untouched by Jewish settlement in the Middle Ages? Harry Meier Koritzinsky argued that the law codes attributed to St. Óláfr (995 – 1030) and King Magnús Lagabœtir (1238 – 1280) which demanded that the Norwegian population be entirely Christian was the main barrier to migrating Jews.<sup>51</sup> This suggestion was countered by Bjarne Berulfsen, who maintained that *disse lovgivere har sikkert bare hatt den gamle norske bedendom i tankene, så det ville være en anakronisme om en trekker jødene inn i dette bildet*<sup>52</sup> – “these legislators surely had only the erstwhile Norwegian paganism in mind, so it would be an anachronism if one were to drag Jews into the picture”. Certainly, as seen in the case of post-expulsion England, even a firm

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49 Benzion C. Kaganoff. *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) pp. 29-30.

50 Jacobs 1893. pp. 370-371. On the death of Mosse cum Naso, see: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. “Acts of Separation: Shaping Communal Bodies” in *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*. ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. (New York: Palgrave, 2006) pp. 13-16.

51 Harry Meier Koritzinsky. *Jødernes historie i Norge. Henrik Wergelands kamp for jødesaken*. (Kirchhain: M. Schmiersow, 1922) p. 9.

52 Bjarne Berulfsen. “Antisemittisme som litterær importvare.”, *Edda*, 58 (1958) p. 125.



Jewish entrepreneur was ever tempted to do the same, although as both Haki Antonsson and Jonathan Adams have pointed out to me, the *kašrut* acceptability of many of Insular Scandinavia's riches is dubious. Turning from business opportunities to questions of personal security, it is worth noting that the Scandinavians were certainly a religiously observant population, but it has been opined that these were peoples with a tradition of rulership based on a strong, secular powerbase rather than religious fervour.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps an educated East Anglian or North German Jew would have seen the Scandinavians as rather backwards, but also unlikely to be whipped up into a bloodthirsty frenzy by overzealous elements in the clergy.<sup>57</sup> A hypothetical Jewish migrant might therefore reasonably have expected lucrative trade prospects, not to mention the possibility of financing the developing machinery of the state, and at least on a superficial examination expected to enjoy an attractive degree of personal safety.

Quite sensibly, though, the perceived security of living amongst ones own on the continent seems to have been a more alluring option than pursuing new, unknown enterprises in the North. In the traumatic wake of an expulsion such a desire for stability is hardly surprising. English Jewry seems largely to have opted to join the already established Jewish communities in France.<sup>58</sup> In England, the status of Jews as property of the state, or at least as having no legal identity beyond their service to the crown, meant that a relationship with the Jews independent of a relationship with the English crown would have been impossible.<sup>59</sup> Sweden had hardly any connection to England, while by the thirteenth century the relationship between England on one side and Denmark and Norway on the other was culturally productive, but seldom concerned with co-operation on the international issues of the day.<sup>60</sup>

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Raymund, who is sometimes referred to in Old Norse as Rémundr, was most likely Spanish, i.e. “Ramon de La Mena”. An alternate possibility might be a Cornish origin, i.e. “Raymond of Lammana”, although I find this less likely, as Lammana would not have been a functioning monastic institution by this period. Therefore the supposed epithet would have to refer to the Looe Island vicinity in general.

56 For a recent study on the West Norse area see: Sverre Bagge. “Division and Unity in Medieval Norway” in *Frankes, Northmen, and Slavs : identities and state formation in early medieval Europe*. ed. by Ildar H. Garipzanov *et al.* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008) pp. 145-166. See also: Hans Jacob Orning. *Unpredictability and Presence. Norwegian Kingship in the High Middle Ages*. trans. by Alan Crozier. (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 66-88. For the East Norse area see: Philip Line. *Kingship and State Formation in Sweden, 1130-1290*. (Leiden, Brill, 2007) *passim*.

57 The concept that intellectuals within the Church (whom we might identify with “the church of the elect”) often sought to protect Jews while populists (whom we might identify with “the church in the world”) presented a threat is not new. See, for example: Chazan 2010. pp. 52-58; Norman Cohn. *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) pp. 68-70. Relevant in this context is a comment by Reidar Astås summarising the pro-Jewish position of Peter Comestor, whose *Historia Scholastica* was an important source behind *Stjórn*, the most important exegetical work composed in Old Norse: Reidar Astås. ”Jøder i middelalderen. Noen bemerkninger til Tarald Rasmussens artikkel «Antisemittisme og kristendom i middelalderen»”, *Kirke og Kultur* (1982) pp. 58-59.

58 Chazan 2010. p. 166.

59 For a broadly post-colonial study of state ownership of Jews in Anglo-Norman England, implying resonances of slavery, see: Krummel 2011. pp. 23-47. See also: Anna Sapir Abulafia. *Christian-Jewish Relations, 1000-1300. Jews in the service of medieval Christendom*. (London: Pearson Education, 2011) pp. 90-93, 97-108.

60 For the classic study of this artistic exchange: Henry Goddard Leach, Henry. *Angvin Britain and Scandinavia*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1921) esp. pp. 130-271. See also: Sif Ríkhardsdóttir. “The Imperial Implications of Medieval Translations: Old Norse and Middle English Versions of Marie de France's *Lais*”, *Studies in Philology* 105, 2 (Spring, 2008) pp. 145-149.

On this subject we ought to mention the particularly warm relationship between the Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (1204 – 1263) and the English King Henry III (1207 – 1272). A letter from around 1223 from Hákon to Henry reads:

Quoniam serenissimus rex Anglie Johannes pater vester antecessores nostros semper sincere dilexit indissolubili dilectionis vinculo, celsitudini vestre cupimus astringi; sperantes quod dilectio que in juventute nostre esse ceperit, cum etatis augmento semper crescat et multiplicabitur, et sicut patribus nostris succedemus in regno ita etiam in dilectione quam se habuerunt diebus suis.<sup>61</sup>

Since your father, the most serene King John of England, and my predecessor always appreciated the lasting cordiality of our bond we wish to affirm this commitment from Your Highness. We hope that this goodwill will be accepted in our youth, and with time constantly grow, thrive and increase, and just as our fathers did during their rule, going forth in goodwill, always counting one another amongst their friends.

This intimacy is particularly relevant given the history of Anglo-Jewry during Henry's reign.<sup>62</sup> At first English Jews enjoyed greater freedom than they had under his predecessor. They were no longer required to wear the *tabula* (a badge in the shape of Moses's tablets), and some made sizeable profits from moneylending. However, around the time that Hákon sent this letter, the Council of Oxford made several rulings calling for the reinstatement of previous discriminatory measures. Although royal power initially prevented the implementation of the council's wishes, this marked the beginning of a decline which seriously accelerated with the seizure of all Jewish goods in 1239. The blood libel of "Little Hugh of Lincoln" came in 1255 and led to riots and persecution across the country. At the time of the unrest Henry had actually mortgaged the Jews to his brother, Richard of Cornwall.<sup>63</sup> In 1245, and then again following the bloodshed in 1255, many English Jews beseeched Henry for permission leave the country but their request was denied.<sup>64</sup> All this seems to indicate that Henry's attitude towards the Anglo-Jewish population was quite possessive, and we ought not to be surprised that Hákon neither requested nor received any Jews. We might also wonder what impressions about the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a Jewish settlement could have been brought from England to Hákon's court during this period. For example, Matthew Paris of St. Albans in Hertfordshire visited King Hákon in 1248 and was subsequently invited to inspect the monastery at Munkeholmen. He would later include several noticeably antipathetic accounts of English Jews, especially the "Little Hugh" episode,

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61 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 19. ed. by Alexander Bugge. (Kristiania: Malling, 1910) p. 118.

62 The details of the following historical summary are largely drawn from: Abulafia, 2011. pp. 97-104.

63 Hyamson 1928. p. 71.

64 *Ibid.* at p. 303.

in his *Chronica Majora*.<sup>65</sup> Finally, when the Expulsion of 1290 marked the end of the King's ownership of the Jews, the ongoing war between Denmark and Norway (1287 – 1295) would most likely have been a more pressing concern to policy makers than the potential establishment of a refugee Jewry.

The other hypothetical vector of Jewish migration into Scandinavia would have come from Germany (that is to say, the geographical area now covered by Germany). The increasing involvement of the Hanseatic League in Scandinavia during the Late Middle Ages goes some way to explaining the lack of any move towards the establishment of a Jewry in the Scandinavian Hansa towns, e.g. Bergen or Visby.<sup>66</sup> Naturally, the Hansamen would have sought to preserve their monopoly on trade and commerce, although it is surprising that Scandinavian rulers who came into conflict with the League, e.g. the Danish King Valdemar Atterdag (c. 1320 – 1375) or King Eric of Pomerania (1381 – 1459), never sought to encourage Jewish entrepreneurs from the south.<sup>67</sup>

A further potential problem for the establishment of a Scandinavian Jewish community was the historical trend during the Middle Ages was for German Jewry to tend towards Eastern Europe in times of crisis, “where economic opportunities seemed to be more promising and where the authorities seemed to be more interested in fostering Jewish presence”.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, German Jews enjoyed much more freedom from governmental control in comparison to their English counterparts.<sup>69</sup> Theoretically this might have made it easier for envoys of the Scandinavian kingdoms to cultivate connections with them. However, there is nothing to suggest that policy makers in the North had much of an understanding of the political situation of German Jews. Thus, the isolation – indeed, the insulation – of Jewish communities in Germany meant that sending representatives south to investigate unknown territory would probably not have seemed as rewarding as it did risky. In summary, although in retrospect we can see the mutual benefits of an invitation to the North, the relations between Scandinavia and its neighbours probably made such an initiative seem unthinkable at the time. Jews lacked an incentive to choose one of the Scandinavian kingdoms over Poland because the

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65 It seems probable that Matthew of Paris's anti-Semitic inclinations were not a latent development following the “Little Hugh” case, as for 1247, the year before he visited Norway, he records how a panic had spread from France to England that “the coins were being circumsised by circumsised people and infidel Jews ...”. For this and other hostile pronouncements, see: Matthew of Paris. *The Illustrated Chronicles of Matthew Paris. Observations of Thirteenth-Century Life*. trans. by Richard Vaughan. (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993) p. 15, 60, pp. 141-143, pp. 157-159.

66 See: Jens E. Olesen. “Inter-Scandinavian relations” in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia. Volume 1. Prehistory to 1520*. ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) pp. 711-799.

67 On Hanseatic antipathy towards Jews during the High Middle Ages, see: Salo Wittmayer Baron. *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*. vol. 9. (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960) p. 339; Cohn 1970. p. 79. See also: Cordelia Heß. “Jews and the Black Death in Fourteenth-Century Prussia: A Search for Traces” in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*. ed. by Cordelia Heß & Jonathan Adams. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015) pp. 109-126.

68 Chazan 2010. p. 198. For a concise iteration of the aforementioned invitation of Boleslaw the Pious, see: pp. 203-204.

69 Ibid. at 181-197.

Scandinavians themselves did not deliberately offer any.<sup>70</sup>

The reasons why the establishment of a Scandinavian Jewry probably remained unthinkable during the Middle Ages are apparent when considered in context. We should note, though, that to a certain extent much of what can be said of Eastern Europe as a prospect for Jewish settlement (where there *was* Jewish settlement) is true of Scandinavia (where there apparently was not). When Chazan points out that “the major option was a move eastward to areas that were in the process of developing ... backwardness worked to the advantages of the Jews, making their contributions in eastern Europe useful...”,<sup>71</sup> the words 'eastward' and 'eastern' could plausibly be replaced with 'northward' and 'northern'. The inherent challenges, including the issue that “the anxiety and fear of existing on the periphery often worked to the Jews' disadvantage”<sup>72</sup> would also have been much the same, yet Jews *did* settle and indeed prosper in the East, while they did not in the North. What was crucially missing, as previously seen, were “authorities interested in fostering Jewish presence”. This observation is not intended as a vain criticism of medieval Scandinavian policy with the benefit of historical hindsight. Rather, it serves to demonstrate that it is also *perception* of distance, with an attendant lack of initiative, which explain Jewish absence in medieval Scandinavia. Consider that from the prominent German Jewish settlement of Speyer to Ribe, the most significant urban area in southern Scandinavia, is actually a marginally shorter journey than from Speyer to Poznań, the westernmost significant Jewry in Poland. Indeed, the smaller Jewish populations of Bremen, Oldenburg and Lübeck<sup>73</sup> would have needed to travel less than 200 miles north to Ribe, as opposed to more than 400 miles east to Poznań. Certainly, as pointed out, there were at times insurmountable practical impediments, e.g. the aforementioned non-existence of an independent Anglo-Jewry prior to 1290. But we should also consider the *ideas* that contributed to a lack of Jews in the North. How Scandinavians saw themselves, how they narrated their position in Europe, how they related themselves to their peers must also have shaped what prospects they deemed plausible or implausible. We might wonder if the reason that Boleslaw the Pious took the initiative to establish Jewish settlements while the Scandinavians did not might lie in a Norse-speaking recognition “that they were themselves situated along a periphery rather than at the center of the

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70 Iceland and Greenland, until 1262, were of course not kingdoms. However, it is safe to conclude that these judiciaries without executives would have lacked even a basic impetus to discuss a potential invitation towards Jewish settlers, let alone to extend one. There were, of course, immigrants in Iceland during the later Middle Ages. See: Ian McDougall. “Foreigners and Foreign Languages in Medieval Iceland”, *Saga-Book*, 22 (1986-1989) pp. 181-185, 190-193; Nichole Laine Sterling. “The Other Inside: Icelandic Identity and Foreigners in the *Íslendingasögur*”, unpublished PhD thesis, University of California Berkeley (2008) *passim*.

71 *Ibid.* at pp. 198-199.

72 *Ibid.*

73 For a brief summary of the evidence for Jewish presence in these towns see: Max Markreich. “Die Beziehungen der Juden zur Freien Hansestadt Bremen von 1065 bis 1848”, *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 7 (1927) pp. 445-449

known world”.<sup>74</sup> The Jews, encountered physically only abroad – and as shall be seen encountered narratively mostly through biblical exegesis and *miracula* – probably only existed in the minds of policy makers as people 'out there', not 'over here'. Whether stoning St. Stephen or appearing in miracles of the Virgin Mary, the Jew as he would have been known to Scandinavian rulers probably did not feel like someone who even *could* (or should) be invited northwards. From the outset we must be careful not to limit our analyses entirely to apparently tangible geopolitical realities. As shall be seen, in time the idea Jewish absence would come to exert no little influence on the Old Norse-speaking imagination. Indeed, it was probably also ideas – the construction of identities of both self and other – that contributed to the cause of that absence.

### Moyses in Bergen in 1340

One Scandinavian location in which Jews have occasionally been supposed to have lived or visited during the Middle Ages is the Hanseatic town of Visby, in Gotland. Dick Wase pointed to a will from 1358, left by one Nicolaus van Hachede, a German-speaking Visbyer. There, he leaves ten marks to *Jacob, der die Tochter der Jüdin Heze hat*<sup>75</sup> - “Jacob, who is married to the daughter of Heze the Jewess”]. *Heze* may well be a Jewish name, perhaps being *הֶזֶה* *Hessa*, an abbreviation of Yiddish *הֶנְדָּה* *Henda*, or possibly from *הודעס* *Hudes*, the Yiddish familiar form of *Judith*. However, as Adams points out in his evaluation of Jewish presence in medieval Denmark, “Jew” could also be a derogatory byname given to a gentile by other gentiles.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, even if Heze were a Jew, she may well have belonged to the German wing of Nicolaus's family, and therefore probably never have set foot in Visby. We cannot know. Wase also points to an exporter in Visby from 1475 by the name of Vítusz, and the recurrence of the name Solomon in the prominent Hude family line in Visby, as possible indicators of Jewish background amongst medieval Visbyers.<sup>77</sup> However, I do not find either of these suggestions compelling. Vítus was a common enough name for Christians, and I have been able to find only one example of a medieval Jew with that name, and then from sixth century Italy.<sup>78</sup> Solomon, like Moses or Aaron, was much more popular amongst Jews than Christians, but on the other hand, for the Hude family to keep bestowing it upon their children would be a fairly bold advertisement of their faith and/or heritage. It seems unlikely that an openly Jewish family could have achieved the prominence

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74 Kevin J. Wanner. “Off-Center: Directional Valences in Old Norse Cosmography”, *Speculum* 84, 1 (2009) p. 50.

75 *Regesten der Lübecker Bürgertestamente des Mittelalters*. vol. 2. ed. by A. Von Brandt. (Lübeck: Verlag Max Schmidt-Römhild. 1973) p. 180. Wase's arguments are found in: Dick Wase. *Människornas Visby. En ciceron till Visbys medeltid*. (Stockholm: Oeisspeiss, 2010) pp. 149-151. On Gutnish-Jewish history more generally, see: Vilhelm Jacobowsky. *Judar på Gotland*. (Visby: Kultur nämnden i Gotlands kommun, 1973)

76 Jonathan Adams. *Lessons in Contempt. Poul Raaff's Translation and Publication in 1516 of Johannes Pfefferkorn's The Confessions of the Jews*. (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2013) pp. 6-7.

77 Wase 2010. pp. 149-151.

78 David Noy. *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. Vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 108, 111, 114-115, 119-120.

that they did without attracting hostility from the Hansa-aligned ruling class. A non-scholarly assumption of a Jewish presence in the same city is Carl Gustaf Hellqvist's depiction of King Valdemar's plunder of Visby in 1361 (see **fig. 2**). This is an arresting image, particularly while we lack reliable evidence of Jewish settlement anywhere in Scandinavia before the Early Modern period.<sup>79</sup> Hellqvist's painting is thus perhaps an attempt to render Visby exotic, or maybe a crude association between Jews and money. Regardless, while it is worth noting, there is no reason to impute to it any historical realism.



**Fig. 2:** Carl Gustaf Hellqvist. *Valdemar Atterdag brandskattar Visby*, 1882, oil on canvas, 2 x 3.3m, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. Note the Jew with *pilleus cornutus*, red badge, and *tallit*, bottom right.

But if Visby has (pending the emergence of any further evidence) yielded rather unreliable suggestions of Jewish presence in medieval Scandinavia, we are perhaps to be rewarded with a slightly more substantial account by looking west to another important urban settlement, namely Bergen in Norway. In 1340, the town was seeing increasing commerce by Low German-speaking traders, but as yet had no Hanseatic *Kontor* and was not so Lübeck-dominated as to be inhospitable to Jewish businessmen.<sup>80</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November of that year, the local bishop, Hákon Erlingsson (r. 1332-1342) issued a letter to the king, Magnús Eiríksson (r. 1319-1364). In addition to relating Raymund de Lamena's ongoing failure to procure Greenlandic gyrfalcons, he detailed the following circumstance:

<sup>79</sup> Bjarne Berulfsen. "Jøder. Norge og Island" in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder*. vol. 8. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1963) p. 77 ; Trachtenberg 1966. p. 104.

<sup>80</sup> Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz. *Traders, Ties and Tensions. The Interaction of Lübeckers, Overijsslers and Hollanders in Late Medieval Bergen*. (Hilversum: Verloren Publishers, 2008) pp. 43-46. Cf. John A. Gade. *Hanseatic Control of Norwegian Commerce During the Late Middle Ages*. (Leiden: Brill, 1951) pp. 56-57.

Mædal annarra luta baðo þeer oss. at ver skyldim aatsia vm kosthalld j. garde. ydrum. hofwm ver þar vm talat uid Gunnar. herra Erlingi ok odrum godom monnum hiauerandom. funnum ver hann j þui viliughan. seghiande sik j. þi ok ollu odru ydart bod vilia hallda. Mon han sialfer nu til ydar komande yder seghia med sannendom. hwat. æder hwimykit falla mæghi. af fehyrdslunni. en þat vitum ver at Moyses lauk honom. eftir ydrum brefom ok boðe. herra Erlings. ok vaarre tilloghu .lxxx. pund ensk ok æina mork brenda. en Ole Hælghason villdi med ængho mote. saker þess serlegha bref. er þeer hofdur honom skrifwat. annat. en til ydar flytia, skræid. riklingh. rafwe. hwitskin. graskin. mardskin. ok falka.<sup>81</sup>

Amongst other matters you commanded us that we should oversee the rent at your lodging [*garðr*]. We have discussed it with Gunnarr [Hvít], Lord Erlingr and other good men who were present. We found him [Gunnarr] to be willing in this, saying that in this and all other matters he would obey your orders. He will now come to you and tell you truthfully what or how much has been made from the treasury, and we know that Moyses paid him 80 English pounds and one mark of burnished gold according to your letters and the order of Lord Erlingr, and our permission. But Óli Helgason would by no means accept because of the special letter which you otherwise had written him, that you should be paid in dried fish, flounder jerky, amber, white furs, grey furs, martens' furs, and falcons.

Given the occasionally somewhat obtuse style of Old Norse diplomatics, it may be convenient to reformulate the events discussed in this passage. Bishop Hákon writes to the king, recommending Gunnarr Hvít as an agent who would, amongst other matters, oversee the income collected when the king's residence in Bergen was being rented out to visitors. He gives a recent example of when Gunnarr has already performed this function to good effect. Apparently a man called Moyses paid 80 English pounds and one mark of burnished gold to rent the king's lodgings. This was in spite of a contrary administrative opinion. One Óli Helgason drew on previous correspondence from the crown that the rent on the property was to paid only in *skræid. riklingh. rafwe. hwitskin. graskin. mardskin. ok falka* - “dried fish, flounder jerky, amber, white furs, grey furs, martens' furs, and falcons”.

Eighty English pounds would have been a substantial sum of money, with a spending power very roughly equivalent to £44,000 in modern sterling, or around \$66,000 in American dollars.<sup>82</sup> Why then was Óli Helgason so reluctant to accept it? It is worth noting that these were *English* pounds, i.e. that Moyses wished to pay in a foreign currency. His lack of a given patronymic might indicate that he was

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81 The full letter and a translation can be found in Appendix III.

82 A conversion utility has been provided by the National Archives in the United Kingdom, and it is from this that my numbers are drawn: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>

very well-known to the corresponders (unlikely, as he appears nowhere else in our sources) or that he was not a Norwegian and so did not have one. If he were indeed a foreigner, then the *skreið*, *rikeling* etc. which Óli demanded would have been commodities he was very unlikely to have to hand. These mostly maritime wares would largely have been the domain of Scandinavian or Baltic traders, despite the odd dabbling by the likes of Raymund. Óli was most likely asking the impossible, until Hákon and Gunnarr overruled him.

One ready interpretation is that Moyses was a Jewish merchant who was passing through Bergen. A Judaeophobic attitude on the part of Óli might then account for his reluctance in leasing him the *gardr*. Hákon is described in contemporary correspondence as a *magister*, and so may well have studied abroad and been quite the kind of intellectual churchman who was above such prejudices.<sup>83</sup> Gunnarr Hvít was known to be a shrewd bursar and so would most likely have been opposed to a voice who wished to deny the treasury eighty pounds.<sup>84</sup> If Moyses were coming from outside of Scandinavia, it might well also explain why he paid in foreign currency. There is also the matter of his name. Moses was apparently rather rare name in medieval Norway. There are two other known examples, one Bjarni Moysesson, a retainer of King Hákon Hákonarson in 1246, and one Sigurðr Moises, named as an ancestor of a witness to a payment contract in 1367.<sup>85</sup> A third case, one Jón Mossi who witnessed a contract in 1438, is uncertain. “Mossi” could be a vernacular rendering of מֹשֶׁה (Mošeh), or a contraction of Moses, as seen frequently in Middle English “Mosse”.<sup>86</sup> E. H. Lind suggests that here it is a diminutive of *másungi* “young sea-gull”.<sup>87</sup> This seems rather semantically and phonologically challenging but remains our most likely prospect while there is no further evidence of Jón Mossi having any kind of Jewish identity. If Moses was not common amongst contemporary Norwegians, it was of course an enduringly popular name amongst medieval Jews.<sup>88</sup>

Moyes's lack of a patronymic is a somewhat puzzling circumstance. As seen, it would appear to rule him out as a Scandinavian, as the fact that no Moyses appears in co-eval Norwegian correspondence

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83 Oluf Kolsrud: “Den norske Kirkes Erkebiskoper og Biskoper intil Reformationen” in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* B. vol. 17. (Christiania: P.T. Malling, 1913) p. 223. Hákon would presumably also have known Jón Halldórsson (d. 1339), the only Norwegian Dominican of his age, and a man who had studied in Paris and Bologna.

84 Gunnarr Hvít was a man of no little consequence in fourteenth century Norway. On his chancellorship, See: Svein H. Gullbekk. *Pengevesenets fremvekst og fall i Norge i middelalderen*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2009) p. 96.

85 E. H. Lind. *Norsk-Islandske Dopnamn ock Fingerade Namn från Medeltiden*. (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1905-1915) p. 775. The name was more common in Iceland, with twelve occurrences.

86 Jacobs 1893. pp. 359-360.

87 E.H. Lind. *Norsk-Islandske Personbinamn från Medeltiden*. (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1920-1921) p. 260.

88 Our records are patchy, but in the surviving sources it was the 6<sup>th</sup> most popular name amongst English Jews prior to 1290. See: Jacobs 1893. p. 369; Kaganoff 1978. p. 59. The name was also widespread amongst the Sephardim. See: Ora (Rodrigue) Schwarzwald. “First Names in Sephardi Communities” in *Pleasant are Their Names. Jewish Names in the Sephardi Diaspora*. ed. by Aaron Demsky. (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2010) p. 193, 199, 205. See also: Tal Ilan. *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part III The Western Diaspora 330 BCE – 650 BCE, in collaboration with Thomas Ziem*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) pp. 136-138.

rules out the possibility that he was in fact a Moyses Someone-son but needed no introduction (cf. Gunnar Hvít and Lord Erlingr, who are not given second names either in the same document). On the other hand, Moyses would appear to be somewhat known to Hákon and the king: there is no brief note to introduce him. Hákon seems to assume that the king will know to whom he is referring. Was he perhaps a recurrent visitor to Norway, but one who never stayed long enough to precipitate much other comment in diplomatic records? Although on this contention we might wonder why he apparently paid such a vast sum of money for his accommodation, i.e. he presumably wanted to rent the *garðr* for some time. If Moyses was Jewish, then he presumably could not have been an English Jew, as his currency would otherwise suggest, because Anglo-Jewry had been more-or-less eliminated by the expulsion in 1290. Some Jews did periodically visit England in the following century, e.g. one Master Elyas in 1309, and an Isaak the Jew in 1319.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps Moyses was one such adventurer, moving from a base somewhere on the continent in order to pursue opportunities in England, where he made some profits, and then across the North Sea to Norway. As is so often the case in the history of Jews in Scandinavia before the sixteenth century, we must confine ourselves to speculation.

### **On Absence**

Questions of absence and presence are long established themes in studies of medieval Christian perceptions of Jews – particularly in an English context.<sup>90</sup> Gloria Cigman discussed Jews as an “absent-presence” in late medieval England, rooting her study in the proposition that “[t]he absent English Jew has a continuing and firmly-rooted place in the society that he has been banished from”.<sup>91</sup> For Cigman, Jews served as a distraction from the increasing woes besetting the Church in the late 1300s: “Hatred of the malignant outsider is calculated to regenerate a faith that has become weakened by inertia and undermined by corruption”.<sup>92</sup> Sylvia Tomasch posits the persistence of the “virtual Jew” as a kind of colonial fantasy: “‘The Jew’ reflects not any actual Jews but the ‘capacity, strategy, agency’ of the observer.”<sup>93</sup> According to Tomasch, recreating the image of the Jew after the Expulsion of 1290 was a continuation – indeed, an escalation – of a process of colonisation that had begun when Jews were still present.

Building on this premise, Miriamne Ara Krummel observes the English situation in conjunction with the events and processes of the Holocaust. Krummel's perspective is deeply informed by the Nazi

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89 Krummel 2011. pp. 12-14.

90 For a brief survey see: Sylvia Tomasch. “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*. ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) p. 256 n2.

91 Gloria Cigman. *The Jew as an Absent-Presence in Late Medieval England. The Seventeenth Sacks Lecture of the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies delivered on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1991*. (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1991) p. 7.

92 Ibid. at p. 14.

93 Tomasch 2000. p. 254.

categories of *judenrein* – “clean/pure of Jews” and *judenfrei* – “Jew free”.<sup>94</sup> This position holds that the medieval English desire to see the country completely rid of Jewish presence can be understood using the language and experience of another time and place. The charge of anachronism is irrelevant, so long as we maintain firstly that we are dealing with analogous, not genealogically derived, phenomena, and secondly that the terminology of a successive generation may well express the intellectual world of its predecessors better than they could themselves.<sup>95</sup> To quote Joshua Trachtenburg: “if the Nazi program has sometimes been loosely described as 'medieval' in the matter of its Jewish policy it assuredly harks back to the psychology of the Middle Ages”.<sup>96</sup> I shall examine and assess the fruitfulness of this terminology in an Old Norse context in a later chapter: “The Importance of Elsewhere: Iceland, Judenreinheit, and Homotopia”.

As shall be seen, scholarship on medieval England often helps to inform this study, but the Middle English interventions are responses to a scenario which is different to that we find in Scandinavia in a very important way. Tomasch categorises the situation she studies as one of “the usual sequence of absence following presence”.<sup>97</sup> Her “virtual Jew” functions across the paradigm shift of the Expulsion, deriving its meaning thereof. The same is true of Krummel's “re-membling” of the Jew, and by definition will also be true of any study of English sources written after 1290.<sup>98</sup> In the North, of course, there were never any Jews to be expelled. Discourses of memory, post-colonialism, material vs. virtual etc. may well apply in a discussion of Scandinavian material, but these themes will not translate easily from the work of critics who are working around such a colossal and traumatic event as the Expulsion. Scandinavian history has no such epoch. It is a testament to just how unusual the absence of Jews from Scandinavia was, that so few studies exist of similar situations elsewhere during the Middle Ages. However, the work of Andrew Scheil on responses to Jews and Judaism in Old English and Anglo-Latin literature is important in this context:

... Jews migrated to England in substantial numbers only in the later eleventh century; anti-Judaic discourse existed in Anglo-Saxon England, therefore, without the presence of actual Jewish communities. The understanding of Jews and Judaism in Anglo-Saxon England is thus solely a textual phenomenon, a matter of stereotypes embedded in long standing Christian cultural tradition. Thinking about Jews in Anglo-Saxon England was an act of individual imagination,

94 Krummel 2011. pp. 7-14, 65-67. See also: Tomasch 2000. p. 255.

95 Jeremy Cohen, for example, dates the concept of *judenrein* to the sixteenth century at the earliest: Jeremy Cohen. “Traditional Prejudice and Religious Reform: The Theological and Historical Foundation of Luther's Anti-Judaism” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*. ed. by Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991) p. 97.

96 Joshua Trachtenburg. *The Devil and the Jews. The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) p. 5.

97 Tomasch 2000. p. 256.

98 Krummel 2011. pp. 1-21.

always conditioned and bounded by the ponderous weight of tradition, as can be said of almost any medieval act: the powerful fusion of local intention and the overarching power of the *author*-defined past. What Jeremy Cohen compellingly terms the “hermeneutically and doctrinally constructed Jew” comes into being as ideologies, genres, authorial intentions, and any number of any other factors (except, apparently, the physical presence of Jews in England) clash, rebound and combine, and move into the depths of tradition and myth.<sup>99</sup>

There is much in the scenario Scheil describes which ought to be recognisable to us. He describes a manner of understanding Jews that neither has any memory of Jewish presence nor expects it imminently. Without an experience of “the living patterns of a specific Jewish minority”<sup>100</sup> it is not possible to construct a uniform image of what a Jew looks like, what he does, what he means, what he *is*. Rather, the Jew becomes “an act of individual imagination”, albeit one that comes from the mould of pre-existing tradition. Nonetheless, Scheil cannot provide us with a perfectly transferable approach. Following Jeremy Cohen, Scheil speaks of the “hermeneutical Jew”<sup>101</sup> which he sensibly employs as the best way to describe the Anglo-Saxon experience. In eleventh century England the contemporary Jews were an almost totally undiscussed phenomenon. The only Jews discussed in any detail by Old English writers came from scripture. However, by the thirteenth century, when the bulk of our material in Old Norse was written, Jewish settlements had been established over much of the continent and contemporary Jews had become a matter of *Realpolitik*.<sup>102</sup> As we shall see, Old Norse literature is far from treating this development as a rational political concern, and it is certainly not insulated in its approach from classic exegetical traditions concerning Jews and Judaism, but it does reflect the existence of a contemporary Jewry elsewhere in Europe and draws on that topos reasonably often. Moreover, the strong traditions of reader response criticism, the attendant proclivity to reconstruct a saga audience, and the much larger extant corpus of Old Norse in comparison to Old English all impel Scandinavianists to consider the popular understanding of texts just as much as the intention of the author (that is to say, both the “high” and “low” reading).<sup>103</sup> Scheil does this to a degree, as in his controversial interpretation of *Beowulf*,<sup>104</sup> but he is largely limited to the reconstruction of an intellectual, learned authorship rather than a more worldly, uneducated readership. In short, our Old

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99 Andrew P. Scheil. *The Footsteps of Israel. Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) p. 7.

100 The term is taken from a summary by Jeremy Cohen of Robert Chazan's tripartite theory of how medieval prejudice against Jews was kindled: Jeremy Cohen. “Robert Chazan's 'Medieval Anti-Semitism': A Note on the Impact of 'Theology'” in *History & Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*. ed. by David Berger (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997) p. 67. For Chazan's original essay see: pp. 49-67

101 Jeremy Cohen. *The Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. (London: University of California Press, 1999) pp. 2-3.

102 Describing concerns beyond the strictly theological/spiritual as *Realpolitik* follows Astås, 1982. p. 57.

103 For an general example of such dual examination, see: Ralph O' Connor. Introduction to *Icelandic Histories & Romances*. (Stroud: Tempus, 2006) pp. 15-34. esp. 26-28.

104 Scheil 2004. pp. 177-191.

Norse material is a product of the same conditions of immediate Jewish absence which Scheil describes, but it is a product which was otherwise born into a very different world.

### Previous scholarship on Jews and Judaism in Old Norse

When we say that the focus here will be on “Old Norse”, we use the term in its traditional British *totum pro parte* usage, i.e. we are really studying *West Norse*: the language written in Iceland and Norway from the eleventh century until the eve of the Reformation in Iceland (and used as a spoken medium across an even greater geographic area and time scale). As Anglophone scholars are often prone to forgetting, of course, there was also another dialect, *East Norse*, written in Denmark and Sweden during roughly the same period (although with a considerably smaller corpus and a creative peak in the fifteenth rather than the thirteenth century). Despite their proximity to one another, there seems to have been only limited significant literary transmission from East to West nor vice versa; indeed, reading West Norse alongside East Norse often gives the curious impression of one language spawning two literatures. However, while there may be no transmissive relationship, East Norse material on Jews can potentially provide a sound analogue for examining the West Norse sources. As we have seen, the lack of Jewish settlement in Denmark and Sweden was identical with that of Norway and Iceland. Moreover, East Norse and West Norse literature are both the product of the High and Late Middle Ages, rather than the Early Middle Ages in the case of Anglo-Saxon.

There has been a modest amount of scholarship on the depiction of Jews in East Norse literature. Martin Schwarz Lausten has provided a thorough account of various positions prior to 1500, mostly amongst Latin language authors from Denmark but also from the vernacular *bønnebøger* – “prayer books” used in private devotion.<sup>105</sup> Schwarz Lausten does not attempt to approach his material using the vector of absence/presence, favouring a technical study rooted in ecclesiastical history. At the time of writing, Jonathan Adams is preparing a two volume study entitled *Muslims and Jews in Medieval Scandinavian Texts: A Cultural Enquiry*, comprising of an edited compendium and a critical discussion. Adams chooses *at fokusere på tekster skrevet på folkesproget, da de ofte var tiltænkt en bredere målgruppe end latinske tekster, som kun kunne forstås af et mindretal. De giver et bedre indtryk af de udbredte holdninger, overbevisninger og antagelser blandt alle samfundslag end kirkens autoritative skrifter på latin gør.*<sup>106</sup> – “to focus on texts written in the vernacular as they were often intended for a broader target audience than Latin texts which could only be understood by a minority. They provide better insight into the diverse opinions, beliefs and axioms amongst all tiers of society than the Church's authoritative texts in Latin”.

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105 Martin Schwarz Lausten. *Kirke og synagoge. Holdninger i den danske kirke til jødedom og jøder i middelalderen, reformationstiden og den lutherske ortodoksi (ca. 1100- ca. 1700)*. (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1992) pp. 46-93.

106 Adams 2012. p. 79.

This position accords well with the aforementioned tendencies common in Old Norse criticism. Moreover, Adams's concept of *ankomst på pergament* – “arrival on parchment” is a useful way to conceive of Jewish absence in medieval Scandinavia. It reminds us that although there was no actual Jewish population we can speak of Jews “populating” vernacular literature, and so the imaginations of ordinary people. But again, the homology is not perfect from an Old Norse perspective. Adams's interpretation of the effects of absence on the reception of the Danish perceptions of Jews does not, as we shall see, translate to Iceland and Norway: *Det ér et frygteligt billede, men manglen på et fysisk møde mellem kristne og jøder – på godt og ondt – betyder formodentligt, at dette billede ikke blev forværret i middelalderen ... Det er som om samtidsjøder ikke rigtig interesserede danskerne.*<sup>107</sup> – “It is a terrifying image, but the lack of physical encounters between Christians and Jews, for better or worse, meant that this image did not deteriorate during the Middle Ages ... It is as though Danes were not really interested in contemporary Jews”. Although Adams does qualify this proposition with a warning that it is based on the rather patchy material available in East Norse.

The limited studies of Old Norse material concerning Jews to date have largely avoided the issue of absence/presence altogether. Bjarne Berulfsen's 1958 article, “Antisemittisme som litterær importvare” (“Anti-Semitism as a Literary Import”) is arguably the most substantial treatment. Berulfsen's argument was 1) *den første påviselige jødefiendtlighet altså utelukkende er av religiøs karakter*<sup>108</sup> “the earliest visible antagonism towards Jews is exclusively religious in character”, 2) that the impulse to criticise Jews had originated outside Norway and Iceland, and could be observed in the literature of those countries only because of translations. The implication was that stereotypes hostile towards Jews might have been meaningful elsewhere, but their meaning was moderated or lost when they were translated into Old Norse. Berulfsen did not deny that anti-Jewish ideas would have been appealing to medieval Norwegians and Icelanders, but only as much as they would have been to any other Christian culture.

Berulfsen's article may well have addressed the demands of its time. Although published in 1958 the article begins with a brief anecdote recounting how in 1941 he noticed that on the first page of a recently published Danish thesaurus the word *Aagerkarl* – “usurer” had listed as a synonym *Jøde* – “Jew”. At this time Denmark had recently come under Nazi occupation, and in Berulfsen's native Norway the government had been dissolved and the people faced the direct rule of the Reich (the puppet Quisling regime would not be established until 1942). Seen against this backdrop, a man whose work had primarily been on lexicography suddenly deciding to write an article about how Norwegians

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107 Ibid. at p. 91.

108 Berulfsen 1958. p. 126.

had probably been largely indifferent to the foreign, anti-Semitic ideas that had been foisted upon them<sup>109</sup> would make perfect sense. Indeed, a few years later in 1963 Berulfsen revisited the topic in an encyclopedia entry, and when writing outside the frame of that day in 1941 when he had been surprised by the first page of a new thesaurus, he chose to revise the concept of Old Norse *antisemittisme* altogether: *[d]enne uvilje kan neppe tolkes som antisemittisme i moderne forstand*.<sup>110</sup> – “this ill-feeling can hardly be considered anti-Semitism in a modern sense”. The central mechanism of Berulfsen's work on Old Norse treatments of Jews, then, was to situate them as peripheral concern in the literary history of Norway and Iceland. The only engagement with the issue of absence/presence was the implication that the absence of Jewish settlement in Scandinavia had led to an absence of concern over Jews.

In order to create a notion of absence in an Old Norse context, and to relate it to the similar uses of the concept we have seen used elsewhere, it is useful to get 'back to basics' and begin by asking firstly what we really mean by 'absence' in general, and secondly what absence(s) shape Old Norse images of Jews. An excursion into the general semantics of absence is necessary in order to avoid the charge of anachronism; we must be certain that the terminology we use to describe 'absence' is not a projection from our historical vantage point onto the various realities experienced by our Old Norse authors. Our opening proposition must be that absence and presence are not necessarily binary categories. Patrick Fuery in *The Theory of Absence* notes that the “forms that ... absences can take are considerably diverse” and that it is insufficient to see absence as “zero-one and true-false sequences”. He does not expand on this heterogeneity, stating that as a philosopher it is not his to purpose to be “directly engaging in issues of typology”<sup>111</sup> – an endeavour which certainly *is* necessary for a student of literature. Fuery does, however, propose two basic orders:

Secondary absences are those which are always derived from a state of presence. They imply presence, acknowledge its relational context, gain their epistemological and ontological structures from it, and indicate sites of presence. They retain, and even reinforce, the binarism of presence and absence. Primary absences, on the other hand, exist outside of any relational context of presence. Primary absences exist in their own right, independent of any sense of presence.<sup>112</sup>

Just as Adams hints with his concept of “arrival on parchment”, we are not dealing with a primary

109 In his conclusion, however, he notes that *Hva almuen i denne måten kan ha lest og lært gjennom århundrer, er et studium verdt ... det behøver ikke være så merkelig at det lenge var bondene som var de argeste motstandere mot å slippe jødene inn*. – “What the ordinary people can have read and learnt of this through the centuries would be worth investigating ... it doesn't need to be so strange that for a long time it was the farmers [Norway's upper middle classes] who were the most stalwart opponent to admitting Jews”. p. 144.

110 Bjarne Berulfsen. “Jøder. Norge og Island” in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder*. vol. 8. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1963) p. 77.

111 Patrick Fuery. *The Theory of Absence. Subjectivity, Signification, and Desire*. (London: Greenwood Press, 1995) pp. 1-2.

112 Ibid.

absence of Jews when we discuss medieval Scandinavian literature. An absence of Jews completely independent of the “relational context of presence” necessitates an absence of all knowledge of the existence of Jews – of the very signifier of “Jew”, *gyðingr, jǫði, ebreski maðr* etc. For our purposes, then, absence is not the state of “not being” but rather “being away”. This is the etymology of “absence” in English, Latin, and Old Norse (Latin: *ab*, “away” + *esse* “being”).<sup>113</sup> Norse: *frá*, “away” + *vera*, “being” – indeed, the prevalence of the Norse word in hagiographic works<sup>114</sup> suggests it may well originate as a calque). Obviously, Old Norse authors knew of the existence of Jews, and they knew that there were not currently any in Iceland or Norway. The crucial matter is just how “away” they imagined them to be in time and space. Later we will explore what possibilities such imaginings provided, but for now we will focus on ascertaining the degrees of absence perceived by our representatives of the authorship in question.

### **Problematising Absence: The Old Norse Perspective**

Although the hindsight of the modern historian sees that it is very unlikely that Jews ever lived within Old Norse-speaking the world, such an apprehension was not universal amongst Old Norse-speaking historians themselves. Several medieval voices proposed the idea that there had been Jews in Scandinavia in the remote past. Firstly, we must consider whether Scandinavians saw themselves as a kind of Jewish presence in the North. There is a noticeable tradition of what we might think of as 'Norse Israelism', that is to say, belief in the descent of the Norwegians (and thus the Icelanders) from the “table of nations” in Genesis 10.<sup>115</sup> Such texts must have served many purposes, and doubtless negotiating notions of Jewishness was not chief amongst them – many genealogies avoid Old Testament roots altogether.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, in order to pursue their primary agendas they could not avoid doing so to some degree. Accounts relating the semi-legendary King Haraldr Hárfagri of Old Norse historiography to Javan, son of Japheth, son of Noah can be found in AM 415 4<sup>o</sup>, *Flateyjarbók*, and the prologue to *Sverris saga* (the latter two also go back as far as Adam). These roaming genealogies all follow the same meandering flow for King Haraldr's descent through several ethnic categories: Beginning with the sons of Japheth, they then move to the Trojans, where they also co-opt the Norse Þórr, then the Anglo-Saxon pantheon, then Óðinn and the Norse pantheon, and finally the Danish Skjöldung dynasty.<sup>117</sup> As an example, here is the shortest of these family trees, subtitled *Langfeðga tal fra*

113 C.T. Onions, C.T. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 4.

114 *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*. ed. by Helle Degenbol et al. (Copenhagen: Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission, 1989-) s.v. “frávera”. Available online at: <http://www.onp.hum.ku.dk/>

115 Not to be confused with the large amounts of pseudo-scholarship currently circulating under the banner of “Nordic Israelism” or “Norse Israelism”. Much of this writing stems from *Nordisk Israel*, a special interest group which is a surviving offshoot from Victorian “British Israelism”. They argue that modern Nordic nations really can trace their descent back to Biblical tribes.

116 For a full presentation of the Old Norse regnal tradition with accompanying translations, see: Alexander M. Bruce. *Scyld and Scef. Expanding the Analogues*. (London: Routledge, 2002) pp. 92-96. 111-113, 114-119, 121-122, 141-150.

117A common motif amongst medieval historians, probably deriving from the *Etymologiae*: “Japheth means width, for from

*Noa til varra konunga.* (“A Reckoning of Ancestry from Noah until our Kings”). The manuscript dates from 1310 but as an encyclopedic text with earlier antecedents it clearly represents a much older, originally Old English tradition:<sup>118</sup>

Japhet Noa s., faðir Iaphans, f. Zechim, faður Ciprvs, f. Celivs, f. Satvrnvs i Krit, f. Iupiter, f. Erichonii, f. Troes, f. Ilus, f. Lamedon, f. Priami konungs i Troeo. Mimon eða Memmon het konungr i Troeo, hann atte dottur Priami konungs, þeira svn het Tror, er ver kollvm Þor, hann var faðir Hloriþa, þeira s. Einriði, hans s. Vingepor, hans s. Vingener, hans s. Moda, hans s. Magi, hans s. Seskef vel Sescef, Beðvig, Athra, Itermann, Heremotr, Scealdua, Beaf, Eat, Goðvlf, Finn, Frealaf, Voden, þann kollvm ver Oðen, fra honum ero komnar flestar konunga ettir i norð alfvna heimsins; hann var Tyrkia konungr; hann flyði fyr Romveriom norðr hegat. Oden, Niorðr i Noatvnm, Ynfguifreyr, Fiolnir, [Svegðir], Vallande, Visbvr, Domalldr, Domar, Dyggvi, Dagr, Agni Skialfar boandi, Alrekr, Yngvi, Iorvndr, Avn hinn Gamle, Egill Tunnadolgr, Ottar vendil kraka, Apils at Vppsælvm, Eysteinn, Yngva, Bræt Qnundr, Ingialldr illraði, Olaftr tretelgia, Haldan hvitbeinn, Eysteinn, Halfdan milldi, Guðrøðr gæfoglafi, Halfdan svart, Haralldr harfagri.<sup>119</sup>

Japhet, son of Noah, father of Javan, father of Zechim, father of Cyprus, father of Celius, father of Saturnus of Crete, father of Jupiter, Father of Erichthonius, father of Tros, father of Ilus, father of Lamedon, father of King Priam of Troy. The king of Troy was called Mimon or Memmon. He married King Priam's daughter. They had a son called Tror, whom we call Þórr. He was the father of Hloriði, whose son was Einriði, his son was Vingipórr, his son was Vinginir, his son was Móða, his son was Mági, his son was Seskef, more properly Sescef, Beðvig, Athra, Itermann, Heremótr, Scealdua, Beaf, Eat, Góðulfi, Finn, Frealaf, Voden, whom we call Óðinn and it is from him that most royal families in the Northern part of the world are descended. He was the King of the Turks. He fled from the Romans up here to the north. Óðinn, Njqrðr of Nóatún, Yngvi-Freyr, Fjqlnir, [Svegðir], Vallandi, Vísburr, Dómalldr, Dómarr, Dyggvi, Dagr, Agni dweller at Skjalf, Alrekr, Yngvi, Jqrundr, Auðunn (?) the Old, Egill Tunnadólgr, Óttar vendill kraka, Aðils of Uppsala, Eysteinn, Yngva, Braut Qnundr, Ingialldr illráði, Óláfr trételgia, Hálfdan Hvítbeinn, Eysteinn, Hálfdan gqfuglafi, Hálfdan svart, Haraldr Hárfagri.

This Israelism does not have to mean that the writer considered himself to have some kind of descent

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him were born the pagan nations, and because wide is the multitude of believers among the gentiles, Japheth means was named from that width”. St. Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville.* trans. by Stephen A. Barney *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 163.

118 Anthony Faulkes. “The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library” in *Sjöttu Ritgerðir helgaðar Jakob Benediktssyni.* ed. by Einar G. Pétursson & Jónas Kristjánsson. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977) passim.

119 *Alfræði Íslenszk. Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur.* vol. 3. ed. by Kr. Kálund. (Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1917-18) pp. 52-53.

from “Jews” – that is to say, whatever he understood by the terms *gyðingar* or *júðar*. Firstly, we do not know how far he connected “Old Testament-ness” to Jewishness at all. As shall be seen, at least one medieval Icelandic scribe did so, but of course Abraham is the more widely agreed upon candidate for “the first Jew”. Secondly, the time span here is a very long one. By the time Óðinn comes to Scandinavia, this lineage has gone from being Old Testament to Trojan to Saxon. Even if the text's authorship or audience did not think in terms of such ethnic categories, they would surely notice the names become decreasingly alien and increasingly recognisable. For many, time and trajectory might well have scrubbed away the Jewishness of King Haraldr's ancestry, leaving only a spectacular pedigree and a firm connection to the world of the Bible. Thirdly, this is essentially the genealogy of a ruling line – all medieval kings of Norway traced their descent back to Haraldr Hárfagri. The prologue to *Snorra Edda*, which draws on the *langfæðgatal* in multiple instances, vaguely suggests that all Scandinavians are descended from the Æsir: *Æsir tóku sér kvánsföng þar innan lands, en sumir sonum sínum, ok urðu þessar attir fjölmennar, at umb Saxland ok allt þaðan um norðrhálfur dreifðisk svá at þeira tunga, Asiamanna, var eigintunga um öll þessi lönd.*<sup>120</sup> – “The Æsir took wives in the country, as did some of their sons, and this race became so populous that all around Germany and all the way around the Northern part of the world they spread to the extent that their language, that of the Asians, was the only language in all these countries”. Although Snorri also indicates that only the aristocracy have Æsir blood, because Óðinn's son, Sæmingar, is the progenitor of *Nórekskonungar ... ok svá jarlar ok aðrir ríkismenn* – “the Kings of Norway ... and also the earls and other nobility”. Otherwise, there is nothing to connect the various genealogies with ordinary people. King Haraldr and the nobles may well have been considered to have distantly Jewish roots, but not the average Norwegian or Icelander. This accords with one of the motivations behind such tallies of ancestors as supposed by Anthony Faulkes: “to support the claims to nobility of individual families, both to differentiate them from commoners and in rivalry with other families either within the same national group or outside it”.<sup>121</sup>

This said, the position that the characters in Genesis ought to be considered Jewish is not entirely irrational nor, as we can infer from the occasional attempt to counter it, especially rare. From the outset, Christian theology has considered the problem of “the end of Jewishness” – i.e. at what point ought Mary and the apostles be thought of as Christians rather than Jews. It has devoted rather less energy to perhaps an even more problematic question: at what point in Biblical history is it plausible to *begin* labelling people Jews? Is it with Abraham, or the sons of Jacob, or the division of Israel and Judah in Kings etc.? To what extent should Hebrews and Jews be considered synonymous? It is relatively easy

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120 Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. ed. by Anthony Faulkes. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1988) p. 6.

121 Anthony Faulkes. “Descent from the Gods”, *Medieval Scandinavia* 11. (1978-9) p. 93.

to say that the New Testament marks a change of direction, and that the focus – and with it God's covenant – thereby shifts to the gentiles. But the Old Testament rather undermines this claim. After all, its metanarrative really revolves around the emergence of “God's chosen people” or “Israel”, who by the book of Exodus seem to be identical with the Jews. If Christian thinkers accept Israelism then they get the positives of affinity with the Jews, i.e. the covenant with God, but they necessarily implicate themselves to some degree with the negatives, i.e. the enduring shame of the Jewish people for rejecting (and killing) Christ. As the *Icelandic Homily Book* says, citing the infamous passage in Matthew 27:25: *En allr lýfr svarape. Se blóþ hans yfer oss. oc yfer óra sǫno*<sup>122</sup> – “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.” The 12<sup>th</sup> century *Veraldar saga* tackles this issue head on:

fra þesvm .iii. sonvm Noa er komið allt mankyn. þær þiodir erv komnar fra Kam er bygdv svdrhalfo heimsins. En þer fra Sem er austrveg bygdv ok þadan er Gydingalydr. En þær þiodor fra Iafeð er norðrhalfv bygdv ... þessir varo langfed<g>ar i odrvm alldri heims ok patriarche. Noi ok Sem Arfaxat ok Cainan Sal<e> ok Heber er Hebrei erv fra komnar. i hvsi Heber hellz in sama tvnga sem adr hafði mælt verit. Af hans nafni hetir ebresca sv tvnga er a Gyþingalidi er mælt...<sup>123</sup> Sv þioð er komin fra Esav er kavllod er Idomevs en Gyþinga lyð<r> fra Jacob ... fra Jvdas var Cristr drotin varr komin ok af hans nafni erv Gyþingar Ivðei callaðir.<sup>124</sup>

From these three sons of Noah are descended all mankind. Those nations who descend from Ham are settled in the southern part of the world, and those from Shem settled the east and from them come the Jewish people, and those nations who settled the northern part come from Japheth ... These were the ancestors and patriarchs during the second Age of the World: Noah and Shem, Arpachshad and Cainan, Salah and Eber from whom the Hebrews are descended. In the house of Eber the same language which had been spoken before [the tower of Babel] is preserved. Hebrew is named after him, the language which is spoken amongst the Jewish people ... The nation which is known as the Edomites are descended from Esau and the people of the Jews from Jacob ... Our Lord Christ is descended from Judah and from his name the *Gyðingar* are called Jews.

The author claims that only the descendants of Judah will be *gyðingar* or *Judaei*. This stands rather in contradiction to Genesis 49, which defines the tribes of Israel much more broadly. In doing so, he creates a narrative where Scandinavians can feel affinity to the history of the Bible through Japheth, but at the same time position themselves positively in relation to the *gyðingar/júðar*, from whom there can now be now question of them being descended. This position does not contradict those we have just

122 “A ioladagin” in *Homiliu-Bók. Isländska Homilier efter en Handskrift från Tolfte Århundradet*. ed. by Theodor Wisén. (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups Förlag, 1872) p. 174. Henceforth *Homilubók*.

123 *Veraldar saga*. ed. by Jakob Benediktsson. (Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1944) pp. 13-14.

124 Ibid. at p. 19.

seen in the royal lineages, but it does qualify them. *Veraldar saga* gives the Scandinavians and other Europeans a Japhethic heritage, but stresses that they are explicitly neither *gyðingar* nor *júðar*. The etymology of the word Jew, *judæus*, etc. from Judah has been widely posited since antiquity, and need not be controversial in itself. However, the author of *Veraldar saga* reveals his urgency to use this as a device to separate “Jew” from Northern gentile when he commits a striking syllogistic fallacy: if *gyðingar* are distinguished by their ancestry from Jacob (*en Gyþinga lýð <r> fra Iacob*) and *júðar* are distinguished by the fact they come from Judah (*af hans nafni eru Gyþingar Ivðei callaðir*), then why is *júðar* a synonym of *gyðingar*, not a subset? It follows, then, that in the author's mind an interchangeable category of *gyðingar/júðar* must predate his knowledge of the etymology. He was apparently not willing to relinquish the synonymy of the two words. Therefore, his onomastic approach has been improperly applied in order to justify the position he already held – namely that it was important and possible to make absolutely clear that Scandinavians cannot be confused with Jews.

Of all the Japhethic tendencies found in Old Norse literature, there is only one that actually places a character from the Old Testament directly in the North, rather than following his descendants via Troy and so providing further insulation from the potential for Jewish presence. AM 194 8vo is another manuscript from the encyclopedic tradition, dated to c. 1387. In the section entitled *Landafræði* (“Geography”) it gives the following information:

Iapeth atti VII syni, þeira nöfn voro þessi: Gomer, Magoc, Madai, Iuban, Tubal, Masok, Tirak. Þessi ero þiodlönd i þeim hluta heims, er Eyropa heiter: Svíþiod sum hinn micla, þar réð Magoc, Kylfingaland, þath kóllum ver Garda-riki, þar var Madai, Grikland, þar réð Iuban, Bolgara-land, þar var Tirac, Un[g]araland,, Saxland, Frakland, Spanland, þar var Tubal, *Romverialand*, *Danmark*, *Svíþiod*, *Noregr*, þar var Gomer, Gallia, Capado[cia], þar var Masoc.<sup>125</sup>

Japheth had seven sons. These were their names: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras. These are the nations in that part of the world which is called Europe: Greater Sweden [Scythia], Magog ruled there. Kylfingaland, which we call Russia, Madai was there. Greece was ruled by Javan. Bulgaria, Tiras was there. Hungary, Germany, France, Spain, Tubal was there. *Rome*, *Denmark*, *Sweden*, *Norway*, *Gomer was there*, Gallia [Galatia?], Cappadocia, Masoc was there.

Again, this short statement cannot be taken as irrefutable evidence that a medieval Norwegian/Icelander believed that there had been Jews in the North. The proposition *þar var Gomer* certainly looks like it applies to *Noregr* directly, but could potentially apply to one of the other three

<sup>125</sup> *Alfræði Íslenszk. Íslandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*. vol. 1. ed. by Kr. Kålund. (Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1908) p. 8. My emphasis.

areas too. On the other hand, in opposition to the “decontamination” of the meandering *langfedðgatolur* and the urgent delineation of *Veraldar saga*, we do get the strong impression here of a writer who was unconcerned that his readership might misunderstand his ambiguity – that is to say, get the impression that Gomer, a Jew or proto-Jew, had been physically present in Norway and was their ancestor. Moreover, unlike his fellow genealogists, the scribe of AM 194 8vo is not attempting to explain the shared heritage of *norðrhálfir heimsins*. In fact he uses the Old Testament to explain why Scandinavians are distinct from Germany, Russia, Scythia, France etc. Those peoples are descended from Magog, Madai and Tubal. Through Gomer, however, the people of *Danmork*, *Svipiod* and *Noregr* are kindred to a no less splendid people than those of *Romverialand*. Exhibiting such a bold rejection of affinity to the nations of the north and west, and such strong preference for the south, should prompt further consideration of the possibility that a degree of Jewish presence in the distant past was by no means universally unthinkable nor unpalatable. Attitudes towards these *langfedðgatolur*, particularly the one found in DG 11 4to, will be examined more closely later in this thesis.

If the regnal and genealogical material is problematic because it is hard to see whether or not it is really dealing with a Jewish topos, we are happily on much firmer ground with a particular episode in the *Historia Norwegie* (1150 – 1200). Although this text was written in Latin rather than Old Norse, its obviously Norwegian provenance,<sup>126</sup> content matter, and its relationship with vernacular sources<sup>127</sup> make it very much pertinent to this discussion. In its account of the indigenous peoples of Orkney, the text describes two groups:

Originally those islands were inhabited by Pents and Papes. One of these races, the Pents, only a little taller than pygmies, accomplished miraculous achievements by building towns, morning and evening, but at midday every ounce of strength deserted them and they hid for fear in underground chambers ... The Papes were so called on account of the vestments in which they clothed themselves like priests, and for this reason all priests are known as papen in the German tongue. One of the islands is still named Papey from them. However, as the appearance and letter-forms of the books they left there behind them testify, they were from Africa and clove to the Jewish faith.<sup>128</sup>

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126Although the author was almost certainly Norwegian, it has been supposed that it might have been written in Denmark. See: Svend Ellehøj. *Studier over den ældste norrøne historieskrivning*. (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1965) pp. 146-147.

127Generally the *Historia* is seen as having common sources with West Norse texts, and perhaps some direct borrowings from Ari Þorgilsson. However, many scholars, most prominently Gustav Storm, have suggested that the vernacular *Ágrip* borrowed extensively from the *Historia*. For a general study, see: *ibid.* passim. esp. pp. 114-115, 138-141, 203-219, 242-245, 256, 294-301.

128*Historia Norwegie*. ed. by Inger Ekrem & Lars Boje Mortensen. trans. by Peter Fisher. (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2003) pp. 65-67.

This remarkable statement firmly places a Jewish community in the Scandinavian past. The Papes are one manifestation of the *papar* motif; the idea also seen in *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* that there was some kind of Celtic clergy living in Iceland before the coming of Scandinavian settlers during the late ninth century. Although the Icelandic *papar* are not quite so exotic: *Dá váru hér menn kristnir, þeir es Norðmenn kalla papar, en þeir fóru síðan á braut, af því at þeir vildu eigi vesa hér við heiðna menn, ok létu eftir bækir írskar ok bjöllur ok bagla; af því mátti skilja, at þeir váru menn írskir.*<sup>129</sup> – “There were Christians here then, those whom Scandinavians call papar, but then they went away because they did not want to be here alongside heathens, and they left behind them Irish books and croziers and vestments. From this we may discern that they were Irishmen”. By the time that the *Historia Norvegie* was written, Orkney was monoculturally Norse, and the earls of Orkney swore fealty to the Norwegian crown. We can certainly think of it as a part of Scandinavia (perhaps Norwegians of the time would have thought of it as *Norðrlönd*) albeit an outlying and sometimes troubled territory.<sup>130</sup> Like the Icelandic *papar*, the Papes are absent in the sense of something that was once here, but is now gone. Though while the former simply *fara á braut* – “leave, go away”, the latter disappear much more violently. As the *Historia* says: “Ragnvald jarl, crossing the Solund Sea with a large fleet, totally destroyed these peoples after stripping them of their long-established dwellings and made the islands subject to themselves.”<sup>131</sup>

William P.L. Thompson has suggested several theories for explaining the Jewishness of the Papes:<sup>132</sup> 1) That the depiction of the *papar* here has been augmented by legends of Mediterranean missionaries in the British Isles, such as Augustine of Canterbury. He also cites a sixteenth century Scottish tradition from the *Brevarium Aberdonense* that “Pope” Boniface and St. Serf were an Israelite and a Canaanite respectively. 2) That making some of the indigenous Orcadians Jewish was a move to discredit the native Church which had existed before the coming of the Scandinavians. Thus, by proving that Norwegian possession of Orkney had ultimately advanced the state of Christianity there, the *Historia* argues that Orkney should more properly belong to the archbishopric of Trondheim rather than the proposed archbishopric of St. Andrews. 3) That Orcadians and Norwegians did travel in the Eastern Mediterranean on their way to the Holy Land. As they would have been trained only to read minuscule script, the non-insular uncial and cursive scripts they encountered there would have not been legible to them, but might well have resembled whatever writing the indigenous church left behind. The statement would then be based on the empirical reasoning of the literary milieu to which the writer of

129 *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*. vol. 1. ed. by Jakob Benediktsson. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1968) p. 5.

130 For a study that uses *Orkneyinga saga* as a source for understanding the various territorial, political and identity issues in late twelfth century Orkney, see: Ian Beuermann. “Jarla sögur Orkneyja. Status and Power of the Earl of Orkney according to their Sagas” in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*. ed. by Gro Steinsland et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011) esp. 153-155.

131 *Historia Norvegie*. p. 67.

132 William P. L. Thompson. “The Orkney *Papar*-names” in *West over Sea. Studies in Scandinavian Sea-borne Expansion and Settlement Before 1300*. ed. by Beverley Ballin Smith, Simon Taylor & Gareth Williams. (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 528-530.

the *Historia* belonged.

None of these suggestions are entirely without flaws (of course, when studying such a small reference in a work of this age we can hardly expect them to be). It is certainly not impossible that post-medieval sources can preserve much older material. However, the tentative suggestion that a twelfth century Norwegian work might represent an earlier attestation of an idea otherwise only found in a Scottish source more than 350 years younger would require some explanation of how and where a common tradition might emerge. The image of Norse-speaking clerics examining the books of the indigenous church is also problematic. Firstly, we have already seen this trope in the case of the Icelandic *papar*. It might be a narrative convention without any roots in historical fact. Secondly, even if it is historical fact, if Norwegian/Icelandic priests could look at these manuscripts and make the quite plausible judgement that they were Irish, why did Norwegian/Orcadian priests look at them and reach the outlandish conclusion that they belonged to African Jews? Finally, the proposition that this section may be an article of what Thompson terms “inter-diocesan warfare” is probably the best of these theories, although we might note that it is a fairly circuitous way to make a point. For my own contribution to the debate over the potential inspiration for the Papes, I would like to point out the resonances between the *Historia*'s Pentland and the Hvíttramannaland of *Eiríks saga Rauða* (c. 1263). This similarity does not explain their Jewishness, but it potentially indicates that the author of the *Historia* was inclined towards exploring the fantastic more than the historical in this case. Clearly, it would be anachronistic to suggest that the *Historia* borrowed from *Eiríks saga*, but it is not unthinkable that they are ultimately drawing a common source. Both feature the theme of an exotically dressed people living alongside an indigenous people with a proclivity towards the subterranean:

[Þeir] fundu þar [á Marklandi] Skrælinga fimm, ok var einn skeggjaðr, konur váru tvær ok börn tvau. Tóku þeir Karlsefni sveinana, en hinir kómusk undan, ok sukku þeir Skrælingar í jörð niðr. Sveina þessa tvá hqfðu þeir með sér. Þeir kenndu þeim mál, ok váru skírðir. Þeir nefndu móður sína Vethildi ok fōður Óvægi. Þeir sōgðu, at konungar stjōrnudu Skrælingum, ok hét annarr þeira Avaldamon, en annarr Avaldidida. Þeir kváðu þar engin hús. Lāgu menn þar í hellum eða holum. Þeir sōgðu þar liggja land qðrum megin, gagnvart sínu landi, er þeir menn byggðu, er váru í hvítum klæðum ok báru stangir fyrir sér, ok váru festar við flíkr ok æpðu hátt, ok ætla menn, at þat hafi verit Hvíttramannaland eða Írland it mikla.<sup>133</sup>

[They] found there [on Markland] five Skrælingar, one was bearded, there were two women and

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133 *Eiríks Saga Rauða*. in *Íslenske Fornrit*, vol. 4. ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, 1935) pp. 233-234.

two children. Karlsefni and the others took the boys, but the others escaped, and the Skrælingar sank down into the earth. They took the two boys with them. They taught them how to speak and had them baptised. They said their mother was called Vethildi and their father Óvægi. They said that the Skrælingar were ruler by kings, one of whom was called Avaldamon while the other was called Avaldidida. They said they did not have houses. People lived in caves or holes. They said that opposite the country where they live there was another country where people wore white clothes, and processed about with staffs and wore long fringes and whooped loudly, and people think that must have been Hvítamannaland [“Land of the White Men”] or Greater Ireland.

It does not necessarily contradict any of the aforementioned hypotheses to point out that the medieval imagination was prone to conflating ethnic categories according to whatever psychological or political factors underpinned their meaning. In Anglo-Norman literature we can see vikings, Vandals, Anglo-Saxons, Jews, non-Latin Christians, and Scots all becoming “Saracens” in order to “articulate a wide range of anxieties that tied to race and nation”.<sup>134</sup> We might well think of Orkney as “contested space”. The indigenous Picts had, whether by extermination or assimilation, disappeared entirely by the ninth century. Scotland was just ten miles to the south, although Caithness (Norse: Kataness) was not formally recognised by the Norwegians as Scottish until the Treaty of Perth in 1266.<sup>135</sup> *Orkneyinga saga* (c. 1230) features a cast of characters with mixed Scottish-Norse names, and frequently narrates Norse-speaking Orcadians interfering in affairs to the south, and vice versa.<sup>136</sup> Against this backdrop, it is likely that the robed African Jews would not have felt so incongruous to their intended audience as they do to us. Orkney was, and had always been, a place of conflicting identities, with a precariously Norwegian present and an utterly alien past. An exotic but sophisticated civilisation fading away under external pressure probably felt like the sort of thing that happened in Orkney – we might speculate whether the Earls of Orkney worried it might one day happen to them too, going themselves from victors to vanquished under the Scots. Neither is the Jewishness of the Papes entirely random; it is a trait that performs functions which are relevant to the Orcadian metanarrative. Two of the most important destinies which medieval Christians imagined for the Jews were 1) to be superseded by Christianity, 2) to be victims of violence and expulsion. Just as Anglo-Normans could make any militant unbeliever a Saracen, it is not surprising that our Norwegian historian made the doomed *papar* Jews.

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134 Jeffrey J. Cohen. *Medieval Identity Machines*. (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) p. 219.

135 For the original treaty see: *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 8. ed. by Christian Christoph Andreas Lange. (Kristiania: P.T. Malling, 1874) pp. 13-17.

136 Consider also Gareth Williams's observation: “The earlier chapters of *Orkneyinga saga* include frequent references to conflict between the Orkney jarls and native rulers in the north of Scotland, and the domination of Caithness by the Orkney jarls seems to have been in question until the reign of Þorfinn the Mighty ... In addition, Moddan and his children have a mixture of Norse and Scottish names, in contrast to the purely Norse names of most of the inhabitants of Orkney mentioned in the saga. This ... suggest[s] at least a mixed descent”. Gareth Williams. “These people were high-born and thought a lot of themselves: The Family of Moddan of Dale” in Ballin Smith et al, 2007. p. 133.

How should this episode affect our notion of Jewish absence in Old Norse literature? Clearly, this was very much a minority position. The theme of Jewish rather than Irish *papar* was not applied in Iceland, perhaps precisely because, as seen, it was perceived as applicable in the contested frontier land of Orkney but not in isolated Iceland. Here Fuery's mooted typology of absence and the charged terms of *judenrein/judenfrei* become pertinent once to our discussion once again. Reading the *Historia* alongside Old Norse literature as a whole, we can see an understanding that there once had been a Jewish population on the fringe of the North, but it had been annihilated. This state of absence, of things removed or destroyed, could be characterised as *once-here-now-gone*. Such an absence precipitates the possibility for haunting, for the desire or fear of a return. It is contrapuntal to the predominant state of Jewish absence in Old Norse (where Jews are observed in foreign locations) which we can term *never-here-now-there*. The idea that Jews are somewhere else, waiting to encroach into virgin territory is a different discourse, and a different concern, than the idea that they might return to territory from which they have been removed. The terminology of *judenrein/judenfrei*, as employed by Krummel in a Middle English context, tends towards the former position. Consider this definition from a dictionary of Nationalist Socialist jargon: *judenfrei. Bezeichnung für die vollzogene Verdrängung der Juden aus Institutionen, Berufen, Wirtschaftszweigen, Wohnstätten usw. Gelegentlich auch: frei von jüdischem Einfluß ... judenrein. Gleichbedeutend mit judenfrei.*<sup>137</sup> – “judenfrei. Designation for the completed expulsion of the Jews from institutions, professions, industry, homes, etc. Occasionally: free of Jewish influence ... judenrein. Synonymous with judenfrei”. Krummel enriches her critical vocabulary by using these terms, but in a medieval Scandinavian context, although it is useful shorthand for “without Jews, 'cleansed' of Jews, etc.”, the lack of differentiation between these two states of absence (one where once-present Jews have been eliminated, one where they can be *once-here-now-gone*, or *never-here*, etc.) will often be limiting.<sup>138</sup>

### **On anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism**

Now that we know what is meant here by “Jewish absence”, we shall turn to the much contested attitudes that medieval Christians took towards Jews. This is a vast topic on which substantial studies have been written. Therefore, the treatment here will not be exhaustive – some of the basic problems and trends in scholarship will be sketched, and then each term will be defined as it is used in this study. One of the key battle lines has been the question of whether we can speak of “anti-Semitism” when discussing the Middle Ages, or whether we ought to restrict ourselves to the word “anti-Judaism”.

Both of these terms have connotations which can potentially hamper discussion. The word “anti-

137 Cornelia Schmitz-Berning. *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000) pp. 333-334.

138 I expand this typology of absence in: Richard Cole. “Towards a Typology of Absence in Old Norse Literature”, *Exemplaria* 28, 3 (2016, forthcoming). However, for the purposes of this study I do not wish to overcomplicate the already infant field of anti-Judaism studies in Old Norse by introducing a complex theoretical lens.

Semitism” is a product of the 1870s and 1880s, when Wilhelm Marr, an otherwise fairly unremarkable figure in the history of Judaeophobia, began to publish pamphlets under the name of the organisation which he had founded, the *Antisemiten-Liga*.<sup>139</sup> Although, as we have already seen in the case of Trachtenburg and Krummel, there are scholars who have felt that a dialectic process led from the Middle Ages to the horrors of the twentieth century, it is nonetheless true that a word which began in Germany at the close of the nineteenth century will feel more applicable to the intellectual currents which were the immediate forerunners of National Socialism (although as a historical curiosity, we might note that Marr rejected anti-Semitism when it was adopted by later populists, whom he referred to as “gay 'heil' shouters”).<sup>140</sup> The world in which Marr coined the word *Antisemitismus* is commonly assumed to have had fairly different ideas about race, and the supposed science thereof, from those of the medieval period. Moreover, there were events and concepts which shaped Marr's reality that did not even exist in the Middle Ages, such as the principle of a nation's right to self-determination, and the theological innovations of the Reformation, etc. So can “anti-Semitism” really articulate a medieval phenomenon? We will return to this issue.

Anti-Judaism might seem like a safer way to describe certain movements in medieval thought, but it too is charged with unhelpful resonances. To say that someone is not anti-Semitic, only anti-Jewish, is to say that they do not despise Jews as people, only Judaism as a religion. Ergo, it often amounts to saying “well, such-and-such-a-person had *bad* views about Jews, but only because he was such a *good* Christian”. Just as it is hard to choose the term anti-Semitism without inadvertently invoking images of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is hard to choose the term anti-Judaism without inadvertently invoking a sense of apologism. To quote Hubert Wolf: “Christian or Catholic anti-Semitism [is] usually called anti-Judaism to make it more palatable.”<sup>141</sup> Both Berulfsen and Adams do indeed prefer the term *antijødisk*, but as scholars of medieval Scandinavia their use of the term is not so problematic. Firstly, there was no actual Jewish presence, so imagining unpleasant depictions of Jews in Old Norse or Old Danish as something abstract and pious is not such a stretch. Secondly, the popular conception that Scandinavia – Denmark in particular – resisted Nazi indoctrination efforts regarding Jews means that it is easier to avoid an impression of somehow being an apologist for later events: whatever hateful things medieval Scandinavians may have said in the Middle Ages, they cannot in any way be construed to have led to bloodshed in the 1930s and 40s.

Let us examine further how the variance of these two terms has been applied in a medieval context.

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139 Moshe Zimmerman. *Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Anti-Semitism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 8, 112.

140 Ibid. at p. 135.

141 Hubert Wolf. *Pope and Devil. The Vatican's archives and the Third Reich*. trans. by Kenneth Kronenburg (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) p. 119.

Gavin Langmuir defined anti-Judaism as a primarily religious objection “[on behalf of] people who accept[ed] a competing system of beliefs and practices and consider[ed] certain genuine Judaic beliefs and practices as inferior”.<sup>142</sup> This does not mean he thought that anti-Judaism was strictly the peaceful concern of religious scholars. Langmuir cites the Jewish martyrs who refused to convert during the preparations for the first crusade as victims of anti-Jewish violence, for example. Their Christian persecutors had an understanding that the Jews did not accept Christ as the messiah. Their response was clearly horrific, but their perception of Judaism was essentially correct. Conversely, Langmuir reasoned that anti-Semitism was not a prejudice against actual Jewish beliefs, but fallacious Jewish stereotypes. This was where:

... Jews were being killed for what they were not. If by “antisemitism” we mean not only its racist manifestation but all instances in which people, because they are labelled Jews, are feared as symbols of subhumanity and hated for threatening characteristics they do not in fact possess, then antisemitism in all but name was widespread in Northern Europe by 1350, when many believed that Jews were beings incapable of fully rational thought who conspired to overthrow Christendom ...<sup>143</sup>

Interestingly, Langmuir's definition of anti-Semitism is 1) not predicated on the presence of Jews, and 2) as we shall see in the following chapters, describes beliefs which are certainly found in Old Norse literature. So long as we bear in mind that the anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century was shaped by different forces to that of, for example, the thirteenth, it seems reasonable to apply the term in a medieval Scandinavian context. It is a useful way to describe negative images of Jews which are chiefly focussed on aspects of their being outside of Judaism conceived as belief system, e.g. their bodies or their intellects. As a division this is inevitably somewhat inaccurate. There will always be some overlap between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, because 1) people are not always clearly motivated by one rather than the other, and 2) A statement intended as one can be received as the other. Nonetheless, it is surely more accurate than to use the same term to describe both a manuscript illumination showing a throng of malicious looking Jews with hooked noses (as in the *Teiknibók*)<sup>144</sup> and an *exemplum* about the joy of a Jew who converts to Christianity (as in *Mariu saga*).<sup>145</sup> It is also important to stress that while I accept that “not being true” is an important part of defining anti-Semitism, I do not accept as Langmuir does that “being true” is a necessary quality of anti-Judaism. After all, if this were the case then an evaluation of whether a gentile account of the crucifixion was more anti-Jewish than anti-Semitic would lead us to the ludicrous position of examining whether the alleged culpability of the

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142 Gavin Langmuir. *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 57.

143 Ibid. at p. 301

144 Björn Th. Björnsson. *Íslenszka Teiknibókin í Arnasafni*. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1954) p. 57.

145 “Vor frv hialpadi iuda.” in *Mariu Saga. Legender om Jomfru Maria og hendes jertegn, efter gamle haandskrifter*. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: Brögger & Christie, 1871) pp. 963-965.

Palestinian Jews is “genuine” or imagined. For this reason, my definitions are somewhat more relaxed than those of Langmuir. Here, then, anti-Judaism simply refers to the whole field of polemic which recognises that Judaism is a belief system with competing truth-claims to Christianity, and reacts with hostility to those claims without necessarily involving commentary on other facets of the Jew as a being. As Langmuir points out, it is still generally unpleasant and sometimes still violent, but it is generally a distinct tendency from anti-Semitism. Anthony Bale deftly summarises this sort of approach:

To argue against the usury practised by the Jews of Norwich on the grounds of Judaism as opposed to Christianity might be called 'anti-Judaism'. To represent Moshe [משה] as Mosse-Mokke in [a] fictive, grotesquely physical register, in which an imagined 'Jewish' body is the cynosure for a range of vices, is antisemitic ... 'Antisemitic' will be my preferred term throughout; there are few 'real' Jews in the narratives I consider, only deprecatory non-Jewish ideas about Jews.<sup>146</sup>

Unlike Bale, however, I choose to hyphenate my terms. This has been a surprisingly controversial issue in studies of hostility towards Jews. As Shmuel Almog writes: “If you use the hyphenated form, you consider the words 'Semitism', 'Semite', 'Semitic' as meaningful ... It is obvious then that 'anti-Semitism' is a non-term, because it is not directed against so-called 'Semitism’”.<sup>147</sup> Almog dismisses the word “Semite” because it refers to a vague and erroneous conception of something that does not in fact exist. As Bale says: “I have chosen not to hyphenate 'antisemitic' as, outside linguistics, there is no such thing as a Semite; it is only a negative category forced onto Jews, and others”.<sup>148</sup> These points are obviously true. However, taking such a rational position does not help us get inside the anti-Semitic mind, which ultimately must be our aim if we are to produce realistic readings of our material. “Semitism” – the word which Marr tellingly invented before *Antisemitismus* – does not exist in the real world, but it is still a fixture in the mind of gentiles who obsess over Jews. It refers to the special attention paid by a gentile towards a Jew – or more often the idea of a Jew. That is exactly why we must accept the term in a study of Old Norse literature. These authors had almost certainly never seen a real Jew themselves nor met anyone who had. He might be a distant enemy, or rarely, as in *Gyðinga saga*, an object of sympathy. Anti-Semitism was as possible as philo-Semitism, that is to say, the eulogising or identification with Jews, which we will later examine more closely in the works of Brandr Jónsson. This is also true of simple allo-Semitism, “the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in

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146 Anthony Bale. *The Jew in the Medieval Book. English Antisemitisms 1350-1500*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 3.

147 Shmuel Almog. “What's in a Hyphen?”, *SICSA Report: Newsletter of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism*, 2 (Summer 1989) pp. 1-2.

148 Bale 2010. p. 3.

all or most social intercourse”.<sup>149</sup> There was not one universal “signified” for the particle “-Semitism”. Whatever “the Jews” meant to individuals in medieval Scandinavia must have been just as heterodox then as now, despite the broad categories hitherto discussed. The hyphen serves to remind us that whether anti-, philo-, allo- or any other prefix, we are dealing with the fundamental problem of what happens when Jews are experienced through gentile eyes.

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149 Zygmunt Bauman. “Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern” in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*. ed. by Bryan Cheyette & Laura Marcus. (Polity Press, 1998) p. 143.

## Chapter 2: Learned and Popular Knowledge of Jewish Culture

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

- Proverbs 9:9

Before exploring the diverse and complex conceptions of Jews and Judaism which we encounter in Old Norse literature, it is necessary to examine the basic premise upon which such positions depended. Before we ask what Icelanders or Norwegians might have *felt* or *thought* about Jews, we need to know what they felt or thought they *knew* about them. The division between opinion and knowledge has long been a fraught issue but, foregoing a protracted discussion of epistemology, here the latter is defined as the uncontentious facts upon which hypothetical critics and defenders of the Jews can agree, extraneous to any “knowledge” about Jews that serves only to define the identity of Christianity. E.g. an anti-Semite may maintain that he completely and utterly “knows” that Jewish moneylenders will always swindle Christian borrowers; he may have absolutely no doubt in that prejudice at all, but for our purposes this does not make his proposition “knowledge”. On the other hand, that the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is א (*aleph*) is a knowable fact, regardless of whether the zealot later uses that knowledge to link Jews with malicious magical inscriptions or the scholar uses it to comment on Psalm 119.

This line of enquiry is challenging beyond its definition of terms. Recreating an archetypal *aeterna veritas* which can be interrogated in order to recreate the tastes and opinions current of a particular historical period is an obviously problematic strategy: after all, nobody would seriously attempt to conjure such an imaginary figure in order to understand the psychology of our own age. Every individual today has their own personal response to texts and the ideas they convey. There is no reason to suppose this was otherwise during the Middle Ages. That said, our archetypal reader might be more informative if he could be defined precisely geographically, diachronically, socially, etc. But when surveying knowledge of Jews extant in Old Norse literature, our sources are so few that they largely elude attempts at reliable periodisation or localisation. If the chronological reach of our study commences with the conjectured date of the earliest known West Norse homilies (early 1100s)<sup>150</sup> and ends with the traditional arbitrary epoch of 1500, we are still looking at four centuries of shifting mentalities. In addition to chronological

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David McDougall. “Homilies (West Norse)” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. ed. by Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf. (London: Garland Publishing, 1993) p. 290.

concerns, there is also the question of cultural homogeneity. For most of this period what we now call “Old Norse” remained the shared language of two increasingly divergent societies. Presumably at various points in this four hundred year period, Icelanders and Norwegians would have tended towards differing views of the world and their place in it, but it is not always easy to extricate that which is Icelandic from that which is Norwegian, particularly in the homiletic and religious material in which Jews most frequently appear. Put simply, it is very hard to know where and when to put an archetypal historical reader.

It should also be noted that the level of knowledge about Jews required in order to understand a given text depends largely on its genre. Authors working on different texts would naturally have made different expectations of their respective audiences. For example, in Brandr Jónsson's *Gyðinga saga* Antiochus IV attempts to force the Jews, amongst other religious humiliations, to eat pork: *Kongr baud þeim at sæfa suín ok hafra*. - “The King commanded them to slaughter pigs and goats”.<sup>151</sup> Brandr clearly expects his audience to know enough about Judaism and its dietary restrictions that they will be able to respond sympathetically to the plight of the Jewish martyrs. For a less scholarly example of authorial expectation, we can turn to the Old Norse versions of the Theophilus legend. Here, Theophilus enters a Faustian pact with a Jewish magician: *Þessi ebreus uar fullr af eitri illzķunnar sua sem hinn uesti uillumadr, ok hafði morgum drekt i belviti eilifrar glatanar med slægd ok prettvise sinnar flærdar*<sup>152</sup> - “This Hebrew was full of the poison of evil like the worst heretic, and he had drenched many people in the hell of eternal damnation with the cunning and sneakiness of his deceit”. In this case, the audience are not required to know anything about actual Judaism, but they do need to be familiar with the presupposed notion of Jewish magic and its alleged efficacy; a belief once so widespread that it was also held by those educated Christians who were positively inclined towards Jews.<sup>153</sup> For a still lower level of required knowledge, we might look to the Icelandic *Christmas Day Homily*. Being primarily a retelling of the Gospels, it requires almost no prior knowledge of the Jews or their culture. Anything the homilist feels his congregation ought to know about Jews can be gleaned from the text: they don't necessarily need to know about Jewish culture or history in order to comprehend the shame of denying Christ.

Because of all these complications, in the following chapter we will not attempt a comprehensive dating for the arrival of hypothetical waves of learning into Scandinavia. Nor will we attempt to reconstruct

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151 Brandr Jónsson. *Gyðinga Saga*. ed. by Kirsten Wolf. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1995) p. 7.

152 “De Theophilo” in *Mariu saga*. p. 409.

153 See: Joshua Trachtenburg. *Jewish Magic and Superstition. A Study in Folk Religion*. (New York: Atheneum, 1974) pp. 3-5.

Trachtenburg makes it clear that the idea of “Jew as magician” was a Christian fantasy, one that often had bloody consequences (ibid. at p. 11). Nonetheless, Jews, like other medieval peoples, did have magical traditions, and those traditions were a field in which a Christian scholar could legitimately pursue knowledge. Moreover, the aforementioned variety of positive and negative attitudes towards Jewish magic indicate that its existence was considered a simple fact, i.e. it did not prompt a singular predetermined response.

any one interdependent plateau of scholarship that can be demonstrably connected to a particular time or place in the Middle Ages. Rather, our question is more hypothetical: what was the highest possible degree of knowledge about Jewish culture which an Icelander or Norwegian living at any time in the Middle Ages could have attained? That is to say, what could he have known about their religion, history, law, or language?

### **The origin of Old Norse terminology for Jews**

The answer to our question begins with establishing the minimum amount of knowledge: that is to say, the first point of contact with the topos of Jews and Judaism, merely knowing the word “Jew”. Given the central role played by Jewish characters in the core narratives of Christianity, it is not unsurprising that many European languages have developed a variety of words to describe their ethnicity, some completely interchangeable and others with particular subtleties or connotations. In English, for instance, proper nouns such as “Hebrew” or “Israelite” feel archaic, perhaps confined to rather old-fashioned Biblical exegesis.<sup>154</sup> We can imagine the word “Jew” being employed equally in academic discussion, as a self-identifier, and indeed in anti-Semitic parlance.<sup>155</sup> There are also a number of terms which are used exclusively in a racist context. Old Norse also had a range of designations for Jews, albeit not to the same extent as modern English. Four types are attested in written sources: *gyðingr*, *júði*, *ebresker maðr* plus varied spellings of the Latin *hebraeus* or *judæus*. As shall be seen, all originate in the Christian period. Presumably, the pagan Norse-speakers who negotiated a route through Khazar territory, served the Khan, or traded alongside Radhanites in Baghdad would have required terminology to discuss the religious status of their Jewish peers, but these words are lost to history. It is with the advent of Christianity in Scandinavia that we can first begin to analyse what understandings of Jews and Judaism were contained within the word “Jew” itself.

The earliest identifiable expression of interest in the Jewish topos from within Scandinavia are *potentially* the words found carved onto *Gunnhildkorset*, a walrus-ivory crucifix from Denmark inscribed with both runes and Latin writing. The identifying siglum for the runic inscription DR 413. I say “potentially” because its dating is something of a vexed issue. The cross names three people involved in its production: 1) King Sveinn the Great (“*pro magni Sueonis regis*”) to whom it is indirectly dedicated, 2) his daughter, Gunnhildr, who commissioned it, 3) Liutger, who carved it. From his name and his use of Latin rather than the vernacular we might assume him to be German. The key here would be to identify Sveinn. Harald Langberg summarised the various arguments for and against Sveinn Tjúguskegg (c. 960

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154 On these terms and their conflation, see: David Nirenberg. *Anti-Judaism. The Western Tradition*. (New York: Norton & Company, 2014) pp. 1-2.

155 For a thoughtful deliberation on shifting connotations in modern English, see: Berel Lang. “You Can Take the Jew Out of Jewish... But You Probably Wouldn't”, *The Jewish Daily Forward* (6<sup>th</sup> October, 2006).

- 1014), Sveinn Ástríðarson (c. 1019 - 1074) and Sveinn Eiríksson (1125 – 1157). While admitting that there was no conclusive evidence for any candidate, Langberg cautiously preferred a dating between c. 1075 – c. 1100,<sup>156</sup> reasoning on stylistic grounds and the sophistication of the Danish court at the time that the cross was most likely to have commemorated Sveinn II. The full inscription reads:

Jesus Nazarenus rex judeorum vita mors ecclesia sancta synagoga. Videte [m]anus meas et pedes meos dicit Dominus venite benedicti patris mei dicitur a me maledicti in ignem pater Habraham miserere mei et mitte Lazarum ut [in]tinguat extremum digiti sui in aquam ut refigit filii recordare quia recepisti bona in vita tua. Gunnhildr qui me cernit pro Helena magni Sueonis regis filia Christum oret que me ad memoriam Dominice passionis parari fecerat. Qui in Christum crucifixum credunt Liutgeri memo[ri]am orando faciant qui me sculpsit roga tu Helene que et Gunhild vocat[ur].<sup>157</sup>

Jesus the Nazarene, king of the Jews. Life, death. Holy Church, synagogue. “Look at my hands and my feet” says The Lord, [Luke 24:39] “Come to My Father, you who are blessed. [Matt. 25:34] But you who are cursed, be banished into the flames”. [Matt. 25:41] Father Abraham, be merciful to me and send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool me. Son, consider the good you did in life – Gunnhildr. He who sees me shall pray to Christ for Helena, daughter of King Sveinn the Great, who had me made in memory of the Passion of The Lord. Those who believe in Christ the Crucified, remember Liutger who carved me at the request of Helena, by which Gunnhildr is also known.

Although there is little here that would be considered “knowledge” about Jews according to our earlier definition, and the inscription is neither in West Norse nor from what would later emerge as the West Norse-speaking area, the *Gunhildkors* is nonetheless important because it demonstrates that Scandinavians were capable of meditating on the Jewish topos in a fairly advanced way even in the immediate aftermath of the conversion period when we might otherwise expect consideration of the Jews to be an underdeveloped and ancillary theme (assuming, of course, that Langberg's tentative dating is correct). Giving Jesus the epithet *rex judeorum*, the first attestation of a word for “Jews” in Scandinavia, might appear to be a hollow trope were it not for the cross's accompanying illustration. (see fig 3). Ecclesiastica (west) is a righteous looking queen, waving a banner and sternly presenting a book bearing her name. Synagoga (east) is blind, as per usual in this medieval motif. She is dressed in a vaguely oriental style with much flesh uncovered, and a much longer headdress than her counterpart. She is also tearing her hair out in grief – or rage - unable to read the book before her in which her

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156 Harald Langberg. *Gunhildkorsset. Gunhild's Cross and Medieval Court Art in Denmark*. (Copenhagen: Selskabet til udgivelse af danske Mindesmærker, 1986) pp. 9-10, 17-19, p. 64.

157 Accessed via Rundata 2.5.

name is written. Vita (north) whose attire resembles that of Ecclesiastica, looks out smiling from her panel, indicating a small book to show her name, while Mors (south) is cowed in a manner reminiscent of Synagoga, curled up dead in a casket labelled with her name.



**Fig. 3:** Ecclesia, Vita, Synagoga, Mors from the *Gumbildkors*. Illustration adapted from Langberg, 1986. p. 1.

It is interesting to observe such sophisticated, if unpleasant, discourses at work in an artefact which was produced relatively close to Denmark's missionary period, i.e. not so long after the conversion. The Jews are shown to be lacking spiritual insight, frenzied, incapable of reading their own scripture, Eastern and “otherish” in their material culture, and metonymically aligned with death.<sup>158</sup> There is an obvious spiritual understanding of the Jews here, but Synagoga's exotic costume also hints at a parallel understanding of the Jews as a real and different ethnic group located in a specific time and place. For Liutger, and presumably his audience too, thinking about the Jews was not solely an abstract matter of faith.

The earliest vernacular references to Jews are found, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the West Norse homily books. Perg. 4<sup>to</sup> 15, now known as *The Old Icelandic Homily Book* dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century, as does AM 619 4<sup>o</sup>, *The Old Norwegian Homily Book*. However, these two books clearly represent a much older tradition. A fragment containing homiletic materials, AM 237 fol., has been dated to the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>159</sup> Earlier still, the hand of one of the scribes of an inserted leaf in *The Old Norwegian Homily Book* can be traced to the late eleventh century.<sup>160</sup> Interestingly, in these texts only one appellation is used for the Jews: *gyðingar*. Although it is not the homilists' concern to describe the culture, location or history of the Jewish people, neither do they feel the need to define what a *gyðingr* is. It must have been a widely understood concept among the Norwegian congregations by the 1150s at the very latest. Ergo, the word cannot be a neologism coined

158 For an interesting study of supposed Jewish blindness and emotional instability in the near contemporaneous Anglo-Saxon material see: Scheil 2004. pp. 35-50, 240-269. Note that King Sveinn II spent his childhood in England, and it would hardly be surprising if he were exposed to Ælfric and Bede's thinking on the Jews.

159 Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir. “Prose of Christian Instruction” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) p. 339.

160 Marius Hægstad. *Vestnorske maalføre fyre 1350. I: Nordvestlandske*. (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1908) p. 75.

with the literary composition of homilies, and we can therefore extrapolate its currency – and probably its origin – back to the period of missionary activity in Norway during the tenth century.

It is worth considering to what extent the word *gyðingr* conveys the Jewish covenant with God by its morphology alone. Morten Thing asserts that: *[v]ed siden af formen juði [sic] havde oldislandske ordet gyðingr, afledt af guð, gud. Jøderne var altså 'gudlinger'.*<sup>161</sup> - “In addition to the form *juði* [sic] Old Icelandic had the word *gyðingr*, derived from *guð*, God. Thus, the Jews were 'godlings'.” There is an obvious error here: the diminutive in Old Norse is formed by the suffix *-lingr*, not *-ingr*. Two scholars much more acquainted with the language in question (Thing publishes mostly on the modern history of Danish Jews) also contradict the hypothesis of an etymological relationship between *Guð* and *gyðingr*. Cleasby & Vigfússon, citing the work of Páll Vídalín, maintain that “this word is formed, not from *Guð*, but from Lat[in] *Judaei*, through the A[nglo] S[axon] form *Gjudeas*”.<sup>162</sup> Vídalín's original argument was actually not directly concerned with the etymology of *gyðingr*. Rather, he was seeking supporting evidence for his theory that Old Norse *jól* - “Yule, Christmas” stemmed from its Old English cognate, *Gíul* (here spelt *gjule*):

Tvíla eg ei, að “gildi” sè sömu ættar sem gjule, jól og öl, þó eigi sèu þau, gjule og gildi, í sama lið skyldseminnar, [?] sem *primitiva* sjálf, jól og öl. Hin eru afkvæmi. Dæmið hefi eg sýnt um jöldu – stein, jöldu – hlaup og öldu – hlaup. Sjá menn, að í orðunum Jótar, Gotar, Joli, Gjule, Judæus, á vora tungu: Gyðingur, ɔ: Júðingur, [er g og j sama, og mun slík *permutatio literarum* finnast mörg, þá að er hugað. Eg skal gjarnan læra rættara, þegar mér verður það sýnt og kent með skírurum rökum.<sup>163</sup>

I don't doubt that *gildi* is of the same stock as *gjule*, *jól* and *öl*, although those two, *gjule* and *gildi*, are not of the same order [?] as the more primitive *jól* and *öl*. They are their descendants. I have already shown the examples of *jöldu-stein*, *jöldu-hlaup* and *öldu-hlaup*. People can see that in the words *Jótar*, *Gotar*, *Joli*, *Gjule*, *Judæus* in our language: *Gyðingur*, ɔ: *Júðingur* [g and j are identical, and such a change of letters will be frequently encountered when it is investigated. I would very much like to study this more closely, as soon as I discover and become acquainted with clear arguments.

Vídalín's analysis is also not without flaws. There is no evidence of a form corresponding to *\*júðingr* as a precedent for *gyðingr*, and while this alone does not negate his argument I have not been able to find any spelling of the Old English *Iudéas* which supports the intermediary proposed by Cleasby & Vigfússon. It also appears that Vídalín has not considered the role of the /i/ umlaut characteristic of

161 Morten Thing. *Forsøg til lille, personlig, jødisk ordbog*. (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetstryk, 2000) p. 43.

162 Richard Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfússon. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1874) p. 221.

163 Páll Vídalín. *Skýringar yfir Fornyrði Lögbókar þeirrar er Jónsbók kallast*. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Bókmenntafélag 1854) p. 284.

the transition from Proto-Norse to Old Norse from the sixth to early twelfth centuries. Applying this vowel change would actually make Vídalín's schema run in reverse, e.g. /u:/ > [y:] (itself problematic as there is no evidence for the pronunciation \**gyðingr*)<sup>164</sup> and then the impossibility of [y:] following a glide /j/, presumably necessitating a hardened /g/. Conversely, *i*-umlaut would suggest that there had indeed been some kind of stem from *Guð*. Stressed /u/ has been shown to mutate to [y] under the influence of a following /i/,<sup>165</sup> allowing us to conjecture the existence of a form like \**guð-ingr* prior to 1100.

It stands to reason that missionaries in pre-Christian Norway should have coined a word for “the Jews” that made their special relationship with God self-evident. After all, convincing a pagan audience of the existence of a single divinity would surely not have been easy, but it would have fundamentally been a metaphysical problem. Pre-existing positions on deities and their role in the shaping of reality could be engaged with and subsequently reformed. Convincing pre-Christian Norwegians of the importance of a group they'd never heard of (the Jews) killing a person they'd never heard of (Jesus) would have presented much more of a challenge – unless there were something immediate in the name of that group which indicated their relevance to presupposed concepts. As Rasmus Rask noted, the suffix *-ingr* denotes “a) a sufferer ... e.g. *lögræningr*, one robbed of his rights ... b) a person, also a thing, of a certain character ... e.g. *spekingr*, a wise man .... c) Names of [p]eoples in particular are formed with this ending.. [e.g.] *Austfirðingr*”.<sup>166</sup> More than one of these connotations might have seemed appropriate to a missionary. The sense of suffering resonates with the Old Testament theme of God's frequent curses and tribulations upon the Jews, although unlike Rask's other examples the first element in the compound would obviously not be a process or action. The use of *-ingr* for creating an ethnonym is more plausible,<sup>167</sup> as is equally the stressing of a particular core quality, in this case the covenant with God. Furthermore, a form like \**Guðingar* might have allowed a potent rhetorical parallel with *heiðingjar* (“pagans”), although this must remain conjectural due to the comparatively late date when the latter is first attested.

It should be noted that the theory of an Anglo-Saxon origin for *gyðingr* is not mutually exclusive with its

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164 There is Faroese *gyðingur*, but this would be very dubious proof of a widespread medieval pronunciation.

Jóhannes av Skarði. *Donsk-Føroysk Orðabók*. (Tórshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag, 1967) p. 172

165 Bo Ralph. “Phonological and graphematic developments from Ancient Nordic to Old Nordic.” in *The Nordic Languages. An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages*. vol. 1. ed. by Oskar Bandle et al. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002) pp. 706-707.

166 Rasmus Rask. *A Grammar of the Icelandic or Old Norse tongue*. trans. by George Webbe Dasent (London: W. Pickering, 1843) p. 151. [my italics]

167 cf. the categorisation of *gyðingr* as *Personalbezeichnung, abgeleitet aus Personalbezeichnungen ... [p]leonastische Ableitung* - “A personal name derived from a personal name ... a pleonastic derivation”: Horst Haider Munske. *Das Suffix \*inga/-unga in den germanischen Sprachen*. (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1964) p. 15. *Nota bene*: As shall be seen, Munske also reads De Vries's (lack of) entry for *gyðingr* as an inference that it descends from *júði* – an obvious error as *gyðingr* is clearly the older word.

apparent derivation from *Guð*, although it is far from provable. It is not necessarily the case that the person or community which generated the word had a native command of Norse. Many of the clerics involved in the Norwegian and Icelandic missionary effort would not have had the vernacular of those countries as their mother tongue. There is the notorious Þangbrandr, attached to King Óláfr Tryggvason's court, a *saxneskr prest*<sup>168</sup> - “Saxon priest” who had apparently spent time in Canterbury, amongst other sojourns: *En þá er Þangbrandr var vaxinn bauð Hugbertus byskup af Kantaraborg [Þangbrandi ok Alberti] ... til sín*<sup>169</sup> “And when Þangbrandr had grown up, Hubert, bishop of Canterbury invited [Þangbrandr and Albert] ... over to him”. Siân Grønlie identifies two English bishops from *Íslendingabók* as historical members of Óláfr's court, Bjarnharðr inn bókvísi, and Hróðólfr.<sup>170</sup> She also finds an Irishman, Jóhan inn írski, to be part of the same circle.<sup>171</sup> Judging from their names, Heinrekr, Friðrekr and Góðiskálkr may well have been German-speakers (i.e. Heinrich, Friedrich and Godescalc). *Íslendingabók* also names *þrír ermskir: Petrus ok Abrahám ok Stephánu*<sup>172</sup> - “three Armenians: Peter and Abraham and Stephan”.<sup>173</sup> Although undoubtedly international in terms of personnel, it does seem that influence from England was a particularly strong force on Óláfr's conversion efforts, and indeed throughout Norwegian church history in the Middle Ages.<sup>174</sup> Consider this passage from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*:

... Óláfr Tryggvason fór ór landi þessu sinni með fimm skipum ok vestr til Englands, þá er hann hafði einn vetr verit konungr í Nóregi; fór hann aptr um haustit til Nóregs, ok var þá í fyr með honum Jón byskup ok margir prestar, Þangbrandr prestur ok Þormóðr, ok margir aðrir Guðs þjónar er hann setti til at styrkja upp ok at timbra Guðs kristni ok kenna þeim at snúask réttleidis, er áðr trúðu rangt, ok kenndi þeim satt ljós vera af almáttkum Guði.<sup>175</sup>

168 Snorri Sturluson. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*. vol. 1. ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. Íslensk Fornrit, vol. 26. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1941) p. 319.

169 *Kristni saga* in *Biskupa sögur I*. vol. 1. ed. by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson *et al.* Íslensk Fornrit, 15. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2003) p. 14.

170 Bjarnarðr was possibly the same man as Bernhard, bishop of Scania, invited from England by King Knútr the Great around 1025. See: A. Brandrud. “B., Biskop i Skaane” in *Kirke-Læksikon for Norden*. vol. 1. ed. by Fredrik Nielsen (Århus: Jydsk Forlags-Forretning, 1900) p. 274.

171 Siân Grønlie. Notes to *Íslendingabók. Kristni saga. The Book of the Icelanders. The Story of the Conversion*. trans. by Siân Grønlie. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2006) pp. 26-27, n77.

172 Ari Þorgilsson. *Íslendingabók* in *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*. vol. 1. ed. by Jakob Benediktsson. Íslensk Fornrit vol. 1. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1968) p. 18.

173 On the discussion about the ethnic identity of these men, see: Grønlie 2006. p. 27 n78.

174 Similarly, it has been shown that there is a very strong Anglo-Saxon component in the content of *The Old Norwegian Homily Book*, not just in its vocabulary: Christopher Abram. “Anglo-Saxon Influence in the Old Norwegian Homily Book”, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 14 (2004) passim. King Sverrir (c. 1145 – 1202) is said to have had a court priest named Marteinn, later bishop of Bergen, who was *enskr at öllu kyni ok forkunnar góðr klerker* - “entirely of English descent and an exceedingly good cleric”. See: *Sverris saga*. ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson. Íslensk Fornrit, vol. 30. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2007) p. 189, pp. 304-305.

175 Oddr Munkr Snorrason. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson, Íslensk Fornrit vol. 25. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2006) pp. 210-211.

... Then when he had been king of Norway for one year, Óláfr Tryggvason left this country once again with five ships and went west to England. In the autumn he went back to Norway, and Bishop John went with him together with many priests, including Þangbrandr and Þormóðr, and many other of God's servants, whom he put to constructing and strengthening God's Christianity and teaching those who had previously believed in error to be turned in the right direction, and to teaching them that true illumination comes from almighty God.

If Anglo-Saxon preachers were involved in the discussion around what terminology should be used to introduce the Jews in the Christian story, it is likely that their thinking would have been shaped by their native language.<sup>176</sup> It is certainly possible that the combination of *Guð* + *-ingr* was the direct innovation of a Norwegian, but it would surely also have chimed with Old English *God* + *-ing*. As Bosworth and Toller observe regarding the Old English suffix *-ing*: “it is a power of that termination to denote the genitive or possessive, which is also the generative case”.<sup>177</sup> This is just as appropriate as the connotations of Old Norse *-ingr*, if not even a little more so by virtue of its looser meaning. There would also be a precedent from a religious context, in that *Goding* was already a word in Old English used to refer to Christ, i.e. “the son of God”.<sup>178</sup> This similarity could potentially have been at odds with the preachers' message, but an Anglo-Saxon who had learnt Norse and was coining neologisms in his second language would probably not have been concerned by this so long as his target audience could comprehend the new concepts he was trying to explain. Moreover, Old English speakers would have been very much accustomed to using *-ing* to designate groups, ethnic or otherwise: e.g. *Beormingas*, *Scyldingas*, *Exsyringas*, *Mygingas*. With all this in mind, it seems plausible to imagine the word *gyðingr* emerging out of the deliberations of a group of clerics very much like those who served Óláfr. They may well have hailed from a variety of European nations, have spent time in England, some would have spoken Old English and others Old Norse. The most important factor in the neologisms they sought was that they were rhetorically powerful, readily apparent in meaning, and explicitly connotative of the primary concepts of the Christian faith. Doubtless, by the thirteenth century when the majority of the sources that will be examined here were composed, the evocation of the word *Guð* by *gyðingr* had largely faded away, obscured by the sound changes of two centuries previous. However, this connotation does not seem to have disappeared entirely. As late as 1250 – 1275, by accident or design the scribe of *Pétrs saga Postula* substituted *guðníðingr* (“apostate, mocker of God”) for *gyðingr*.<sup>179</sup>

176 For an overview of the Old English element in West Norse religious vocabulary, see: Reidar Astås “Language contact during the Old Nordic period III: The impact of Christianity on Old Nordic” in *The Nordic Languages*. pp. 1045-1052.

177 Joseph Bosworth & T. Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882-98) p. 592.

178 Ibid. at p. 483.

179 Berulfsen 1958. pp. 126-127. (also 1963. p. 77) argued that this was deliberate folk etymology: *En slík folkeetymologi er ofte en utmerket indikator på hva man egentlig legger i ordet*. - “Such a folk etymology is often an outstanding indicator of what one really invested in the word”. Perhaps this was the connotation of the thirteenth century, but as seen it stands at odds with the original “people of God” meaning. The context here is Peter's explanation of Simon Magus's circumcision: “*Til þess tok Simon skurðarskirn, at hann mætti framarr bleckia andir ebreska manna, ef mann syndi vera sík vera* [gyðing / guðníðing /

The second most common Norse word for “Jew” is *júði*. Like Latin *judæus*, its first Scandinavian attestation is in a runic inscription from the East Norse area. DR 373 is a baptismal font fashioned from Gotlandic sandstone, probably made in Gotland but now found in Åkirke on the island of Bornholm. It has been dated to c. 1200. The font has eleven panels, 1) showing Gabriel telling Mary that she will have a child, 2) Mary embracing Elisabeth at the Visitation, 3) Christ's birth in the manger, 4) the Magi approaching, 5) Christ accepting their gifts, 6-8) the Magi departing, 9) Christ being tormented by his captors, 10) Christ being led to the cross, 11) Christ about to be nailed to the cross. The accompanying runic inscription provides a commentary on these scenes. The language hails from the period where East and West Norse had already begun to diverge.<sup>180</sup> The word standardised in the following transcription as *iop̄ar* was actually written 𐌺𐌺𐌰𐌿 – **ioþær**, which closely resembles a spelling we could expect to find in later East Norse manuscript sources, e.g. *Iothær*.<sup>181</sup> The runes read as follows:

Þitta ir santi Gabrel ok segþi santa Maria, at han skuldi barn fyþa. Þitta ir Elizabeþ ok Maria ok hailsas. Hiar hwilis Maria, sum han barn fyddi, skapera himinz ok iorþar, sum os leysti. Þitta iru þair þrir kunungar, sum fyrsti giarþu offr warum drotni. Hiar tok han wiþr kununga offri, war drottin. Hiar riþu þair burt þrir kunungar, siþan þair offrat [haf]a orum drotni. Þa ir þet hiar fram s[ag]u(?). Iop̄ar toku warn drottin ok [bu]nd[u] [ha]n wiþ[r] t]re ok gettu. Siþan laddu þair han burt þiaþan bundin, ok negldu hiar iop̄ar Iesus a krus. Si fram a þitta. Sigrafr me[st]e[r]i.<sup>182</sup>

This is holy Gabriel who told holy Mary that she would give birth to a child. This is Elisabeth and Mary greeting each other. Here Mary is resting as she has given birth to a child, the creator of heaven and earth who redeemed us. This is the three kings, who first made offering to Our Lord. Here he accepted the kings' offerings. Here the three kings ride away, now that they have given offerings to Our Lord. Then, it jumps forwards in the story to here: The Jews took Our Lord and bound him to a piece of wood and stood guard over him. Then they led him away bound up, and here the Jews nailed Jesus to the cross. Look upon this. Master Sigreifr.

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*Juda] ok leti sem hann kendi guðs lögmal.*” - “This is why Simon was circumcised, he could further mislead the souls of the Jews if he showed himself to be a [Jew / mocker of God / Jew] and pretended that he accepted God's commandments”. *Petr's Saga Postola. I.* in *Postola Sögur*. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M Bentzen, 1874) pp. 99-101. This could well hint at perceived etymology on the part of the scribe, but could equally be a scribal error, or indeed a simple expression of anti-Jewish sentiment.

180 Michael Barnes. “Language” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. p. 185.

181 For various Old Danish examples, see: *Gammel dansk ordbog*. ed. by Merete K. Jørgensen et al. s.v. “juthe” Available online at: <http://gammeldanskordbog.dk/>

182 Accessed via Rundata 2.5.



Fig. 4: Panels IX-XI show Christ suffering at the hands of *iǫþær*.

Unlike the case of “*rex judæorum*” and the Synagoga figure from the *Gunbildkors*, here a written reference to “the Jews” is not accompanied by any apparent understanding of Jews as a people whose existence, somewhere else geographically or historically, is any different from that of northern Europeans. Master Sigreifr (assuming he carved both the runes and the illustration) makes little effort to vilify or differentiate his characters visually. Mary, Elisabeth, the Magi, and Christ's tormentors all seem to belong to the same material culture, and there are no anti-Semitic tropes of blindness, ugliness or hooked noses. The *júðar*, some bearded and long haired, all clad in tunics, would not look out of place next to the famous Sigurðr Fafnisbáni carvings from Hylestad stave church in Norway. In Sigreifr's imagination there was little difference in setting between Golgotha and Gotland. Unlike *gyðingr*, the word *júði* – or however we might choose to spell its East Norse antecedent - never intrinsically connoted even the most basic information about Jews. Their role in constructing Christian identity or their relationship with God was not apparent from the outset. Rather, a process of enculturation was required to make *júðar* a loaded term. Witnessing their fierce attack on Christ, as seen on panel 9 in **fig. 4**, may well have been a part of that process.

Interestingly, the earliest attestations of West Norse *júði* are in manuscripts of the fourteenth century.<sup>183</sup> However, it occurs in works which are obviously much older, such as *Gyðinga saga* and *Stjórn*. As the dating of the latter is rather problematic, we will base our dating on the former and assert that the entry of the word into the Norwegian/Icelandic vocabulary could not have been later than the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>184</sup> The absence of the word from the Norwegian and Icelandic homily books means it could not have entered the language before c. 1100. If this solves the problem of “when”, the next order of questioning must be “whence”. According to Jan de Vries, *júði* came from Middle Low German or Middle High German *Jude*, stemming ultimately from the Latin *judæus*.<sup>185</sup> He did not

183 Degnbol et al. 1989-. s.v. “júði”

184 Ian Kirby. “Stjórn” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. pp. 611-612.

185 Jan De Vries. *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961) p. 294, cf. p. 195.

mention the possibility of an East Norse intermediary. There are two potential explanations for this, one predicated on technical arguments, and another rooted in a study of de Vries's convictions more generally. We will begin with the latter, as it is a more delicate and complex matter.

Without framing our investigation in *ad hominem* invective, it would be unwise to discuss de Vries's position on anything related to Jews or Judaism without at least briefly considering his relationship with Nazism. Stefanie Würth, in her preface to the third edition of de Vries's *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, by no means attempts to conceal his manifold connections with the Dutch Far Right or German Nazis, but also stresses his differences with some of the educational policies of the wartime occupation, and asserts that he did not partake of anti-Semitism as another famous Old Norse scholar, Andreas Heusler, did.<sup>186</sup> However, Würth's historical accuracy has recently been called into question by Horst Junginger, who further describes Würth's contribution as a “whitewash” and de Vries as “the prototype of an intellectual collaborator”.<sup>187</sup> Willem Hofstee has also provided a more detailed overview of the Dutch academic's associations with the Nazi party and its various political organs; membership of the *Abnenerbe* and the *Allgemeine SS* suggest much more than a fleeting or opportunistic collaboration.<sup>188</sup> However, it is important for our purposes to note that no explicitly anti-Semitic statements can be found in any of de Vries's writings. If there is no absolute evidence to inform us of his views towards Jews, there is much more to indicate his views towards Germans and their role as a cultural force acting upon the other Germanic nations. Concerning some of his publications outside of the *Religionsgeschichte*, Bruce Lincoln notes:

*Welt der Germanen* (1934) carries a swastika on its cover and celebrates the race of blue-eyed, blondhaired warriors. *Onze Voorouders* (1942) was made required reading for Dutch school children under the occupation and was designed to teach them reverence for the Teutonic ancestors they shared with their German brethren. De Vries's Germanophilia was both personal and professional. Days after the Nazi conquest, he was one of four university professors who met with the new Reichskommissar (the infamous Artur Seyss-Inquart) and offered to establish a *Nederlandsche Kultuurkamer* that would regulate Dutch arts and learning under the new regime. Once formed, this institution was run by the German propaganda ministry and had de Vries as its last president.<sup>189</sup>

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186 Stefanie Würth. “Vorwort zum Nachdruck” to *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*. by Jan de Vries. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999) pp. xiii-xxii, esp. p. xxii. For Heusler's original comments, see: *Andreas Heusler an Wilhelm Ranisch. Briefe aus den Jahren 1890-1940*. ed. by Oskar Bandle & Hans Neumann. (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn Verlag AG, 1990) pp. 561-562.

187 Horst Junginger. Introduction to *The Study of Religion Under the Impact of Fascism*. ed. by Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 74-81, 548-550.

188 Willem Hofstee. “The Essence of Concrete Individuality. Gerardus van der Leeuw, Jan de Vries, and National Socialism.” in *ibid.* pp. 548-550.

189 Bruce Lincoln. “Rewriting the German War God: Georges Dumézil, Politics and Scholarship in the Late 1930s.” *History of Religions*, 37, 3 (February, 1998) pp. 192-193.

Against this backdrop, for de Vries to write that the West Norse experience of the Jews came immediately from Germans is hardly unproblematic.<sup>190</sup> All the more so, since de Vries did not even attempt an entry in his etymological dictionary for *gyðingr*. Rather, he refers the reader straight to *júði*. As evinced by Vídalín and Cleasby & Vigfússon, *gyðingr* was a word then universally considered to have an Old English root, and it has been observed that de Vries's pro-German leanings were accompanied by firmly anti-British sentiments.<sup>191</sup> There is nothing to infer that de Vries was making any value judgements about the Jews by his etymology, but it is conceivable that he narrowed his investigation in accordance with certain presupposed notions he held regarding the historical importance of Germany. That is to say, on a theme of great significance for the Nazi world view to which he had once publicly subscribed, he emphasised the German connection with Old Norse at the expense of the Anglo-Saxon. This does not render de Vries's contribution obsolete nor unusable, but we should certainly be wary of uncritically accepting it as a conclusive solution.

Turning from the contextual to the technical details, it should be noted that there is nothing phonologically implausible in de Vries's suggestion as there was in Vídalín's. A West Norse speaker attempting to reproduce Middle High or Low German *Jude* would indeed come up with a form like *júði*, as Old Norse words could not end with an /ə/ nor maintain a hard [d] in between vowels without doubling the consonant. However, there are some historical problems. Judging from sources such as *Kristni saga*, the time when German-speaking presence was at its greatest in the Norwegian and Icelandic clergy was during the missionary period (e.g. Heinrekr, Friðrekr, Góðiskálkr) but *gyðingr*, not *júði*, appears to be the word that emerged from those circles. Towards the end of the Middle Ages in Iceland there was also the so-called “German Age” (*Þýska Öldin*) where German-speakers became very influential in the religious and political spheres, but as seen *júði* first occurs in texts from two centuries prior. Between c. 1100 and c. 1250, the contexts where significant exchanges concerning Jews would have taken place between German-speakers and West Norse-speakers are thus very hard to imagine. The point where *júði* entered the language considerably predated the rise of the Hanseatic League in Scandinavia, and the noticeable influx of Middle Low German words into Old Icelandic which it precipitated.

Conversely, a German origin for the East Norse word for “Jew”, *juthe*,<sup>192</sup> has a great deal more support

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190 Although the *Wörterbuch* was first published in the late 1950s and thus after the occupation of the Netherlands, it has been convincingly suggested that de Vries was still exploring racial themes in connection with the Germans in his later publishing career. See: Junginger 2008. p. 81.

191 Hofstee 2008. p. 548.

192 Orthography based on the lemma from the *Gammel dansk ordbog*. Evidently, the vowel was not universally pronounced [ø] as in DR 373 but could also be [u:], as in West Norse *júði*.

from circumstantial evidence.<sup>193</sup> Denmark and Sweden were converted to Christianity largely by missionary activity from northern Germany, and so we might well expect crucial religious terminology there to have a Low German flavour.<sup>194</sup> If *júði* did not originate from direct contact with German speakers, diffusion via the East Norse end of the Scandinavian linguistic continuum seems a more likely prospect.<sup>195</sup> Intellectual contact between East and West Norse speakers prior to 1250 is certainly much better attested. From 1104 – 1152 Lund, then in Denmark, was the archbishopric responsible for both Norway and Iceland. During this period there must have been much contact and co-operation between the clergy of the two dialect groups. The Swedish or Danish Archbishop Özurr (d. 1137) was credited for his advice in compiling the canon law section of the Icelandic *Grágás* code.<sup>196</sup> Bishop Jón Ögmundarson (1052 – 1121) of the Hólar diocese in northern Iceland hired a Swedish teacher of *grammatica* by the name of Gísli Finnason. According to this glowing description from *Jóns saga Hólabyskups*, Gísli's influence was not restricted to teaching Latin:

Enn til þess at styra skolanvm ok kenna þeim monnvm er þar settiz i. þa valði hann einn bezta klerk ok enn sniallazta af Gavtlandi. Hann het Gísli ok var Finna son hann reiddi honvm mikit kavp til hvasstveggia at kenna prestlingvm ok at veita slikt vpp halld heilagri kristni með sialfvm byskvpi sem hann matti ser við koma ikenningvm sinvm ok formælv. ok avallt er hann predicaði fyrir folkinv þa let hann liggia bok fyrir ser. ok tok þar af slikt er hann talaði fyrir folkinv ... Heilagr J(on) byskvp tok marga menn til læringar ok feck til goða meistara. at kenna þeim. Gisla Finna s(on) er fyr gatvm ver at kenna grammaticam ...<sup>197</sup>

And for the purpose of administering the school and teaching those who were registered with it, he then chose one of best and most eloquent clerics from Götaland. He was called Gísli, and was the son of Finni. He offered him a good wage both to teach the junior clerics and to provide such instruction in the Holy Church as even the bishop himself might want with his knowledge and teachings, and whenever he preached before the people he always had a book in front of him, and drew from it when preaching to people ... Holy Bishop Jón took on many students and found

193 Supporting a Middle Low German origin, see: *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*. vol. 9. ed. by Verner Dahlerup. s.v. “jøde”. Available online at: <http://ordnet.dk/ods>

194 On linguistic inheritance, see: Barnes 2007. p. 184. For comment on distinguishing German and English channels during the conversion process, see: Jón Viðar Sigurðsson. *Innledning to Religionskjiftet i Norden. Brytinger mellom nordisk og europeisk kultur 800-1200 e.Kr.* ed. by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson et al. (Oslo: Senter for studier i vikingtid og nordisk middelalder, 2004) pp. 5-10. For an in-depth study of the German role in the Christianisation process, see: Erik Gunnar Niblaeus. “German Influence on Religious Practice in Scandinavia, c. 1050-1150.”, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010) esp. pp. 76-167.

195 Albeit hard to ascertain scientifically: “Direct linguistic influence [on West Norse] from the other Nordic countries is not ascertainable until the different linguistic developments in Icelandic and Norway lead to fragmentation into two separate languages, i.e. in the 14th Century?”. Hagström, Björn. “Inter Scandinavian language contact II: Linguistic influence.” in *The Nordic Languages*. p. 2038.

196 *Grágás. Stykker, som findes i det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 351 fol. Skálholtsbók, og en Række andre Haandskrifter.* ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat, 1883) p. 291.

197 *Jóns saga Hólabyskups ens Helga.* ed. by Peter Foote. (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 2003) p. 17, 21.

good teachers for them. Gísla Finnason, whom we encountered before, taught them *grammatica* ...

Although *fólke* can be an ambiguous term, it would appear from this extract that Gísli also preached for the benefit of laymen. This kind of environment, where East Norse-speaking clergy interacted with both the intellectual elite and ordinary people, would have been an ideal interface for the transmission of loan-words. Even after Iceland and Norway got their own archbishopric at Trondheim in 1152, there is still evidence of exchange between intellectuals from eastern and western Scandinavia. Bishop Páll Jónsson spent a year in 1194/5 with Archbishop Absalon (1128 - 1201) in Denmark.<sup>198</sup> Páll is also known to have deployed knowledge acquired in an East Norse-speaking environment while preaching to a West Norse audience. Consider this epilogue to an Old Icelandic Marian miracle: *Þessa iartegnn var Pall byskup vannr at segja, þar sem hann var stadr Mauriv messu hina fyrri, en hann kvat segja ser Absalon erkibyskup* ...<sup>199</sup> - “Bishop Páll had the habit of telling this miracle, when he was presiding over the lesser Marian mass, and he said it was told to him by Archbishop Absalon”. Nor were the connections limited to churchmen. In 1218, during a sojourn to the Norwegian court, the Icelandic politician and man of letters Snorri Sturluson (1179 – 1241) also made a trip to Västergötland in order to meet Eskil Magnusson (c. 1170 – c. 1227). Snorri's academic credentials are well known. He may well even have drawn on the Jewish topos for inspiration in his *Edda*,<sup>200</sup> a theme to which we shall later return. In addition to an eventful, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, political career, he wrote extensively on history and mythology, and utilised a diverse range of sources in order to do so. Judging from the following description by the *Vidhemspräst*, he may well have been corresponding with an equal in Eskil:

Æskil laghmaðþær. han spurðþi innurllikæ. oc lettæðþi all lums lagh. oc annarrær. at nytræ hæfð lanzsins for ælðri. Siðþæn han fan lanzsins lagh. þa. huxæðþi han þem mæð. mykli snilli. oc syalfsins forseo. han war marghæ wæghæ wæl ffallin til þæs walz. han hafði þa giæff. af guðþi. at han atti snilli mykllæ. fore aðrum mannum. han hafðþi oc clærkdom ærlikæn. iæmth goðþom clærkum. ... han war mykin maðþær for sic. til aldræ raðþæ oc rætræ. swa at war iuir allæ rikissins höffðþhengiæ. Swa sum han war mykin for sic till aldræ raþhæ. swa war oc han goðþær drængær till swærðh oc til aldræ takæ .i. strið. hwat ma iæk nu meræ af hanum sighiæ. vtæn þættæ. at sent föðþes annar slikær maðþær.<sup>201</sup>

Eskil the lawspeaker, he inquired of things thoroughly, and researched all kinds of law and other things for the rewarding eminence of the country over others. When he made the law of the land

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198 Sveinbjörn Rafnsson. *Páll Jónsson Skálholtsbiskup. Nokkrar aþuganir á sögu hans ok kirkjustjórn*. (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1993) pp. 48-50.

199 “Af presti einvm i Danmork” in *Mariu saga*. p. 153.

200 Heather O'Donoghue. “What Has Baldr to Do with Lamech? the Lethal Shot of a Blind Man in Old Norse Myth and Jewish Exegetical Traditions.” *Medium Ævum* 72, 1 (2003) pp. 90-97.

201 *Westgöta-Lagen*. ed. by H.S. Collin & C.J. Schlyter. (Stockholm: Z. Haeggström, 1827) p. 297.

he then meditated upon it with great intelligence and his own foresight. He was in many ways well predisposed towards this work. He had that gift from God, of having great intelligence compared to other men. He also had respectable clerical knowledge, even compared to good clerics ... He was the greatest of men in wise and righteous counsel, so that he was above all the other chieftains of the kingdom. Just as he was the greatest of men in wise counsel, so too was he a fine warrior with the sword and all other articles of war. What more can I say of him? Except for this: that it will be a long time before another such man is born.

There is no reason to suppose that the word *júði* was transmitted into West Norse from any one of these interactions. Rather, it was probably diffused through multiple such contacts, clerical and secular, learned and colloquial, over a long period, gradually gaining currency over time. An admittedly unscientific survey of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* yields 31 attestations of *gyðingr*, 14 of *ebresker maðr* and 29 of *júði*. This seems to suggest that *júði* eventually attained a frequency that made it very nearly interchangeable with *gyðingr*. However, while *gyðingr* conveyed a self-evident meaning from the outset, *júði* seems to have taken a long time to saturate the vernacular. Grímr Hólmsteinsson (d. 1298) in his *Jóns saga Baptista*, writes: “Hverr sa sem syni er eigi trur, man eigi lif sia, helldr er yfir honum guðs reiði”. *Þessi orð sæls Jóhannis, segir fyrr nefndr Augustinus, syndu Judum, þat er ebreiskum monnum, sinu villu oc ollum oðrum þeim monnum, sem suninn synið sem þræll, en faðirinn sem guð ...*<sup>202</sup> - “He who does not believe in the son, will find no life, rather the wrath of God is upon him”. [John 3:36] These words of the Blessed John, says the aforementioned Augustine, showed the Jews, that is the Hebrews, their being astray, and with them all other people to whom the son seems a wretch but the father a god ...”. It is interesting to note that Grímr felt the need to gloss *júði* for his audience, showing that the word had not fully permeated West Norse vocabulary even by the second half of the thirteenth century.

The differing contextual appropriateness and frequencies of the various words for “Jew” in Old Norse does not appear to be particularly connected to their etymologies. For example, one might expect the Latin imports (*hebraeus*, *judæus*, *ebresker maðr*) to occur largely in scholarly works. *Gyðingr*, being the oldest vernacular expression and the one originally used in the homilies, might fit best in works of Christian instruction, while *júði*, a word that entered West Norse during the ascendancy of anti-Jewish/-Semitic feeling in northern Europe, might be better suited to the crude and gory episodes of the *miracula*. But there appears to be little such correlation. “*Ebreus*” is attested only in bawdy stereotypes: the aforementioned Jewish magician of the Theophilus legend, and the Shylock-like moneylender of

202 Grímr Hólmsteinsson. *Jóns saga Baptista II* in *Postola sögur: Legendariske Fortællinger om Apostlernes Liv, deres Kamp for Kristendommens Udbredelse, samt deres Martyrdød*. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M Bentzen, 1874) pp. 899-900.

On the dating of the saga, see: C.R. Unger. Forord to *ibid.* p. xxviii. On the supposedly Augustinian quotations in the saga, see: David McDougall. “Patristic sources for Icelandic texts: pseudo-Augustinian passages in *Jóns saga baptista II* and *The Fourth Grammatical Treatise*”, *Traditio* 44 (1988) pp. 463-483.

*Nikulás saga erkibyskups*, a character who is also said to be *stórliga ríkan at gulli ok silfri, sem þess battar kyni er veniuligt*<sup>203</sup> - “very wealthy in gold and silver, as this sort of people usually are”. There is a noticeable tendency for the word *júði* to be employed where the Jews are being criticised, but it is also sparingly used in the Bible compilation *Stjórn*, which exhibits very little of such prejudice. *Gyðingr* can occur in any context, from biblical exegesis to anti-Semitic caricature, although we might note again that it is by far Brandr's preferred term. Kirsten Wolf has noted that *Gyðinga saga* utilises *Júðar – Júdei – Gyðingar* at a rate of 1: 5: 13 respectively.<sup>204</sup> As seen, *gyðingr* and *júði* are nearly equally attested elsewhere. Brandr's reluctance to use *júði* suggests that he felt it to have negative connotations, while *gyðingr* was a more neutral term. But Brandr's tastes cannot be taken as evidence for the mentality of others. It seems likely that *gyðingr* was the most convenient word for “Jew” from the missionary period until the middle of the thirteenth century, when *júði* began to gain parity. The other terms appear to be outliers. *Ebresker* as an adjective appears in *The Old Icelandic Homily Book*, but *ebresker maðr* does not occur until *Stjórn*.<sup>205</sup> These forms were doubtless well understood by the educated, and there is no reason to suppose they would have been too obscure to be understood by laymen when heard read aloud by a preacher. However, the Latinate inflections on *hebraeus* and *judæus* (making them hard to integrate into the Old Norse case system) and the lengthy polysyllabism of *ebresker maðr*; mean they probably would have been too cumbersome for everyday usage.

### Understanding Jewish history and law

That which we would now recognise as an objective, scholarly understanding of Jewish life was probably a rare gift amongst Christian intellectuals of the Middle Ages. True, Christians often acquired great *learning* about Jews – some, as shall be seen, even studied Hebrew – but when they did so their knowledge was often framed in terms of disputation, polemic, missionary activity, or innocent introspection on the nature of Christianity itself. There was very little study of Jewish history or culture for its own sake; that is to say, being inspired by any inherently stimulating, edifying or didactic content therein. Hebrew was not part of the trivium, and there is scant evidence of any Jewish languages or literatures being considered objects of xenophilia in the way that King Hákon Hákonarson apparently thought of French, for instance.<sup>206</sup> We might choose any number of examples here, but in a Norse context Robert of Cricklade (fl. 1170s) is a very apt illustration of this trend. Robert's now lost *vita* of St. Thomas à Becket was a major source behind *Thómas saga erkibyskups*, and he also seems to have

203 Bergr Sökkason. *Nikulás Saga Erkibyskups II* in *Heilagra Manna Sögur*, vol. 2. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877) p. 134.

204 Kirsten Wolf. Introduction to *Gyðinga Saga*. by Brandr Jónsson. ed. by Kirsten Wolf. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1995) pp. cxviii-cxix.

205 Degnbol et al. 1989-. s.v. “ebreiskr”.

206 Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard. “Translations at the Court of Hákon Hákonarson: a well planned and highly selective programme”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36, 4 (September, 2011) passim.

written a hagiography of St. Magnús, possibly at the behest of the Norse-speaking bishopric of Orkney.<sup>207</sup> His hagiographical career was complemented by a keen interest in Hebraica. Gerald of Wales, who met him in his old age, noted that he could read Hebrew.<sup>208</sup> During his time as a scholar at Oxford, Robert eagerly pursued the manuscripts of the local Jewish population, (history does not record how the Jews themselves felt about this) believing they possessed a lost work by Josephus.<sup>209</sup> But Robert's scholarly inclinations in this direction were, like similar endeavours by Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175 - 1253) or William de Arundel, (fl. 1239) fuelled by missionary zeal.<sup>210</sup> In this particular case, he believed in the existence of a missing allusion to the coming of Christ, which once revealed would presumably not only enrich the Christian faith, but correct the errant Jews.

As these examples indicate, the best source for a student of anything Jewish, whatever his motivations, was interaction with an actual Jewish community. However, in the words of Dror Segev, Norwegian or Icelandic intellectuals had no recourse to “the Jew next door”.<sup>211</sup> Any scholarly investigations in this area must have been based on received texts rather than original research, and fairly limited ones at that. Very little evidence of disputational literature survives in Old Norse, and what there is contains nothing that would serve a serious interest in Jewish life. There is an account of a disputation that supposedly took place in Rome during the late sixth or early seventh century, identified by Widding as a miracle of the *Blindgeborener wird sehend* tradition.<sup>212</sup> The text is concerned with conversion through divine revelation rather than conversion through dispute. The reader gets the impression that the Jews are cunning debaters: “*Sakir huers dirfiæt þu, madr, med þui at þu ert syndugr ok getinn af synd, ath vernda kristiliga tru wid oss, þar sem þu kant eigi ritningar; er eigi audsætt, ath Kristr þinn ma eigi orka at gefa þier þin augu?*”<sup>213</sup> - “How dare you, sir, for you are sinful and begotten in sin, to defend the Christian faith against us when you don't know the scriptures. Isn't it obvious, as your Christ isn't even able to give you your eyes?” but absolutely no insights into the nature of Jewish culture, or indeed the nature of the Jewish faith beyond its rejection of Christ. One of the most famous Jewish converts to Christianity, Petrus Alfonsi (d. 1110), travelled in England and Northern France during the first quarter of the twelfth century, bringing

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207 Haki Antonsson. *St. Magnús of Orkney: A Scandinavian Martyr-Cult in Context*. (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 42-67, esp. pp. 65-67

208 Haki Antonsson. “Two Twelfth Century Martyrs: St Thomas of Canterbury and St Magnús of Orkney.” in *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*. ed. by Gareth Williams & Paul Bibire. (Leiden: Brill, 2004) p. 43.

209 Ibid. See also: Cecil Roth. *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*. (Oxford: Oxford Historical Society, 1951) p. 121

210 Cecil Roth. *A History of the Jews in England*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964) pp. 129-131.

211 Dror Segev. *Medieval Magic and Magicians – In Norway and Elsewhere. Based Upon 12th - 15th Centuries Manuscript and Runic Evidence*. (Oslo: Senter for Studier i Vikingtid og Nordisk Middelalder, 2001) pp. 98-99.

212 Ole Widding. “Norrøne Marialegender på europæisk baggrund.”, *Opuscula* 10 (1996) p. 94. For notes on the eleventh century poem on which it is probably based, see: Jean-Claude Schmitt. *The Conversion of Herman the Jew. Autobiography, History and Fiction in the Twelfth Century*. trans. by Alex J. Novikoff (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) pp. 147-148.

213 “Af Boni(facio)” in *Mariu saga*. p. 696.

extensive knowledge of astronomy and other Arabic learning.<sup>214</sup> His *Disciplina Clericalis* was translated into Icelandic, and one chapter of it was incorporated into *Víga-Glúms saga*.<sup>215</sup> His *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* is an anti-Jewish polemic *par excellence*, but unlike the *Disciplina* there is no indication that it was known in Iceland or Norway. This is perhaps surprising, given its popularity elsewhere and the precedent of an appetite for Alfonsi's work, but if a copy ever did arrive in the north then it apparently inspired no Norse commentary on Judaism nor nourished any interest in Jewish life.

If first hand experience of Jews were impossible, and secondary scholarship on the topic inaccessible, then the only option was to turn to Christianity's "built-in" sources, that is to say, the Bible and the exegetical works derived thereof. Indeed, there was at least one Christian scholar in Scandinavia who did use these assets, together with supplementary works, to explore an interest in Jewish history. Brandr Jónsson (d. 1264) was abbot of Þykkvabær monastery in southern Iceland, and bishop of Hólar for a year before his death. We will introduce Brandr's life and examine his philo-Semitic attitudes more closely later, but for now it will suffice to outline his contribution towards the development of a scholarly perspective on Jews and Judaism in thirteenth century Iceland. The works most securely attributed to Brandr are: 1) *Alexanders saga*, a translation of Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* 2) *Gyðinga saga*, a compilation of Maccabees, the *Historia Scholastica*, and possibly *De bello Judaico* and *Antiquitates Judaicae*.<sup>216</sup> Both of Brandr's works involve informed and sympathetic consideration of Jewish characters.

If Brandr were aware at all of the precepts observed by contemporary Jewry, he would have found it extremely hard to study them in much depth. As previously noted, without proximal Jewish congregations Þykkvabær, Hólar or Niðarós would have been unyielding environments for a student of Judaica. Nonetheless, using the limited sources at his disposal Brandr depicts Jewish law and custom sympathetically and without any apparent misunderstanding. In *Gyðinga saga*, for example, he masterfully reproduces in the vernacular the martyrdom of Jews who would not submit to the *heiðinn siðr* of Antiochus IV. Jews observe the Saturday Sabbath, abstain from eating pork, and at great peril continue to venerate the Temple. In this example, two women are martyred for having their sons circumcised:

J þenna tíma sendi anthiochus kongr til íudee. éinn mann sua grimman at qngum eirdi þeim er æigi

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214 John Tolan. *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993) pp. 41-93.

215 For a source study and stemma, see: James R. Caldwell. "On the Icelandic 'Disciplina Clericalis'", *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* 10 (1928-9) pp. 125-135; John McKinnell. "Víga-Glúms saga" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 692

216 Although for scepticism on the use of these two sources, see: Kirsten Wolf. "Gyðinga saga" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 253.

uilldu heidinn sid hallda. Konur íj. varo leiddar fyrir hann. þær er veitt hofðu umskurdar skírn börnum sinum. hann let færa þær af klædum. ok beria þær med lurkum. þar til at blod fell vm þær allar. Börnin liet hann binda undir briost þeim sua fast. at þau kafna þar ok springa. Sidan varo þær dregnar vm stræti noçktar. ok vm sidir hrundit ofan af turni éinum. ok sua deyddar.<sup>217</sup>

At that time King Antiochus sent to Judea a man so terrible that he showed no mercy to those who would not observe the pagan rite. Two women were brought before him who had their children circumcised. He had them undressed, and beaten with cudgels until blood ran all down them. He had the children bound to their breasts so tightly that they suffocated and ruptured. Then they were dragged through the streets naked, and for a while hung from a tower until they were dead.

As we can see from this passage, Brandr certainly invites a great deal of sympathy for his Jewish characters. More than this, however, he invites a dispassionate understanding of difference. As Würth observes: “Although *Gyðinga saga* is based mainly on biblical sources it is to be seen less as clerical edification than as historiography”.<sup>218</sup> A scholar like Brandr would have been able to comprehend the Jews as more than an abstract article of faith to underpin Christianity. He explores their history as a people in their own right, with a law that shaped their lives, a history that told their story, geographical areas in which they historically operated and to which they felt an enduring connection. Put another way, he knew who they were, where they were, and what they had been through. This degree of understanding was probably unusual even amongst his educated peers, but very basic efforts to sketch Judaism as a coherent (if erroneous) belief system were also made in texts designed for mass consumption. In Old Norse *miracula* and *exempla*, Jewish and Christian characters occasionally engage in dialogue faintly reminiscent of a potted disputation. The exposition of Judaism here was simplistic and obviously not the central purpose of the texts in question. Nonetheless, it would have offered a crude understanding not just that Judaism was different from Christianity, but *how* it was different.

As we have seen in the case of Bishop Páll's anecdote from Archbishop Absalon, Old Norse Marian miracles seem to have been used for preaching, and as these miracles increasingly featured the villainy of the *gyðingar*, a basic public understanding of what a *gyðingr* believed and what made them inimical would have been an appropriate foundation to establish in the minds of the laity. Moreover, such conversations establish continuity between the Christ denying Jews of the Gospels, extensively translated and circulated in the West Norse homilies, and the persistence of Jewish presence in the contemporary world. Central to Christianity is the notion that the people of Jesus's time did not accept

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217 *Gyðinga saga*. pp. 8-9.

218 Stefanie Würth. “Historiography and Pseudo-History” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. p. 167.

him as the Messiah. These texts provided the extra information that these people still existed, and to varying degrees still did not believe, something which was both obvious and spiritually useful for proponents of the “witness doctrine” such as St. Augustine,<sup>219</sup> but might not have been so immediately relevant to lay congregations in medieval Iceland or Norway. “Believe” is an important word here: in the examples we shall shortly examine, the Jews are not shown as somehow innately or inscrutably hostile to Christianity. They are rational actors, who have a reasoned and comparatively nuanced conception of Christ's divinity. They are not crude caricatures, where malice on the part of Jews towards Christians is given more prominence than the illustration of the theological differences between the two religions. Put simply, they convey an image of Judaism as a coherent belief system; a process of understanding which is itself something that can be investigated and understood (albeit rather superficially). For example, the *Jew Lends to Christian* miracle is attested in Old Norse five times,<sup>220</sup> and contains this simple but clear delineation of the Jewish position on Jesus. In this scene, set in Constantinople, a bankrupt Christian is seeking a loan from a Jewish moneylender:

Þá svaraði gyðingrinn: „Ef þú hefir hvárki veð né vörzlumann at fá mér, þá mun ek eigi fá þér fé mitt.” Þá svaraði enn kristni maðr: „Öngan vörzlumann hefi ek ok ekki veð, nema þú vilir taka í vörzlu dróttinn minn Jesum, þann er ek dýrka ok trúik á.” Þá svaraði gyðingrinn: „Jesum trúi ek hvárki vera Crist né dróttin, en fyrir því at Jesus var spámaðr ok réttlátr, at því sem ek hygg, þá mun ek taka vörzlu hans at ifalausú.”<sup>221</sup>

Then the Jew replied: “If you have neither security nor a guarantor to give me, then I will not give you my money”. Then the Christian answered: “I have no guarantor and no security, unless you would take as a guarantee my Lord Jesus, he whom I believe in and worship”. Then the Jew replied: “I do not believe Jesus to be Christ nor a lord, but because Jesus was a prophet, and a righteous one in my opinion, then I will take his guarantee without a doubt”.

This is certainly not an example of inter-faith dialogue in the modern sense. Later on, true to the moneylender stereotype, the Jew will attempt to swindle the Christian. We might wonder how much the logic of the author or the audience would expect this to happen *because* he is a Jew. Nonetheless, there is an effort here to impart a very primitive understanding of Judaism as a tangible faith community. The *gyðingr* is not unthinkingly or reflexively opposed to Christ. He does deny that Jesus was the Messiah,

219 For example: “...it was not enough for the psalmist to say, 'Do not slay them, lest at some time they forget your Law', without adding, 'Scatter them.' For if they lived with that testimony of the Scriptures only in their own land, and not everywhere, the obvious result would be that the Church, which is everywhere, would not have them available among all nations as witnesses to the prophecies which were given beforehand concerning Christ.” St. Augustine of Hippo.

*Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*. trans. by Henry Bettenson. (London: Penguin Books, 2003) p. 828.

220 Widding 1996. p. 108

221 “Um halld Marie” in *Marín saga*. p. 88. cf. “Ríkr maðr setti líkneski vors herra í pant” in *ibid.* at p. 1064.

but he also demonstrates a degree of respect, perhaps even veneration (“*spámaðr*” also being the designation for the prophets in Christianity). There is nothing here of Brandr's scholarly research – the description of Jewish belief is not even factually correct. With the possible exception of some fairly obscure Karaite sects, no medieval Jews considered Jesus a prophet.<sup>222</sup> Nonetheless, after having heard this story read aloud, a congregation surely be more “informed” about contemporary Judaism than if the preacher had taken images of Jews from a host desecration story such as *Af vndarligum atburð i þyveska landi* or a Marian lament such as the one in AM 667 4to.<sup>223</sup> That is to say, there is a pretence here which an audience raised under conditions of Jewish absence would have no reason to question: that Judaism is being permitted to speak through the moneylender as a living set of beliefs in its own right. The audience can feel satisfied that exegesis on John or Matthew showed them what Jews *did not* believe, and now they have on good authority what Jews *do* believe. From the later *exempla* we find a slightly more eloquent example, but still probably one that enjoyed general rather than exclusively learned circulation.<sup>224</sup> *Af sýslumanni ok fjánda* is set in France, and claims to be originally *í fögru letri skrifat í Latínu*<sup>225</sup> – “written in beautiful letters in Latin.” The titular *sýslumaðr* seeks the advice of a local Jew on how to scare off pursuing demons. The Jew comments on the apocryphal gospel of Nichodemus (itself a popular text in Iceland, existing in multiple recensions as *Niðrstigningar saga*). He suggests that because according to the Christians, Satan retreated in fear from Christ during the Harrowing of Hell, an effective strategy might be to impersonate Jesus in his bloodied state during the horror of the Passion – providing of course, Christianity really is the one true faith:

Ok því næst kemr honum í hug, at þar innan staðar var einn Gyðingr, maðr svá ráðugr ok forvitri, at ... [hann] létta öll vandkvæði er hann lagði til ... Ebreski maðr sem hann hefir heyrð málit, svarar hann svá: “Þat er undr mikt, a þèr er trúit á Jesum hinn krossfesta komit til mín með nökkuru kveini ok vandkvæði, svá sem þèr vitut úlíka vera trú vára ok siðferði. En þó fyrir þá sök at ek hefi því vaniz lengi at spara eigi orð mín eða tillögur ef mönnum mætti hugbót at verða, þá nenni ek eigi at vísa þèr af hendi, þvíat ek sè at þú ert mjök hryggr maðr. En þat vil ek at þú vitir, at ráð mitt verðr ekki annat með þèr, en sú trúa er þú hefir til Jesum Nazarenum hon prófar sik. Er hon góð, þá dugir hon þèr, er hon ok annan veg, þá fær þú undir á þèr. Nú þótt forfeðr mínir krossfesti hann, þvíat þeir sögðu

222 Fred Astren. *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) pp. 119-120. See also: Wout J. Van Bekkum. “The Karaite Jacob al-Qirḡisānī (Tenth Century) on Christianity and the Christians.” in *Syriac Polemics. Studies in Honour of Gerrit van Reininj*. ed. by Wout J. van Bekkum *et al.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007) pp. 175-176. There is the possibility that the merchant is supposed to be deceptive or sarcastic here, although as his primary motivation seems to be to make money, and the opportunity to embarrass Christianity is a tangential bonus, I am not inclined to think so.

223 Edited in *Mariu saga*. pp. 1058-1059 and pp. xvii-xviii respectively.

224 On the wide influence of the Old Norse *exempla*, see: Erika Ruth Sigurdson. “The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland. Ecclesiastical Administration, Literacy, and the Formation of an Elite Clerical Identity.” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2011) pp. 62-80.

225 “Af sýslumanni ok fjánda” in *Isländzke Æventyri. Isländische Legenden Novellen und Märchen*. vol. 1. ed. by Hugo Gering. (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1882) p. 154.

hann ok trúðu einfalldan mann en eigi guð, veit ek fyrir víst at þær Kristiani aukit því viðr, at hann væri bæði guð ok maðr. Því flytit þær ok frægit ok á bækr setit, at þá er líkaminn dó á krossinum, herjaði guðdómrinn til helvitis ok ynni þar svá mikinn herskap, at hann byndi kónginn sem barn, en herleiddi fólkit hvat er hann kallaði sitt vera. Nú ef svá væri satt, at fyrir blóð ok benjar mannzins náttúru hefði guðdómrinn þetta gjört, veit ek víst at helvízkir andar reka þar minni til, með hvílkri ásjónu han kvalði kóng þeirra ok eyddi ríki þeirra, ok því munu þeir eylífliga viðr enga ásýnd hræddari ok aflausari en þíningarsár ok kross Jesu ...”<sup>226</sup>

And then it occurs to him, that in town there was a certain Jew, a man so good at giving advice and very wise that ... [he] solved all the problems to which he applied himself ... When the Jew has heard the case, he answers as so: “It is a great wonder to me, that you who believe in Christ the Crucified should come to me with complaints and problems, when you know how different our religions and customs are. But because I have long made a habit of not sparing my words or suggestions if people might get some relief from it, then I will not refuse to help you out, for I see that you are a very worried man. But I want you to know this, that my advice will be nothing other to you than a testing of this belief which you have in Jesus the Nazarene. If it is good, then it will serve you, and if it's not, then you'll go under. Now, although my forefathers crucified him because they believed and pronounced him to be entirely human and not a god, I know for certain that you Christians developed it further, saying that he was both God and man. That's why you preached and publicised and wrote books about how when the body died on the cross, the Godhead harried Hell and won a great victory there, and that he trussed up the king like a child, and took away those he called his own. Now if that's true, that the Godhead had done that with the blood and wounds of human form, I know for sure that hellish spirits would remember that face, with which he tormented their king and destroyed their kingdom, and therefore they will eternally find no face more terrifying and impossible to face than the crucifixion wounds and cross of Jesus ...

Again, the Jew's wily nature hints at ethnic stereotyping rather than learned deliberation on the part of the author, but the speech begins to seem remarkably subtle when we consider that the audience of this text would not have been living alongside Jews, hearing about or experiencing their practices first hand. The hermeneutic value of the “New Testament Jews” is potentially universal, regardless of Jewish absence or presence, but the discussion of persistent Jewish beliefs may well be prompted, precluded or coloured by external, social factors.<sup>227</sup> Consider, for instance, Adams's aforementioned conclusion

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid. at pp. 157-158.

<sup>227</sup> Consider Salo W. Baron's comment on anti-Judaism in societies with and without Jews: “Jewish 'perfidy' and 'infidelity,' or what was so designated by way of contrast to the Christian dogmas and practices which the authors wished to extol, could have been put up as an internal bogey before the Christian nations as a result of purely historical reminiscences. However, the force of the argument was increased many times over by the ever-present realistic illustration through well-known inmates of a neighboring Jewish quarter.” Salo W. Baron. “The Jewish Factor in Medieval Civilization.”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 12 (1942) p. 34.

regarding medieval Denmark: the Danes did not often encounter Jews, Old Danish literature has very little discussion of contemporary Jewry, ergo Danes could not have been interested therein. Conversely, taking a classic example from anti-Judaism studies, the sermons delivered by St. John Chrysostom in Antioch in 386 are peppered with theological attacks on contemporary Jews and Judaisers. These were texts written for people who experienced Jews and Judaism on a daily basis, and who needed reassurance that this religion with which they were constantly confronted was indeed false.<sup>228</sup> They required an authority to describe, interpret and dismiss Jewish beliefs (and if they didn't, such an authority soon appointed itself in the shape of St. John Chrysostom). In this regard, the absence of Jews clearly makes Iceland more similar to medieval Denmark than fourth century Antioch. Yet here we have a Christian avatar of Judaism 1) explaining something of his belief system, 2) showing how his heritage (“*forfedr míni*”) gives him a sense of continuity with the time of Christ, and 3) offering pointed criticism of the apocryphal gospels, all in an earthy and wry tone which has more in common with the counsel of Snorri goði than classic anti-Jewish polemic. Reducing Judaism to a long relegated adversary of Christendom, or a cartoonishly stubborn and irrational remnant, would surely be sufficient strategies for an Old Norse author dealing with the topos of the *gyðingar*, but this *exemplum* reveals a determination to do something more sophisticated than that. Its premise is that elsewhere in Europe Judaism exists as a religion not simply in conflict with Christianity, but in dialogue with it. This is not to say that these two examples are somehow religiously tolerant. After all, they both end with their Jewish characters seeing the error of their ways by divine revelation and subsequently apostatising. However, they do suggest that there was a tendency to encourage the Icelandic laity not just to reject Judaism dogmatically, but to feel that they knew something about it.

### **Judaising and popular knowledge in Medieval Norway**

Intriguingly, there is also some evidence of a Norse-speaking congregation adducing knowledge of Jewish law and custom directly from scripture, much as Brandr did, rather than relying on the basic and sometimes incorrect fragments supplied by the translators of *miracula* and *exempla*. The originally Jewish observation of the Saturday Sabbath (or “Seventh Day Sabbath”) had been forbidden to Christians by canon law since the Council of Laodicea in the fourth century.<sup>229</sup> But in fifteenth century Norway there were apparently some who rejected this pronouncement. The only vernacular source describing this incident dates from the late Middle Ages, but the language in which it is written is recognisably inflected West Norse, albeit well on the way to becoming fully fledged Middle Norwegian. On the 24<sup>th</sup>

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228 John G. Gager. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism. Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) pp. 118-120.

229 “The Christians must not sit idle and judaize on the Sabbath, but ought to work on that day. They must honour the Lord's Day [Sunday] in whatever way they can by resting, inasmuch as they are Christians. But if they persist in being Jews they ought to be anathema to Christ”. Rader Jacob Marcus (ed. and trans.) *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook 315-1791*. (New York: Hebrew College Union Press, 1999) p. 118.

August 1435, the Archbishop of Trondheim, Aslak Harniktsson Bolt, issued a decree containing the following:

Nu er oss til ørna komit at swmer mæn y imisom stadum tesse rikis dyrfvas thes af brøysleika sinna natura, en summer af villu pukans ok tileggian thæ helger wp at taka ok halda som hwerkit æro aff gudi æder heilagre kirkiu skipader æder samtyktir, wtan heldr storligha bade mote gudi ok helgra sætning ok ær theth lögurdagx helg som Juda ok hædhninga plega at halda æn æy cristne men ok stander høgelika forbudit i helga kirkiulaghum at ijngen ma helga dagha halda æder aff nyio wpp taka adra æn the som war helge fader pawen erkebiscop æda biscopa biuda at haldas ...<sup>230</sup>

It has now come to our attention that some people in various places of this kingdom dare, because of the weakness of their character, and some of the heresy and incitement of the devil, to revere and take and observe that which is neither ordained or agreed upon by either God or the Holy Church, and which is rather greatly contrary to both God and divine sense, and that is the Saturday Sabbath, which Jews and heathens usually observe, but not Christians, and which remains highly forbidden in the laws of the holy church, that no-one should observe holy days or take up new ones other than those which our holy father the Pope, the archbishop or bishop decrees to be observed ....

This episode has not gone uncommented upon by historians. Nineteenth century explanations included possible influence from Judaizing Russian *Subotniki* and a supposed medieval Norwegian innovation of devoting Saturday to the veneration of the Virgin Mary.<sup>231</sup> Oluf Kolsrud argued that this doctrinal deviance was a typical intra-Christian disagreement about how to define the starting point of Sabbath. Building on this view, Berulfsen suggested that any connection with Judaism had most likely not existed until Aslak used the word *Juda* as a denigrating epithet for the non-conformists.<sup>232</sup> This cautious position seems largely sensible, and it is relevant to our investigation into knowledge of Jews and Judaism. As Salo W. Baron noted, the Christian observation of the Saturday Sabbath has often been caused by direct Jewish influence, but can also arise spontaneously out of “a reversion to the Old Testament against the New”.<sup>233</sup> Assuming for a moment that such a movement is indeed what happened in fifteenth century Norway, it's worth sketching out its potential scale. The letter is strongly worded, even for the register of the medieval Church. Its exhortations were repeated in Latin in an

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230 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 7. ed. by C.R. Unger & H.J. Huitfelt. (Christiania: P.T. Mallings, 1869) p. 390. On the dating of the letter see n. 1. in *ibid*.

231 The scholarly debate on this point took place in obscure Norwegian journals which are now very hard to find. The most accessible summary is Berulfsen, 1958. pp. 132-133.

232 *Ibid*.

233 Baron 1942. p. 33.

official summary of statutes three months later in the following December: *Item prohibemus sub eadem pena proxime predicta ne quis decetero feriendo festinet sabbatum more Judeorum*<sup>234</sup> - “we prohibit, under the same penalty previously mentioned, [a fine of two solid sterlings] not working and observing the Sabbath in the manner of the Jews”. The addition of a fixed penalty here suggests that Aslak's vernacular missive did not immediately solve the problem. Thus, it seems to have been a matter taken fairly seriously, both by the non-conformists themselves and the clergy (indeed, given the impracticalities of fining an entire congregation two sterlings each, and the fact the threat is made only in Latin, Aslak may well have suspected the involvement of his own clerics too). That said, the fact that there are no references to the affair in any subsequent sources is indicative of a controversy that may well have been particularly vocal or widely supported, but was not long-lived and was certainly not considered important enough by its proponents to go to the stake for.

Whether through alleged Jewish interference or folk exegesis, medieval churchmen seem to have been recurrently concerned that their flocks would begin to observe Jewish customs such as the Saturday Sabbath.<sup>235</sup> In the case of folk exegesis, their fears may not have been entirely unfounded. There do seem to be precedents for autonomous study of scripture leading to the rejection of the Sunday Sabbath. A ninth century epistle from the recently converted Bulgars naively asks Pope Nicholas I (c. 800-867) for clarification over whether to observe a Saturday Sabbath, a perfectly rational response when confronting the challenges of scripture for the first time.<sup>236</sup> The Sabbath-keeping Passagians of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries “believed in literal obedience to the Law of the Old Testament”,<sup>237</sup> and Judaized extensively as such. Although beyond the scope of our period, it is worth noting that post-medieval Saturday Sabbath-keepers seem to have arisen from independent study of the Old Testament too: e.g., various Reformation sects in northern and eastern Europe,<sup>238</sup> or the Sabbatarian tendency within the Millerites which eventually became the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The only firm evidence for similar lay knowledge of the Old Testament in medieval Norway dates from the late thirteenth and possibly early fourteenth centuries. *Stjórn* is itself indicative of popular interest, given that it is written in the vernacular. The prologue, which was either added after the work's completion or

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234 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 5. ed. by Chr. C. A. Lange & C.R. Unger (Christiania: P.T. Mallings, 1860) pp. 470-471.

235 For a number of translated case studies, see: Karl W. Deutsch. “Anti-Semitic Ideas in the Middle Ages: International Civilizations in Expansion and Conflict.”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, 2 (April, 1945) pp. 241-242. The aforementioned sermons by St. John Chrysostom menacingly warn that: “if you take part in the fasting, or share in the sabbath, or observe any other Jewish ritual great or small, I call heaven and earth as my witnesses that I am guiltless of the blood of all of you”. St. John Chrysostom. “Discourse I” in *The Fathers of the Church. Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. trans. by Paul W. Harkins. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999) p. 32

236 Daniel Augsburger. “The Sabbath and Lord's Day during the Middle Ages” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*. ed. by Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D.C. : Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982) p. 196. See also pp. 190-214 for a survey of medieval Sabbatarianism more generally.

237 G. R. Evan. *A Brief History of Heresy*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) p. 6.

238 Dirk Van Arkel. *The Drawing of the Mark of Cain. A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Growth of Anti-Jewish Stereotypes*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009) p. 439.

belonged to a section of *Stjórn* which postdated the rest of the work, is dedicated to King Hákon Magnússon (1270 – 1319). There it is written that the work was translated for the benefit of those *sem eigi skilía eðr vnderstanda látínu ...[ok skal] líosliga lesaz láíta fyrir qllum goðum monnum af þuí guðs husi.*<sup>239</sup> - “who do not understand or comprehend Latin ... [and it should] be clearly read aloud for all those good people of the house of God”. As we have seen from Aslak's letter, the language of the 1430s was very similar to Old Norse, but it was divergent enough to give us strong misgivings about the prospect that parts of *Stjórn* might have lain behind the insurgent Sabbatarianism. That said, *Stjórn*, *The Old Icelandic Homily Book*, *The Old Norwegian Homily Book*, the various pieces of vernacular Bible quotation dotted around elsewhere in Old Norse literature, on-going research into the influence of Exodus on works as diverse as *Laxdæla saga*, *Yngvars saga Víðförla* and *Gauts Þáttr*, the Israelist streak in Norwegian royal genealogies, all suggest a long precedent for transmitting knowledge of the Old Testament in Old Norse, both through written and oral channels.<sup>240</sup> There is no reason to suppose that clerics abandoned this effort as Old Norse began to evolve into Middle Norwegian. As the proverb goes, “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing”: we might well infer that the custom which so alarmed Aslak was the inevitable product of centuries of popular engagement with fragments of the Old Testament.

If the Norwegian Saturday Sabbath-keepers were, as the Passagians before them, inspired by study of the Old Covenant they must have also possessed a significant degree of understanding about historical Judaism. Like Brandr, there would have been no avenue for them to acquire knowledge of the religion's contemporary form, but unlike Brandr their comprehension would doubtless not have recognised the integrity or value of Judaism beyond its meaning for Christians. After all, although Judaisers were regularly accused of being more Jewish than Christian, they were motivated by a desire to find a purer form of their faith. Aslak's invective - *som Juda ok hæðninga plega at halda æn æy cristne men* – addresses this tension. *Hæðninga* here probably refers to Muslims rather than pagans, as in Old Norse *heiðinn / heiðingjar*, used to refer to adherents of Islam in the *riðdarasögur*. There is also no evidence of a pre-Christian tradition resembling the Sabbath; the idea of *hæðninga* observing the wrong Sabbath might be a garbled reference to *jumu'ah* – Islamic Friday Prayers. Thus, Aslak is invoking the two contemporary enemies of Christendom. (Of relevance to the question of Scandinavian apprehensions of Jews, he also exposes his own *interpretatio christiana* of Judaism and Islam in the process). The archbishop's strategy is to juxtapose the non-conformists' interest in the Mosaic tradition, the “good Jews” of the Old Testament, with contemporary Judaism, the “bad Jews” of *miracula*, such as the *Jewish*

239 *Stjórn*. vol. 1. ed. by Reidar Astås. (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2009) p. 4.

240 Haki Antonsson. “The Search for Salvation and Early Saga Writing in Medieval Iceland”, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, 8 (2012) pp. 84-87, 100-103. On Bible quotation, see Kirby, 1986 pp. 151-164. A catalogue of direct quotations from the Old Testament can be found in: J. Belsheim. (ed.) *Af Bibelen paa norsk-islandske (norröna) i Middelalderen*. (Christiania: P.T. Mallings, 1884) pp. 14-35

*Boy* tale found in a vernacular Norwegian sermon from c. 1450 (a popular Marian miracle where a Jewish child is thrown into an oven by his irate father after accepting the sacrament).<sup>241</sup> It is interesting to note that, as we have seen from the subsequently decreed penalties, such rhetoric alone was not enough. At this particular time in Norway, among those beyond Aslak's immediate reach, apprehensions of Jewish custom based on the Old Testament must have had more appeal than those based on anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic preaching. Whether this reflected the independent thinking of the laity or the clergy is hard to say.

### **Knowledge of Hebrew amongst Medieval Norwegians and Icelanders**

This matter is particularly interesting in cases where Jews were absent. Because a language can be taught as a discrete practical skill rather than a rhizomatic body of knowledge, it is hypothetically possible to become very accomplished in Hebrew *as a language* independent of knowledge (or a lack thereof) about authentic Jewish history and culture. Moreover, while understanding other areas of Jewish culture is best achieved through direct experience, understanding a written language is relatively easily acquired through instruction – instruction which can be given by Christians far removed from the ancient and distant point where a Jew first provided it. As we have seen, medieval Hebraists were often preoccupied with anti-Jewish polemic, and as such would probably have sought reliable information about Jews and Judaism to complement their linguistic acumen. For example, the first great Hebraist, St. Jerome, combined Hebrew literacy with criticism of Jewish clothing.<sup>242</sup> This tendency has been referred to by Michael Signer as “cultural Hebraism” - a strain which had “an ethnographic eye”,<sup>243</sup> and was “attentive to issues arising from contact with contemporary Judaism”.<sup>244</sup> Signer distinguishes “cultural Hebraism”, where Hebrew is acquired directly from Jews and is subsequently used to engage with contemporary Jewish culture, from “lexical Hebraism”, where the aim of Hebrew study is for Christians to acquire a solid, independent comprehension of the language. To some extent, Signer's classification is built on a discourse of presence and absence. Of his own work in defining species of Hebraism, he writes:

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241 For comment on the providence of the Middle Norwegian version, a Dominican sermon from Solum church in Nedre Telemark, see: Didrik Arup Seip. “Norsk bibelmål” in *Studier i Norsk Språkhistorie*. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1934) pp. 240-241. Elsewhere in Scandinavia, the tale is found five times in Old Norse: *Marín saga*, pp. 71-72, 836-838, 987-988, p. 989, pp. 989-990. And once in Old Swedish: *Ett Forn-Svenskt Legendarium, innehållande Medeltids Kloster-Sagor om Helgon, Påfjor och Kejsare ifrån det I:ste till det XIII:de århundradet*. ed. by George Stephens. vol. 1. (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1847) p. 22.

242 Joel B. Itzkowitz. “Jews, Indians, Phylacteries: Jerome on Matthew 23.5”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 15, 4 (Winter, 2007) pp. 563-572.

243 Michael A. Signer. “Polemics and Exegesis: The Varieties of Twelfth Century Christian Hebraism” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*. ed. by Allison Coudert. (Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) p. 26.

244 Deborah L. Goodwin. “Nothing in *Our Histories*! A Postcolonial Perspective on Twelfth-Century Christian Hebraism”, *Medieval Encounters* 15, 1 (2009) p. 45.

The emphasis of contact with living Jews that appears to constitute the core of Christian Hebraism during the twelfth century is an effort to balance an argument central to ... [Jeremy Cohen's *Living Letters of the Law*, i.e. the “hermeneutical Jew”] ... Cohen's focus on the “images” of the Jew as constructed in the writings of Christian theologians from Augustine through the Friars ... As the textual tradition of the early Christian authors came under the critical methods of medieval scholars, “the hermeneutical Jew” met the “real”, or “living”, Jew.<sup>245</sup>

So while “cultural Hebraism” and “lexical Hebraism” are useful categories that inform this study, a binarism between the two based on the principle of Christian-Jewish contact is not appropriate in a medieval Scandinavian context, where there were no “real” or “living” Jews. Rather, the question of degrees of competence in – not contact with – the Hebrew language and knowledge of Jewish culture is of primary importance. We might contrast “cultural Hebraism” not with Signer's other variety but with Hebraism that was not accompanied by an informed interest in Jewish life. Consider the example of Peter Abelard: He could probably read Hebrew, had studied under Jewish teachers, and frequently consulted local Jewish scholars.<sup>246</sup> Yet his *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian* presents the Jew in a “disunified way” which “has little to do with the currents of Jewish thought at the time”.<sup>247</sup> For Hebraists whose use of the language was still more abstract and still less developed, there is no reason to suppose that they would have required much knowledge of Jewish culture. Naturally, medieval Hebraists who put their skills to use for polemic purposes will seem more prominent to us, but for a large proportion of Christians who knew Hebrew the skill must have been used only for personal spiritual reflection or scribal work. That is to say, although the class sizes were probably fairly intimate, not every student could have been “a Jerome” or “an Abelard”.<sup>248</sup> For instance, consider the scribes who had studied at the great centres of Christian Hebraism, Ramsey Abbey in England or St. Victor Abbey in Paris, who subsequently found no use for the language except when transcribing letters for Psalters or *abecedaria*.<sup>249</sup> Even if they retained the knowledge of *Judaica* they had acquired while studying, the amount of it which would have been transmitted when they took on students of their own at other institutions must have diminished.<sup>250</sup> We might call this kind of knowledge “technical Hebraism”.

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245 Signer 2004. p. 21.

246 Aryeh Grabois. “The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century”, *Speculum*, 50, 4 (1975) p. 617.

247 John Marenbon & Giovanni Orlandi. Introduction to *Collationes* by Peter Abelard. ed. and trans. by Jon Marenbon & Giovanni Orlandi. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. xlvi- xlvii.

248 Eva De Visscher. “An Ave Maria in Hebrew: the Transmission of Hebrew Learning from Jewish to Christian Scholars in Medieval England” in *Christians and Jews in Medieval England: Narratives and Contexts for the York 1190 Massacre*. pp. 175-176.

249 Of course, sometimes an exegete might also be a scribe. The artist of the *Ramsey Psalter* has been shown to have had an understanding of contemporary Jewish theology which Abelard lacked. See: Lucy Freeman Sandler. “Christian Hebraism and the Ramsey Abbey Psalter”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 35 (1972) p. 133.

250 De Visscher (forthcoming) p. 175 notes that this was one avenue by which Hebrew was taught, the other being studying directly from Jews or Jewish apostates.

Surprisingly, the earliest plausible Norse-speaking contact with Hebraism also comes from a country devoid of Jewish settlement, namely Ireland. Irish intellectuals achieved a remarkable level of literary and theological sophistication during the early to high Middle Ages. There is evidence that some of the Hiberno-Norse, who had been settling in the country since the ninth century, became directly involved in the religious institutions in which such achievements were made. Bishops and abbots with Scandinavian names are attested in Ireland from the eleventh century onwards,<sup>251</sup> and there is no reason to suppose that the Scandinavian minority had not been joining monasteries prior to that, just as the indigenous majority did.<sup>252</sup> There is a runic inscription from Beginish, IR 3, over the doorway of an arch in the monastery. A Norse sentence in an Irish manuscript from just before 1160 is also indicative of Norse-speakers being amongst the educated elite.<sup>253</sup> Pádraic Moran has highlighted how, without Jews to serve as teachers, Irish clergymen had been 'reverse engineering' an understanding of the Hebrew language from as early as the seventh century, mostly via St. Jerome's *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*. This auto-didactic understanding of Hebrew can hardly be called "fluency", but given the circumstances Irish Biblical glossaries demonstrate an impressively large Hebrew vocabulary (77 words survive) and an imperfect but well-reasoned understanding of Hebrew morphology.<sup>254</sup> Moran also suggests that this research into the meaning of the Hebrew words embedded in Latin texts was used to prove, or maybe inspired, Irish myths regarding the Tower of Babel.<sup>255</sup> How obscure this knowledge would have been to medieval Irish intellectuals is hard to say, but if it is indeed the origin of the aforementioned Fénius Farsaid tradition then it may well have been taught from generation to generation of students with some continuity. While ultimately conjectural, this would make it not at all unlikely that at some point Irish clergy of Hiberno-Norse background became familiar with this knowledge.

Such hypothetical Hebraism in the Norse-speaking Diaspora can hardly account for any traces of Hebrew knowledge found elsewhere in Scandinavia at a later date. Scandinavian language competency amongst the Hiberno-Norse seems to have been in serious decline by the time of the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169, and thereafter England must have superseded Norway as their most relevant foreign power - indeed by 1300 the last of the Hiberno-Norse who had not become Irish had become

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251 Although otherwise outdated, a convenient register of these names can be found in: J.J. A. Worsaae. *An Account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland, and Ireland*. (London: John Murray, 1852) pp. 343-345.

252 There is some evidence of this, although it is hard to imagine the man in question learning much Hebrew. Amlaíb Cuarán/Óláfr Kvaran retired to Iona shortly before his death in 981. See: Edel Bhreathnach. "Columban Churches in Brega and Leinster: Relations with the Norse and the Anglo-Normans", *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 129 (1999) esp. pp. 6-11.

253 Didrik Arup Seip. *Palæografi B. Norge og Island*. (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz Forlag, 1954) p. 1.

254 Pádraic Moran. "Hebrew in early Irish glossaries", *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 60 (Winter, 2010) passim.

255 Ibid. at p. 18.

English.<sup>256</sup> Although, as we shall see, it is worth noting that many of the features of Irish Hebraism are analogous to that which we find in Scandinavia, being 1) a skill pursued without access to Jewish teachers, 2) a skill not used for polemic purposes, and 3) based on the use of the Hebrew terminology which is integral to Christianity (cf. Brandr's study of Jewish history using Biblical sources). Beyond Ireland there are a number of centres of learning where Hebraism was more developed and direct connections with Icelanders and Norwegians more likely.

Ramsey Abbey in England is known to have produced at least two Hebraists, and its facilities suggest this pair were not alone. One of the abbots there, Gregory of Huntingdon, procured a large number of Hebrew manuscripts following the expulsion of the Jews in 1290. In fact, by the middle of the fourteenth century the abbey possessed "sixteen or seventeen Hebrew books, including two Bibles, a psalter, glosses on the Bible and a Hebrew grammar".<sup>257</sup> Based on these acquisitions, a monk named Laurence Holbeach compiled a Hebrew glossary at some point during the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.<sup>258</sup> As we have seen in the case of the King's Lynn port records, Norwegians were trading in East Anglia throughout this period, and they probably would have been aware of Ramsey's prestige, whether in its capacity as an important economic centre in the area or as a place to find an education for a son. However, our limited sources reveal only a very tenuous connection to the north: a solitary reference to *Ramesiensis kirkiu* in one of the two Old Norse versions of the *Conception* miracle.<sup>259</sup> Even then, this story was widely circulated, so while not impossible, there is little reason to suppose that the Norse translations ultimately stem from a student or visitor at Ramsey itself.<sup>260</sup> Norse-speaking visitors to Ramsey were apparently not numerous enough to leave any historical records. The lower their numbers were, the less probability that they were among the students of Hebrew.

A similarly problematic example of a hypothetical point of contact between Norwegians/Icelanders and the Hebrew language comes from Lincoln. The town had two Jewish *scola*, one of which, the school of Peytevin Magnus, is thought to have provided a fairly advanced education in Hebrew literacy and Jewish thought.<sup>261</sup> It is not unreasonable to think that Christians may have learnt Hebrew from the scholars there. Consider that in the debate over whether Robert Grosseteste ever achieved fluency in Hebrew (as opposed to the rudimentary technical Hebraism which he certainly did possess) it has been argued that he must have done so later in life, therefore after becoming Bishop of Lincoln.<sup>262</sup> The

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256 Edmund Curtis. "Norse Dublin", *Dublin Historical Record* 41, 3 (1988) pp. 94-95.

257 Freeman Sandler, 1972. p. 133

258 Joseph Mihelic. "The Study of Hebrew in England", *Journal of Bible and Religion* 14, 2 (1946) p. 96.

259 "Hversu til kom concepco" in *MaS*. p. 1031.

260 Widding 1996. pp. 64-65.

261 Robin R. Mundill. *The King's Jews. Money, Massacre and Exodus in Medieval England*. (London: Continuum Books, 2010) p. 58.

262 S. Harrison Thomson. *The Writings of Robert Grosseteste. Bishop of Lincoln 1235-1253*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940) pp. 38-39. For a recent argument that Grosseteste fully understood Hebrew, see: James McEvoy. *Robert*

university at Oxford does not seem to have had a teacher of Hebrew during Grosseteste's studies there; perhaps Lincoln finally provided him with the necessary resources? But again, whether there was any collegiality between the Jewish and Christian intelligentsia of Lincoln is not indicated explicitly, much less the participation of St. Þorlákr, Páll or any other visiting Icelanders - even if their medieval biographers enthused about how wide the learning they achieved there was:

[From *Þorláks saga*.]

Þaðan fór hann til Englands ok var í Lincolni ok nam þar enn mikit nám ok þarfsælligt, bæði sér ok qðrum, ok hafði þá enn mikit gott þat af sér at miðla í kenningum sínum er hann var áðr trautt jafn vel við búinn sem nú.<sup>263</sup>

From there [Paris] he went to to England and was in Lincoln, and acquired there yet more learning, useful both to himself and others, and he enjoyed sharing his knowledge as much as he had been unwilling to do so before.

[From *Páls saga*.]

En síðan fór hann suðr til Englands ok var þar í skóla ok nam þar svá mikit nám at trautt váru dæmi til at neinn maðr hafði jafn mikit nám numit né þvílíkt á jafn langri stundu. Ok þá er hann kom út til Íslands þá var hann fyrir qllum mǫnnum qðrum í kurteisi lærdóms síns, versagorð ok bókalestri.<sup>264</sup>

And then he went south to England was in school there, and there acquired so much learning that it would be hard to name a man who had acquired as much of such learning in a time of equal length. And then when he returned to Iceland he was above all others in the greatness of his knowledge, poetry and the art of letters.

Elsewhere in England, we know that Hebrew was being taught in Oxford as early as 1320, when a Jewish apostate named John of Bristol was appointed as a lecturer. This decision was presumably taken in accordance with an order from the Council of Vienne issued in 1312 stating that Aramaic, Arabic, Greek and Hebrew should be taught in Bologna, Paris, Salamanca, and Oxford.<sup>265</sup> Again, there are no unambiguous records to suggest that John or his successors would have taught Norse-speaking students. However, Arne Odd Johnsen has suggested that Norwegian attendance at Oxford has probably been obscured by students in English sources by the epithet “de Dacia”, often taken as

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*Grosseteste*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 120-121.

263 *Þorláks saga in elzta in Biskupa Sögur II*. ed. by Ásdís Egilsdóttir. Íslenzk Fornrit vol. 16. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2002) p. 52

264 *Páls saga biskups* in *ibid.* p. 298.

265 Mihelic 1946. pp. 95-96.

Denmark but potentially including Norway. Of course, Dacia is a notoriously ambiguous term – consider the debate over the origins of Boethius of Dacia. However, we know that during the thirteenth century the Dominicans were sending students to Oxford, and other centres of learning, from a “Dacia” which did not distinguish between Sweden and Denmark, so the fact that even those sponsoring an education abroad were comfortable with the imprecision of the term lends credence to Johnsen's theory.<sup>266</sup> He also points to references in the Norse material concerning study abroad in “England”, which by the fourteenth century would most likely have referred either to Oxford or Cambridge.<sup>267</sup> Frustratingly, we encounter the inverse situation in the case of Cambridge. There is an explicit record of Norwegian attendance at the university; in two letters from 1329 a Norwegian cleric named Arnfinnr is referred to as *studenti Cantabryggis*.<sup>268</sup> But there is no evidence of Hebrew being taught during the same period. Although it has been supposed that Hebrew was sometimes taught at Cambridge prior to the establishment of the Regius Professorship there in 1540, it is not possible to say how early this tradition began.<sup>269</sup>

If there were a number of places in England where Norwegian and Icelandic students might plausibly have encountered Hebrew, France provides one location where we know that Hebraism and visits from the north were taking place at the same time, in the same place. The Abbey of St. Victor was founded in 1110 on the outskirts of Paris, and was arguably the most important and well resourced centre for Hebraism during the Middle Ages. The study of Hebrew had already begun there in the days of Hugh of St. Victor (fl. 1120s), who was the first master known to have some comprehension of the language.<sup>270</sup> Students at the abbey appear to have been fairly well versed in the works of Jewish scholars, particularly Rashi of Troyes (d. 1104), and the growing population of Jews would have provided ample opportunities for inter-religious learning, although the rabbis probably served more as “consultants” than permanent teachers at the abbey – the students may well have learnt their Hebrew from fellow Christians.<sup>271</sup> In addition to Hugh, Hebrew scholars of note there included Andrew of St. Victor, (d. 1175) his student, Herbert of Bosham, (fl. 1170s)<sup>272</sup> and Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173).

Norwegian students began attending St. Victor in the mid-twelfth century, a connection that seems to have been established following the marriage of the abbot's sister to a Norwegian nobleman, and they

266 Ellen Jørgensen. “Nordiske Studierejser i Middelalderen”, *Dansk Historisk Tidsskrift* 8, 5 (1914-1915) p. 347.

267 Arne Odd Johnsen. “Studieresor. Norge” in *KLNM*. vol. 17. (1972) pp. 333-334.

268 See: *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 5. p. 73, 75.

269 Mihelic 1946. p. 98.

270 Beryl Smalley. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978) p. 103. For a thorough overview of the Victorines and the Hebraists amongst them more generally, see *ibid.* pp. 83-195.

271 On contacts between Jews and Victorines, see: Rainer Berndt. “The School of St. Victor in Paris” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: the history of its interpretation*. vol. 1. part 2. ed. by Magnus Sæbø. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) esp. pp. 487-492. On the degree of self-sufficiency amongst Hebraists, see: Grabois 1975. pp. 620-623.

272 Smalley 1978. p. 187.

continued to do so until the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>273</sup> The Victorines had a tremendous impact on ecclesiastical culture in Norway. A number of high-ranking Norwegian clergy were alumni, including Archbishop Eysteinn Erlendsson (d. 1181). During the 1200s, some forty Norwegians are recorded with the title *magister / meistari*, presumably a great deal of them having qualified in Paris.<sup>274</sup> (The University of Paris, which emerged during the late twelfth century, had been founded by a consortium including the abbey of St. Victor, and the two institutions were largely contiguous throughout the Middle Ages).<sup>275</sup> All five of the country's Augustinian monasteries were daughter establishments. There are no records of Icelanders attending, although it has been suggested that the abbey was where St. Þorlákr studied while he was in Paris.<sup>276</sup> The flow of traders, ecclesiastical personnel, and manuscripts between Iceland and Norway make it easy to imagine Norwegian Victorines being active in Iceland and perhaps Icelanders being inspired to study at St. Victor as a result. Even if only very few Icelanders visited the abbey in person, Victorine learning came to exert a great deal of influence on Old Norse literature. Adam of St. Victor (d. 1192), Godfrey of St. Victor (d. 1194), Hugh of St. Victor, and particularly in the case of Brandr, Peter Comestor (d. c. 1179), were all known to Old Norse authors.<sup>277</sup>

During the two centuries where St. Victor was the preferred destination for Norwegians studying abroad, it would be highly unusual if not one of them availed himself of the abbey's unique opportunities for the study of Hebrew. Although none such scholars are named, it is worth noting the reasons that Earl Røgnvaldr Kali Kolsson took Bishop Vilhjálmr of Orkney with him on his crusade in 1151-1153: *Dá gerði hann [Røgnvaldr] ok bert of ráðagörðir sínar, at hann atlaði ór landi ok út til Jórsalabeims. Bað hann byskup til ferðar með sér. Byskup var Parísskerker góðr, ok vildi jarl einkum, at hann væri túlker þeira.*<sup>278</sup> - "Then he [Røgnvaldr] made clear his plans, that he intended to go abroad to Jerusalem. He asked the bishop to go with him. The bishop was a great scholar of Paris, and the earl wanted him because he could be their interpreter". Presumably it was the bishop's competence in French which the earl had foremost in mind, but an additional knowledge of Hebrew might explain Røgnvaldr's decision to take such an important member of the local clergy with him abroad rather than seeking another, less valuable French-speaker (e.g. another more dispensable clergyman or a merchant).<sup>279</sup>

273 Johnsen 1972. p. 332. All the following concerning Norwegian connections with St. Victor is from *ibid.* pp. 332-336.

274 Ludvig Holm-Olsen & Kjell Heggelund. *Norges Litteratur Historie. Fra Runene til Norske Selskab.* vol. 1. ed. by Evard Beyer. (Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 1974) p. 328

275 Gilbert Ouy. "Saint-Victor de Paris" in *Histoire des bibliothèques françaises.* vol. 1. ed. by André Vernet (Paris: Promodès, 1989) p. 86

276 Fredrik Paasche. *Norges og Islands litteratur inntil utgangen av middelalderen.* ed. by Anne Holtmark (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1957) p. 281.

277 Hans Bekker-Nielsen. "The Victorines and Their Influence on Old Norse Literature" in *The Fifth Viking Congress. Tórshavn, July 1965.* ed. by Bjarni Niclasen (Tórshavn: Føroya Fróðskaparfelag, 1968) pp. 32-36.

278 *Orkneyinga saga.* p. 204. "góðr" is supplied from the manuscript variants.

279 Although Hebrew as an oral medium had largely died out by this point, there are examples of spoken Hebrew being

There are a few examples in Old Norse authors possessing – and more often pretending - a degree of familiarity with Hebrew. The anonymous author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* (hereafter *FGT*) opens his proposed orthography by setting Old Norse among various other languages which each require their own writing system. His use of the present tense demonstrates his conception of Hebrew literature not as something that ended with the Bible, but as an ongoing process of scholarship that is still as vital as Latin, Greek or Norse:

Í flestum löndum setja menn á bœkr annat tveggja þann fróðleik, er þar innanlands hefir gǫrzk, eða þann annan, er minnisamligastr þykkir, þó at annars staðar hafi heldr gǫrzk, eða lög sín setja menn á bœkr, hver þjóð á sína tungu. En af því at tungurnar eru ólíkar hver annarri, þær þegar er ór einni ok inni sǫmu tungu hafa gengizk eða greinzk, þá þarf ólíka stafir í at hafa, en eigi ina sǫmu alla í qlum, sem eigi ríta grikkir látínustǫfum girzkuna ok eigi látínუმenn girzkum stǫfum látínu, né enn heldr ebreskir menn ebreskuna hvárki girzkum stǫfum né látínu, heldr rítr sínum stǫfum hver þjóð sína tungu.<sup>280</sup>

In most countries people put down in books either the knowledge which has been achieved natively, or the sort which is considered the most worthy of remembering, even though it has been achieved in another place, or people put down their law in books – each nation has its own language. But because each language is different from every other, for each has diverged or been divided from the same original language, then they need to have different letters, not the same letters for all, for the Greeks do not write Greek in Latin letters, and the Latins do not write Latin in Greek letters, neither yet do the Jews write Hebrew in either Greek or Latin letters. Rather, each nation writes his letters according to its language.

Not content to show his awareness of Hebrew's existence, the author then attempts to display his knowledge of Hebrew script by explaining the supposed origins of the letter “Z”. A facsimile follows, with the scribe's attempt to reproduce 7 and 3 circled:

Z, hann er samsettr af *deleth*, ebreskum staf svá ritnum: [ʔ], ok settr er fyrir *d*, ok af þeim ǫðrum, er heitir *sade*, ok er svá ritinn: [ʔ], ok er fyrir *es* í látínu settr. Alls hann sjálfr er ebreskr stafir, er þó sé hann í látínustafrófi ok hafðr, því at ebresk orð vaða opt í látínunni. Honum vísa ek heldr ór váru máli ok stafrófi, því at þó verða fyrir nauðsynja sakir fleiri stafir í þar, en elligar vilda ek hafa.<sup>281</sup>

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used as an auxiliary language from the medieval period, particularly in areas of Islamic control such as the Middle East. See: Eduard Yechezkel Kutschel. *A History of the Hebrew Language*. (Leiden: Brill, 1982) pp. 148-150.

280 *First Grammatical Treatise. The Earliest Germanic Philology*. ed. by Einar Haugen. (London: Longman, 1972) p. 12.

281 *Ibid.* at p. 28.

Z is combined from *deleth*, the Hebrew letter which is written as so: [ʔ], and stands for *d*, and of another which is called *sade*, and it is written as so: [ʔ], and stands for Latin *s*. Although it is in itself a Hebrew letter, it is also in the Latin alphabet, since Hebrew words often occur in Latin. I would rather exclude it from our language and alphabet, because there are already more letters than the necessary ones I would otherwise have.

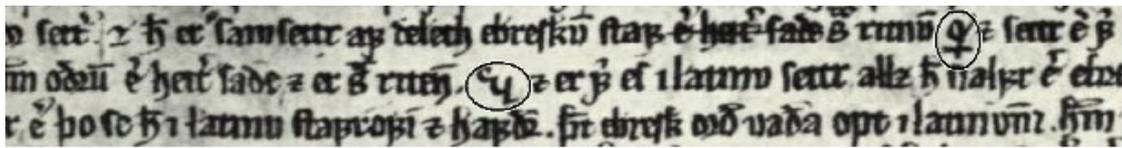


Fig. 5: Spurious Hebrew characters in the *First Grammatical Treatise*. Text and translation above.

The *FGT* is not in an autographic hand, being preserved now only in the fourteenth century *Codex Wormianus*. It is generally thought to have been written in the middle of the twelfth century.<sup>282</sup> Interestingly, this passage is not taken from the continental sources which inform the rest of the work. The Hebrew derivation appears to be an original innovation. What to make of these attempts at ʔ (*dalet*) and ʕ (*tsade*) then? It has been noted that the letters bear a slight resemblance to the Hebrew script as it was sometimes written on coins, but the similarity is not great enough to suppose that this is anything other than co-incidental.<sup>283</sup> For my own part, I can see how the gradual curling of the top bar of *dalet* into a loop is a distortion that might conceivably occur over a lengthy transmission process, but it is hard to imagine how the addition of a cross bar could arise from infidelities in copying. Similarly, the *tsade* has at least the right number of strokes, but as it stands is too removed from the real letter to be the work of anyone acquainted with the Hebrew alphabet, or even a second-hand copy thereof. If the letters are not accurate reproductions, we are led to the question of their provenance. Anne Holtsmark's conclusions on this issue merit citing at length:

Den mann som skrev dette håndskriftet i det 14. årh., var en flink avskriver, men heller ikke mer, og han har neppe kunnet det hebraiske alfabet, som overhodet ikke er overlevert i noe islandsk håndskrift hvad selve tegnene angår ... Skriveren av *Cod. Worm.* har prøvd å kopiere forelegget (som ikke behøver å ha vært originalen), men hans forsøk ser ikke ut til å ha vært vellykket: de tegnene som står i *Cod. Worm.*, ligner i det hele tatt ikke på noen andre skrifte tegn ... ʔ's etymologi, om man kan kalle den så ... er hittil ikke funnet hos noen grammatiker eller i skrifter om alfabet fra middelalderen, hvilket dog ikke vil si at den ikke kan finnes. Den er neppe heller forfatterens egen

282 Fabrizio D. Raschella. "Grammatical Treatises" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 237.

283 This was observed by the Danish Hebraist, H. Kissmeyer. See: Anne Holtsmark. *En Islandsk Scholasticus fra det 12. Århundrede*. (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1936) p. 72

konstruksjon; han trenger den ikke for å forvise  $\zeta$  fra alfabetet; argumentet “hebraisk bokstav” skulle være nok til det. Slik som  $\zeta$ 's historie er satt inn i avhandlingen, viser den sig som annenhånds kunnskap, en demonstrasjon av lærdom.<sup>284</sup>

The man who wrote this manuscript in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was an able copyist, but no more than that, and he can hardly have known the Hebrew alphabet, which is not preserved in any Icelandic manuscript with the letters themselves ... The writer of the *Cod. Worm.* has tried to copy the passage (which does not need to have been the original), but his attempt does not seem to have been successful: the letters which appear in the *Cod. Worm.* do not resemble any other script at all ... Z's etymology, if one can call it that ... is to date not found in any grammarians or texts about the alphabet during the Middle Ages, which is not to say that it does not exist. It is hardly the author's own construction either; he does not need it to exclude  $\zeta$  from the alphabet; the “Hebrew letter” argument would be enough for that. The way that the story of  $\zeta$  is inserted into the treatise shows it to be second-hand knowledge, a demonstration of learning.

Through a close study of the alphabets in question, Holtsmark then argued that the *dalet-tsade* theory originated by the parallel observation of both tenth century Hebrew script and insular Latin, although she stopped short of identifying where this might have happened. She demonstrated how a ligature of *dalet* and *tsade* in Sephardic cursive would have borne a striking resemblance to the insular  $\zeta$ , particularly as it was found in scripts that had recently evolved out of uncial or the insular forms sometimes seen in twelfth century Germany. As examples, she cited the  $\zeta$  from the *Book of Kells*, “ $\zeta$ ” or the German “ $\text{ſ}$ ”. The attempts to reproduce the letters themselves, which obscure rather than reveal this similarity, must therefore be the pretensions of the later copyist. As for “the story of  $\zeta$ ”, Holtsmark was unequivocal: *Så meget er imidlertid helt sikkert: derivasjonen er ikke laget av vår lærde forfatter ... Han må ha hørt den ute et sted.* - “This much is immediately completely certain: the derivation was not coined by our learned author ... He must have heard it somewhere abroad”. While we may well agree that the superfluousness of the defective  $\text{𐌷}$  and  $\text{𐌶}$  mean they are unlikely to have been part of the original *FGT*, there is a serious problem with her observation on the palaeographic similarities between the scripts in question. The form of Hebrew she cites seems very much to be Sephardic, although she refers to it as *den italiensk-tyske “rashi” skrift fra 10. århundrede* - “the Italian-German 'Rashi' script from the 10<sup>th</sup> century”. This is confusing, because Rashi script was not actually used by Rashi himself, being in fact a late Medieval font based on Sephardic cursive, created for the use in printing his commentaries. Although Sephardim might sometimes have exchanged manuscripts with the Ashkenazim, the overwhelming majority of Jewish texts in northern and western Europe would have been in Ashkenazic script, where a combined  $\text{𐌷}$  and  $\text{𐌶}$  would not have resembled Latin  $\zeta$  at all.

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid. at pp. 72-73.

As Ian McDougall points out, “the Icelandic author's remarks on the Hebrew origin of  $\zeta$  ... [are] completely erroneous. The Latin Grammarians regard  $\zeta$  as a Greek letter. No combination of the Hebrew characters  $\text{šade}$  and  $\text{daleth}$  will form either  $\zeta$  or  $\zeta\text{ayin}$ ”.<sup>285</sup> Nonetheless, I would like to contend that his comments are not completely nonsensical. In a way, “z” is *samsett* from *dalet* and *tsade*, not palaeographically, but phonemically. The Grammarian tells us that he pronounced <z> as /dz/ (his supposed <ds> or /ds/ being infeasible owing to voicing): *Vil ek heldr rita, þeim inum fám sinnum er þarf, d ok s, alls hann er ofvalt í váru máli af d samsettr ok s, en ekki sinn af [þ] ok s.*<sup>286</sup> - “At the few times it [i.e.  $\zeta$ ] is needed, I would rather write *d* and *s*, as in our language it is always combined from *d* and *s* but not once of *þ* and *s*”. The Hebrew  $\text{ז}$  would have been pronounced [d], and  $\text{צ}$  as /ts/. The Grammarian is quite reasonable in drawing a parallel between the sibilants of /z/ and a voiced /ts/~ /dz/, although of course his historical linguistic arguments thereof are indefensible.

Hreinn Benediktsson, Haugen, Holtmark and McDougall all seem to agree that an Icelander could not have come up with such an argument himself.<sup>287</sup> But is this necessarily the case? Firstly, the position that 1) the *delet-sade* theory is not found in any other source, and 2) it cannot be original, which will be proved when this mysterious source is found, is somewhat syllogistic. The fact that it is not argued elsewhere would seem to indicate strongly that it *is* an original innovation. Indeed, as McDougall points out, it runs strongly contrary to the teachings of other Latin grammarians, so where should we suppose this source is to be found? Rather, it would seem to be the work of someone who, though much inspired by canonical Latin grammar, does not feel that they are writing within that tradition and so will not be scrutinised by its practitioners – i.e., the author of the *FGT*, who in composing an orthography of Old Norse must have recognised the novelty of his work. Secondly, the Hebraism practised at St. Victor would have been the perfect environment for an Icelander to develop such an idea. Seeing the Hebrew letters could happen remotely via imported manuscripts, but hearing them pronounced necessitates the physical presence of a teacher. Indeed, the First Grammarian being a Victorine would otherwise make a great deal of sense. Holtmark herself pointed out the influence of Parisian scholars on his writing:

Forf. viser klar tilknytning til skolene i Fra. i 1100-årene, men overleveringen er for hullet til at man kan dra sikre slutninger ... [L]æren om bokstavenes 3 *tilfelli* – *accidentia* – *nafn, vøkestr* og

285 Ian McDougall. “Foreigners and Foreign Languages in Medieval Iceland”, *Saga-Book*, 22 (1986-1989) p. 198.

286 *FGT*. p. 28.

287 See: Einar Haugen. Notes to *First Grammatical Treatise. The Earliest Germanic Philology*. p. 74. McDougall, 1986-1989. p. 198. Hreinn Benediktsson. Notes to *The First Grammatical Treatise*. ed. by Hreinn Benediktsson. (Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972) p. 194.

*atkvæði* svarer til lat. *nomen, figura, potestas* el. som skolastene i 1100-årene sa: *pronuntiatio*; når han hevder at *vøkstr* og *atkvæði* skal svare til hverandre, følger han Pariserskolene, Petrus Helie m. fl. Etymologien av *titul* – av titan 'sol' – finnes hos Remigius, ca. 900.<sup>288</sup>

The author demonstrates a clear connection to schools in France during the 1100s, but the tradition is too full of holes for one to be able to draw firm conclusions ... The lesson regarding the 3 *tilfelli* – *accidentia* – *nafn, vøkstr*, and *atkvæði* correspond to Latin *nomen, figura, potestas*, or as the scholastics of the 1100s would say: *pronuntiatio*. When he posits that *vøkstr* and *atkvæði* should correspond to each other he follows the Parisian schools, Peter Helias etc. The etymology of *titul* – from *titan* “sun” - is found in Remigius, c. 900.

It is possible to develop these observations further. Looking more closely we can see a connection not only to France or Paris, but to St. Victor specifically. Remigius was known to Hugh of St. Victor, implying his works were available in the abbey. Peter Helias had been a Victorine himself and was lecturing there during the 1140s.<sup>289</sup> We know from Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* that another very important source for the *FGT*, Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae*, was being taught from the early days of the abbey.<sup>290</sup> Einar Haugen, who preferred an earlier dating for the *FGT* and a relationship with English rather than French learning, dismissed direct influence from Helias as being too late.<sup>291</sup> However, his theory was not conclusive. Indeed, while certainly a very sound piece of scholarship, in our case we have particular need to be wary of this position. Haugen apparently did not master Holtsmark's arguments regarding the addition of the erroneous Hebrew letters at a later date.<sup>292</sup> Admittedly, it cannot be ruled out that the author acquired all his knowledge from various sources second-hand, but neither can it be denied that St. Victor would have afforded the First Grammarian a unique opportunity to experience all his sources directly in one place.

If the author of the *FGT* studied under the Hebraists of St. Victor, he evidently did so in the manner

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288 Anne Holtsmark. “Grammatisk litteratur” in *KLNM*, vol. 5. (1960) p. 416. See also: Holtsmark, 1936. pp. 57-65.

289 For Hugh's use of Remigius in his *Didascalicon*, see: *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de Studio Legendi*. ed. by C. H. Buttmer (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1939) p. 52. On the career of Peter Helias, see: John Marenbon. *Early Medieval Philosophy (480-1150): An Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 116.

290 “... my rival had indeed had a certain number of students, of one sort and another, chiefly by reason of his lectures on Priscian, in which he was considered of great authority”. Peter Abelard. *The Story of My Misfortunes: The Autobiography of Peter Abélard*. trans. by Henry Adams Bellows. (London: MacMillan, 1972) p. 8.

291 Einar Haugen. Notes to *First Grammatical Treatise*. *The Earliest Germanic Philology*. pp. 73-78. In fact, Haugen supports the identification of the author with Hallr Teitsson (d. 1150) or one of his family members. See *ibid.* at pp. 78-79. I do not think that the Grammarian's feeling of “warmth between English and Norse” which Haugen observes is proof that he had studied in England. Scandinavians studying in Paris would have been assigned to the English *natio*, for example. Holtsmark preferred Þorlákr, who as seen has been suggested as a possible Icelandic Victorine: Holtsmark 1936. p. 16.

292 “The information about the Hebrew origin of  $\aleph$  has not yet been traced to its source, but it is manifestly wrong, and the Hebrew characters in the text are violently distorted” *ibid.* at p. 74. A similar misunderstanding of Holtsmark's arguments is found in McDougall, 1986-1989. pp. 198-198, where he attributes Kissmeyer's observations to her, when in fact she dismisses them.

of a dilettante. He does not cite any arguments based on Hebrew elsewhere in the *FGT*, and his technical Hebraism, a knowledge of the writing system but probably no more, could hardly be compared with that of some contemporary exegetes. This image tallies with the curriculum we might expect a visitor from Iceland to have followed: sampling something of everything that St. Victor had to offer while he had the chance. Holtsmark describes the Grammarian as taking *glede over á vise sine kunnskaper. Han vil gjerne gå for en lærd man*<sup>293</sup> - “a delight in showing off his abilities. He very much wants to be taken as a learned man”. This does seem to be a very appropriate summation; he would hardly have been the best Hebrew student of his day at St. Victor, but he probably was the best Hebrew student of his day in Iceland, and in blatant contradiction of canonical grammarians he expounded his theory confidently as such.

Another example of an Icelander exhibiting a limited technical Hebraism is found in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (hereafter *TGT*). Written around 1250 by Óláfr Þórðarson Hvítaskáld, it has been described as less learned than *FGT*, and is concerned with rather different topics, particularly the study of rhetoric and poetry over prescriptive orthography.<sup>294</sup> In the opening of the work he makes this curious pronouncement comparing Hebrew and Old Norse phonology:

J norenv stafrofi ærv .v. liodsstafir sva kallaðir: úr ð, oss ʒ, iss l, ár ʒ, ýr ʒ, ok ær iss stvndvm sættr fyrir æ, þa ær hann er stvnginn, sva sæm alæph æða ioth setiaz fyrir .ij. raddarstqfum i ebresku máli ... ʒ ær tekít af ebreskv m stqfvm.<sup>295</sup>

In the Norse alphabet there are five vowels named as so: *úr ð*, *óss ʒ*, *íss l*, *ár ʒ*, *ýr ʒ*, and *íss* sometimes denotes “e”, when it is dotted, just as *aleph* or *yodh* are used to denote two vowels in the Hebrew language ... ʒ is taken from Hebrew letters.

Again, we find two statements, one plausible, and the other entirely fallacious. Óláfr is somewhat justified in making an analogy between *stungnar rúnar* - “dotted runes” and Hebrew vowels. In later runic script, l denoted /i/ but ʒ denoted /e/, ð denoted /u/ but ð denoted /y/.<sup>296</sup> He also compares the

293 Holtsmark 1936. p. 75. She also remarks that *Det kan synes dristig av en som er ukyndig i det hebraiske sprog og bare kjenner skriftegnene fra håndbøker om skrift og palæografi, å uttale sig om dette. Men mere kunnskap i bebraisk hadde neppe forfatteren av [FGT], så vi står på like fot.* - “It may seem bold for someone who is ignorant of the Hebrew language and only knows the letters from textbooks about script and palaeography to make pronouncement about this. But the author of [FGT] hardly had more knowledge of Hebrew, so we're in the same boat”. *ibid.* at. p. 72.

294 Holtsmark 1960. p. 417

295 Óláfr Þórðarson Hvítaskáld. *Dritte Grammatiscbe Abhandlung*, ed. by Thomas Krömmelbein. (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 1998) p. 60. In standardising “æ” into “e” I am following: Óláfr Þórðarson. *Málhljóða- og Málskrúðsrit. Grammatisk-Retorisk Afhandling*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson. (Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1927) pp. 26-27. More recently: Tarrin Wills. “The *Third Grammatical Treatise* and Ole Worm's *Literatura Runica*”, *Scandinavian Studies*, 76, 4 (2004) p. 443

296 On the practice of dotting runes, see: Michael P. Barnes. *Runes: A Handbook*. (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012) p. 93. Barnes cautions that dotting was not consistently applied.

orthography of “dotted runes” to the supposed variable vocalic values of *alef* ᚱ and *yod* ᚹ: *ær iss stvndvm sattr fyrir æ, þa ær hann er stvnginn, sva sœm alæph æða ioth setiaz fyrir .ij. raddarstofum i ebresku máli* - “*iss* is sometimes put instead of *æ*, when it is dotted, just as *alef* or *yod* stand for two vowels in the Hebrew language”. Óláfr is mistaken, in that ᚱ and ᚹ are not vowels, but consonants, the former denoting a glottal stop /ʔ/ and the latter /j/. However, being party to the remnants of a severely decayed Hebraist tradition, Óláfr's comparison is understandable. Hebrew vowels, as used in the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, are communicated by means of diacritics called *mappiq*, which are tiny marks normally suspended beneath the consonant. Thus, while *alef* ᚱ and *yod* ᚹ are not vowels, ᚱ is pronounced /ʔa:/, and ᚹ is pronounced /i:/. It is easy to see how the dotting of runes and the addition of little *mappiq* marks would seem analogous in a milieu which had only very sporadic encounters with Hebraism.

Naturally, Óláfr's remarks do not suggest that he had studied Hebrew himself. While the *dalet-tsade* theory in the *FGT* seems to be the work of someone who has heard Hebrew letters being pronounced aloud, Óláfr's knowledge does not require a matching degree of familiarity. The fact that he limits the number of variations in Hebrew produced by being *stunginn* to two when it is actually greater suggest that he has heard the analogy between the scripts being made by another, and then extrapolated the number two from the system he *was* familiar with, namely runes. The statement that ᚹ derives from Hebrew also suggests reliance on – and not complete comprehension of – another authority. By the time that Óláfr is writing, the *yṛ* rune should look like ᚹ, and indeed it does when he later gives an example of the runes which *compileraði minn herra valldimarr konungr* - “my lord, King Valdemar compiled”.<sup>297</sup> It seems likely that Óláfr originally wrote ᚹ, and that ᚹ is the distortion of a copyist – although Krömmelbein emends ᚹ instead. Nonetheless, a similarity between the correct *yṛ* and anything in Hebrew script is hard to discern. The older form of the letter, ᚹ, could perhaps bear a passing resemblance to *ṣ* (*šîn*), both topped with a three pointed “crown”. Óláfr may have been familiar with the work of Þóroddr “rúnameistari” Gamlason (fl. 1100s), and even if he were not he “kept abreast of developments in runic writing”, thus his familiarity with such historical changes seems probable.<sup>298</sup> *ṣ* conveys a completely different sound to ᚹ, but again this seems like the kind of conclusion that might be reached when an expert in runes who is ignorant of Hebrew converses with an expert in Hebrew who is largely ignorant of runes.

297 *TGT*, p. 64.

298 On Óláfr's use of Þóroddr's work, see: Thomas Krömmelbein. Introduction to *TGT*. pp. 25-26. Barnes argues that the references to Þóroddr were included in the prologue to the *Codex Wormianus* in order to fortify Óláfr's authority: Barnes 2012. p. 156. On Þóroddr himself, a concise overview is provided by: Finnur Jónsson. “Thoroddr” in *Salmonsens Konversations Leksikon*. vol. 23. ed. by Johs. Brøndum-Nielsen & Palle Raunkjær. (Copenhagen: J.H. Schultz Forlagsboghandel, 1927) p. 390.

Where might Óláfr have had such a conversation? A Victorine who had studied some Hebrew while abroad and subsequently returned to Scandinavia would seem to be the most likely source, and Óláfr would have been very well placed to encounter such a person. He had visited at least two foreign courts, that of King Hákon in Norway during the years 1237-1239, and that of King Valdemar in Denmark from 1239-1241. He must have made some short journeys to Norway during this period, however, as he was present at the Battle of Oslo in 1240. Presumably he also spent some time there on his way back from Denmark, as Valdemar died in 1241 but Óláfr did not return to Iceland until 1242 (Norway being *en route* for Icelanders travelling to and from Denmark). Holtsmark noted that Denmark in particular preserved its learned connections with the Victorines during the period Óláfr was a guest there:

Óláfr har hatt en kommentert avskr. av de lat. grammatikere, akkurat hvilken “utgave” han har brukt, er ikke slått fast. Den må stamme fra Pariser skolen; hans tekst har minnelser fra Petrus Helie og har utlegninger felles med det noe senere *Doctrinale* av Alexander de Villa Dei, som ble hovedkilden for GrA IV. Óláfr oppholdt 1239-41 i Da. ved Valdemar II.s hoff; i lærde kretser var forbindelsen med skolene i Paris levende i Da. gjennom hele 1200-tallet.<sup>299</sup>

Óláfr had a commented copy of the Latin grammarians, although precisely which “edition” he used is not certain. It must originate from the schools of Paris; his text has recollections of Peter Helias and has some conclusions in common with the somewhat later *Doctrinale* of Alexander of Villedieu, which was the chief source for the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise*. Óláfr spent 1239-1241 in Denmark at the court of Valdemar II. In learned circles the connection with the schools of Paris was alive in Denmark throughout the entire 1200s.

When writing the *TGT* back in Iceland in the 1250s, Óláfr does seem to have reflected on knowledge acquired in Denmark, i.e. the aforementioned runes he attributed to King Valdemar. On the other hand, we have already seen that substantial numbers of Norwegians were studying in Paris during the thirteenth century, so the court of King Hákon is an equally viable candidate. Although we cannot say with certainty at which court Óláfr might have met his Hebraist informant, the atmosphere we can imagine at Hákon's court seems more conducive to this kind of exchange. Historians have tended to regard Valdemar's reign as particularly militarily successful – hence his later epithet *Sejr* - “victory”, but Hákon has further been valued for his cultural achievements. Certainly, Valdemar's court cannot lay claim to anything like the amount of literature produced under Hákon. The posturing and pressure to impress at the court of such a cultured monarch might well explain why Óláfr did not enquire further

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299 Holtsmark 1960, pp. 417-418.

and correct some of his misapprehensions.

Similar traces of encounters with technical Hebraism are perhaps most vividly preserved in AM 685d 4to, an Icelandic miscellany from the second half of the fifteenth century. Leaves 30v – 31r contain attempts to reproduce first the Greek, then the Hebrew alphabet. The Greek is mostly passable, but the Hebrew is seriously distorted. It is reproduced here, first in facsimile and followed by a transcription of the names the scribe gives the letters and the values he attaches to them:

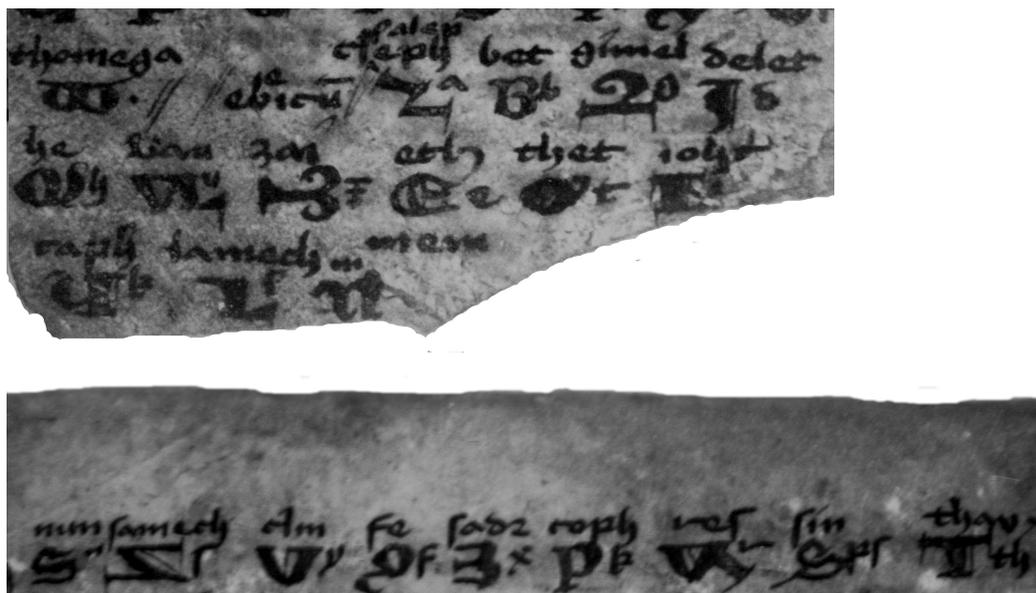


Fig. 6: AM 685d 4to 30v-31r.

Ebreicum	Uau	u	lamech	l	sadr	x	
aleph <sup>alep</sup>	zan	z	mem	m	coph	k	
bet	b	eth	e	nim	n	res	r
gimel	g	thet	t	samech	s	sin	ps
delet	d	ioh	i	alin	y	thav	th
he	h	caph	c	fe	f		

None of the names are complete fictions, even letters such as *eth* can easily be related to ה (*het*), while *fe* must arise from a misreading of *f* and *p* at some point from פ (*pe*). They are also in the correct order. The values are less reliable, with some such as “e” for *eth*, “f” for *fe*, and “th” for *thav* apparently being back-formations. Turning to palaeography, I have found 10 of the letters to have recognisable Hebrew forms, 7 are taken directly from Latin, and 5 are completely unidentifiable.<sup>300</sup> The resonances with

<sup>300</sup> Appendix I.

actual Hebrew mean they are not the inventions of the fifteenth century scribe. Like the copyist who added his impressions of *dalet* and *tsade* to *TGT*, he must have believed that the letters he wrote were correct. He can hardly have been copying directly from a foreign source; I have not been able to find any English, French or German manuscripts that contain such severely distorted reproductions of the Hebrew alphabet, nor is their existence likely given the advanced state of Hebraism in these areas compared to Scandinavia. Rather, the Icelandic scribe must have been working from a copy that was many stages removed from the first iteration of the Hebrew alphabet to arrive in the north. For the letters to have become so confused is indicative of this process being extremely lengthy.

Interestingly, the symbols given in AM 685d 4to bear no resemblance to those supplied in the *Codex Wormianus*. Even with a century between the two men where divergences would have occurred, they can not be part of the same tradition. The two *tsade* have nothing in common, while the *dalet* of AM 685d 4to is later, but is actually far closer to an authentic 7. It is not the case, then, that there was one version of the Hebrew script which deteriorated steadily during the Icelandic Middle Ages. Rather, knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet seems to have reached Iceland sporadically, becoming corrupted and dying out before being reintroduced again later and sharing the same fate. Whether this happened via the movement of texts or clerical personnel is hard to say, and indeed the two are not mutually exclusive possibilities. However, the latter is a slightly more plausible conjecture. Very basic information, such as a list of letters, may well retain its integrity better when transmitted purely by copyists. Put simply, there just isn't that much to go wrong. Slips of the pen and misreadings will doubtless occur, but they are unlikely to mangle things beyond recognition as we have seen in the case of the Hebrew alphabet. For the scribe of the *Codex Wormianus* to produce such a badly deformed *dalet* is more likely the product of a very long genealogy of learning, where a large body of knowledge, i.e. literacy in Hebrew, has over generations been passed down by increasingly confused instructors – many of whom have long since ceased to conceive of that body of knowledge holistically, and instead teach a number of skills in isolation, i.e. separating the teaching of the Hebrew script from Hebrew vocabulary, perhaps further separating the names of the alphabet from the sounds they produce. We might also observe that a manuscript can potentially have a lifetime far in excess of a cleric, and thus provide longer service as a reliable authority. The attempts at Hebrew letters by Icelandic copyists reveal that they had gone for long periods without any such guiding force.

All of these instances are consistent with the proposition that Norse-speakers who had studied abroad, particularly at St. Victor, occasionally studied Hebrew and propagated some of that knowledge when they returned home. How accomplished they or any students they subsequently taught became is

doubtful. Like the Irish Hebraists before them, they lived in societies where Jews were absent. Not only did this limit the flourishing of Hebraism proper, it must also have affected their conception of the Hebrew language itself. Unlike the English and French polemicists we detailed earlier, there was no missionary impetus or stimulation from the subtle challenges to faith that arise from living alongside another religious group. Thus, there was no need for a *Hebraica veritas* in Scandinavia: Jewish texts were unavailable, and no exegetes felt the need to bolster Christian doctrine by deconstructing the Bible in any case. In learned circles, Hebrew might be an ethnographic detail that fleshed out an image of the absent *gyðingar* – simply the *Ebrea tungu su er Gyðingar mala*<sup>301</sup> - “Hebrew language which the Jews speak”. Or it could be an academic curiosity, knowledge for its own sake which was included in miscellanea and aside remarks in treatises. But it did not inspire whole works in the style of Jerome or Holbeach. The technical Hebraism observed in Icelandic is a study of the mechanisms of Hebrew linguistics, primarily its phonology and orthography. It is knowledge for its own sake, at best betraying a worldly interest in the language of a foreign and distant people. At its least, it is little more than academic footnoting. Either way, it is far from being 'weaponised' into an instrument of anti-Jewish polemic.

### **From the Hebrew Language to Jewish Magic**

It is often convenient (and not always irreproachable) to conceive of medieval life in terms of conflicting binary opposites, particularly in matters of inter-religious (mis)understanding. Opposing groups mark out their territory, ideologically or literally, and clash either with words or swords until a *status quo* is established. Perhaps we are influenced by the imagery used by people of the period. Ecclesia stands against Synagoga, with nothing passed between them but silence. Articulating the same idea, St. Cyprian (d. 258) came up with a saying which echoed through the centuries: “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*” - “No salvation outside The Church”. In the metanarrative of medieval Christianity, one was either with or against. The Church, as an institution described metaphorically by a building, structured the world into assenters and dissenters. The faithful were sheltered on the inside, and heretics, unrepenting Jews, and other non-believers were consigned to the outside. Consider this excerpt from the Old Norse *Messuskyringar*:

Dyrr kirkjunar merkja trú rétta, þá er oss leiðir inn til almennilegrar kristni. Hurð fyrir dyrum merkir skynsama menn þá er kunnu hraustliga standa á móti villumönnum ok byrgja þá fyrir útan kristni guðs í kenningum sínum ... Tveir kirkju veggir merkja tvennan lýð kominn til éinnar kristni, annan af gyðingum, enn annan af heiðnum þjóðum. Brjóst þili kirkjunar er samteingir báða veggi í einu húsi merkir dróttinn vor, er samteingði tvennan lýð í einni ást sinni er hann sjálf brjóst ok hlífi

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301 *Alfræði Íslenszk*, vol. 1. p. 48. Cf. the previously cited passage from *Veraldar saga*, pp. 13-14.

skjölduzk fyrir kristni sinni.<sup>302</sup>

The doors of the church signify the true faith, those which lead us in to Catholic Christianity. The doorframes over the doors signify the wise men who can bravely stand against the heretics and shut them out from God's Christendom with their teachings ... The two walls of the church signify two masses become one in Christianity, one of the Jews, and one of the heathen peoples. The front wall of the church which connected both walls into one house signifies Our Lord, who connected two masses in the oneness of his love in His own breast, and which sheltered and protected His Christendom.

Of course, the reality was that lofty declarations of purity did not impede on the permeability of Christian culture. Old Norse literature is a classic example of this osmosis, where Christian elements occur in the ostensibly pagan *Völuspá*, and Christian poetry gladly deploys kennings invoking Óðinn and Þórr.<sup>303</sup> It is another faculty of Norse-speaking culture that interests us here, namely magical practices. While only a few Scandinavians ever possessed an authentic familiarity with Jewish language and culture, very little real knowledge of these fields was required in order for the common European perception that Jews enjoyed a special prowess in the dark arts to take root. This prejudiced trope was commonplace during the Middle Ages. Joshua Trachtenberg describes it as “a time-hallowed cliché, a fact that was taken for granted”.<sup>304</sup> Its etiology is doubtless multi-faceted. The status of Jews as non-Christians surely encouraged accusations of serving unwholesome spiritual powers.<sup>305</sup> Moreover, the average medieval Jew, raised in a small community whose very existence was often dependent on being an instrument of technocracy, was often more educated than his Christian peers.<sup>306</sup> As we have seen, Jewish learning was valued by Christians, even at the same time as it was treated with suspicion. Jews were frequently called into service as doctors, where their expertise was widely interpreted not as science, but as magic. Indeed, the roles of Jewish magician and Jewish medic were frequently inseparable. To quote Trachtenberg once more: “[Jewish] scientific training, such as it was, made them also superior magicians in the popular view, and every triumph of medical science enhanced the Jew's reputation for sorcery”.<sup>307</sup> Of particular relevance to our study is the factor the Hebrew language played in this unfortunate characterisation. Firstly, the special antiquity of Hebrew, and the notion of it as the Divine or Adamic tongue. A people with a native command of such a language might well be

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302 *Messuskyringar. Liturgisk Symbolik frå Den Norske-Islandske Kyrkja i Millomalderen.* vol. 1. ed. by Oluf Kolsrud. (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1952) pp. 90-92. [my standardisation]

303 I am grateful to Christopher Abram for his metaphor of osmosis, and indeed these particular examples.

304 Trachtenberg 1966. p. 57.

305 Ibid. at p. 60.

306 For a concise survey of the comparative ubiquity of learning amongst Ashkenazi Jews, see: Israel Abrahams. *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages.* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004) pp. 357-358, 367-369.

307 Trachtenberg 1966. pp. 90-92.

imagined as possessing extraordinary powers.<sup>308</sup> Secondly, there is the simple “Otherness” of Hebrew. A Non-Indo-European language, full of utterly foreign sounds and written in an ornate and incomprehensible script, it would have looked and sounded thrillingly exotic.<sup>309</sup> The Christian affiliation of Hebrew with magic is thus perhaps as Orientalist as it is doctrinal.

We have already seen the malevolent Jewish magicians of the Old Norse versions of the Theophilus legend.<sup>310</sup> However, even before the thirteenth century, the ground would have been prepared for Scandinavians to receive images of the supernatural with a Jewish flavour. If we take *The Old Icelandic Homily Book* as the earliest work in the canon, then the perception of “the Jew” as somehow occult was present at the very inception of Old Norse literature. One of the sermons on St. Stephen and Gamaliel includes a potted version of St. Augustine's miracle of Petronia, predating its incorporation into Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*.<sup>311</sup> Here, St. Stephen intercedes to heal a sick woman, who in her desperation has turned to a Jewish medic-cum-sorcerer (a common constellation of the trope, from a time where the line between medicine and magic was not clearly delineated).<sup>312</sup>

Húsfreyja necqver gæfög vas vanheíl. svát læcnar móttó eige hene bót vīna. En gyþingr necqver talþe þat fyr hene. at hon bynde í harþræþe sinom fingr goll þat es steín sa í fólgen. es funden hafþe veret í ocsa nýra. oc magnaþr síþan meþ forneskio. En hon gerþe sem Gyþingr mælte. oc fór þó at sókia helgan dóm stefans. En es hon fór leiþar sínar hia necqvere. þa sa hon fyrer fótom sér liggia a gæto fingr gollet es hon hafþe knýr i harþræþenom. þa undraþesc hon. oc leítaþe til harþraþar ens. oc fan hon heílan meþ ællom réxnóm sinom. þa grunaþe hon at fingrgollet munde brotet vera. oc sloppet af harþrænenom. en er þat vas osakat. þa hafþe hon iarteín þessa. fyr vitne heílso sínar þeirar es hon vætte af stephano. oc castaþe hon fingrgolleno a áona. oc tóc hon heílso sem hon vætte af enom helga stephano. hafþe síþan gæfogt gjaforþ i borg þeire es cartágo heiter ::<sup>313</sup>

A certain noblewoman was sick, to the extent that doctors could not treat her. But a certain Jew told her that she should tie to her hairband a ring, in which was concealed a stone which had been found in the kidney of an ox, and then enchanted with magic. And she did as the Jew said, and

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308 Ibid. at p. 61.

309 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. *Medieval Identity Machines*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) pp. 186-187.

310 “Af Teophilio fogr iartein” in *MaS*. pp. 1092-1094 ; “De Theophilio” in *ibid.* at p. 409.

311 First identified by: Johan Fritzner. *Ordbog over Det Gamle Norske Sprog. Nytt uforandret opptrykk av 2 utgave (1833-1896)*. vol. 1 (Oslo: Tryggve Juul Møller Forlag, 1954) p. 739. For the source, see: St. Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God, Books XVII–XXII*. trans. by Gerald G. Walsh & Daniel J. Honan (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007) p. 446.

312 Trachtenberg 1966. pp. 88-96.

313 *Homilubók*. pp. 206-207.

then went to visit the Cathedral of St. Stephen. But as she went on her way, she saw before her lying in the street the ring which she had attached to her hairband. Then she was amazed, and examined the hairband, and she discovered that it was in one piece, complete with all its knots, then she suspected that the ring must have broken and slipped off the hairband. But as it was intact, she attributed this miracle as proof that her recover was given to her by St. Stephen, and she threw the ring into the river, and accepted the healing which she received from the Holy Stephen, and then made an excellent marriage match in that city which is called Carthage.

The Jew's magical abilities here coalesce with several Christian presuppositions surrounding Jews and the supernatural in the Middle Ages. Firstly, there is the troubling gender dynamic: *Júðakona* seems to be the preferred Old Norse term for female Jewish characters, but it is not the word used here. Rather, the homilist prefers the masculine *gyðingr*. Thus the premise of the tale is that a Jewish man is attempting to bewitch a gentile woman.<sup>314</sup> Although the homilist never makes the purpose of the Jew's ring explicit, the general setting resonates with the trope that the Jewish male desires to seduce or otherwise sexually corrupt the Christian female. However, he is so physically decrepit that he can only do so by resorting to dark arts known exclusively to the Jews.<sup>315</sup> Secondly, there is the typological juxtaposition of the material against the spiritual. A common motif in medieval anti-Judaism was to align the Jews with unthinking literalism and gross corporeality. Jewish power, such as it was imagined by Christians, lay in the material world. The Jew's realm was that of unreasoned dogma, matter, and (disgusting) bodies. Christianity, on the other hand, was aligned with ineffability and transcendence. Its power resided in the soul and the unseen.<sup>316</sup>

This theme is perfectly exemplified by the homilist's tale. The miraculous means of St. Stephen are unknowable: matter has passed through matter without breaking, and how it was done can never be comprehended by the mortal mind. Thus, the purity of Christian supernatural power is highlighted by its absolute withdrawal from the material world. The contrast with the crude magic of the Jewish sorcerer is so extreme that it verges on bathos. St. Stephen can offer a fantastic circumvention of the normal laws of existence. The Jew can offer the rather unappealing prospect of an ox's kidney stones. Of course, while Jewish magic might be denigrated as filthy, it is still considered sufficiently potent that saintly intervention is required in order to counter it.

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314 "Vor frv hialpadi iudakonu" in *MaS*. pp. 980-981. See also: "Fra krepptum mann, er feck heilsv" in *ibid.* at p. 967. I have found no example of the masculine nouns *gyðingr* or *júði* being used to describe female characters

315 See, for example, a bizarre French tale where a Jewish woman has her womb removed by a Jewish sorcerer/surgeon: Miri Rubin. "The person in the form: medieval challenges to bodily 'order'" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*. ed. by Sarah Kay & Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p. 108.

316 Steven F. Kruger. "Racial/Religious and Sexual Queerness in the Middle Ages", *Medieval Feminist Forum* 16, 1 (1993) pp. 34-35.

There is also one instance of a Jewish magician to be found in natively composed saga literature. This redaction of *Dínus saga drambláta* probably dates from the 1600s.<sup>317</sup> The earlier, fourteenth century redaction does not contain the reference to Hebrew, but it is not unthinkable that this detail were added during an intermediate version created during the remainder of the medieval period:

... geingur k(ongz) dotter med sijnum meyium aptur j syna hóll og getur ad lyta vid nordurætt aa murnum eitt lytid tabulum edur spialld, þad var skriffad med gullstoffum ä ebresku, sem hun getur þetta ad lyta bregdur henne nockud vndarlíga vid þessa syn, fjrst fleyer hun hóffudgullenu aff sier þar med huorju plagge þui sem a henne var fer til og dansar alnakenn fyrer þessare tabula edur spiallde, þetta sama gióra allar hennar meyiær þegar þær lyta þetta litla letur dansa þær og nactar ... þetta tabulum leykur alla eins smä og störa ryka og fatæka tigna ok otigna þa þeir þad lijta affklædast þeir hlaipande suo j dansenn slykt hender kongenn og drottninguna sem alla adra þegar þau lyta spialldid fleyia þau aff sier sinum tignar klædum og hlaupa suo nakenn j dansenn, ed sama gióra aller þeir hóffdingiar frwr og jomfrur sem med þeim geingu suo aunguer dansa meir enn þesser.<sup>318</sup>

... the king's daughter goes with her ladies-in-waiting back to their hall, and can see that on the north-facing wall there is a little tablet or placard. It was inscribed with golden letters in Hebrew. As she sees it, she is rather strangely affected by the sight. First she discards her tiara, and with it the rest of the effects she had on, and dances entirely naked before these tablets or placard. All her ladies-in-waiting do the same when they see this little thing. They disrobe and dance ... that tablet deludes everyone, short and tall, rich and poor, noble and common, so that when they look at they take off their clothes, leaping into the dance. That is what happens to the king and queen, just like all the others. When they look at the mirror they discard their noble clothes and then leap naked into the dance. All their barons, ladies and maidens do the same, so that none dance more than them.

The Hebrew inscribed tablet similarly affects the local bishop, abbots, monks and abbesses. We can observe all the same tropes about Jewish magic that we saw earlier. There is the desire to corrupt gentile sexuality. Moreover, the *tabulum* clearly belongs to – and operates within – a very physical sphere. Its effect is upon bodies, its power is materially derived from the golden letters. Above all these finer discourses, there is the general perception that Jewish magic is a strange and particularly fearsome force. There is also a visual depiction of a Jewish medic. The Icelandic *Teikenibók*, on a leaf dated to around 1450-1475, depicts a Jewish doctor, distinguished by his *pilleus cornutus*, attending a deathbed.<sup>319</sup>

317 Jürg Glauser. “Dínus saga drambláta” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. ed. by Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf (London: Garland Publishing, 1993) pp. 136-137.

318 *Dínus saga drambláta*, ed. by Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, 1960) pp. 114-115. Cf. pp. 37-41.

319 *Íslenska Teikenibókin*. ed. by Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir (Reykjavík: Crymogea, 2013) pp. 148-149.

This image re-enforces how quotidian the image of the Jewish doctor-magician had become in the Old Norse world by the Late Middle Ages. Naturally, the Icelandic artist was almost certainly following a continental model, but it is worth noting that, despite living in a country without a single Jewish inhabitant, where no-one could have ever employed a Jewish doctor themselves his model made sense; it would have been easy to draw the doctor without his pointed cap, but such an adaptation was not necessary. The artist expected his audience to infer the doctor's Jewishness from the hat just as they inferred it from the images of Biblical Jews elsewhere in the *Teiknibók*. He was comfortable with that inference. Most likely, he had long since internalised the stereotype of the Jewish doctor and magician from preaching and *miracula*.



**Fig. 7:** Deathbed scene from the *Teiknibók*, 17v. Jewish doctor far right.

Textual or visual images such as these probably had a dialectic relationship with the desire to deploy Hebrew magical formulae. That is to say, the stereotype of the Jewish sorcerer affirmed the notion that Hebrew was a particularly potent medium, and in turn the proliferation of Hebrew words on amulets cemented the reputation of Jews as particularly adept in that sphere. As briefly outlined earlier, the runic corpus is the most visible record of these affectations surviving today. However, we should note that there are some limited examples of Norse-speaking magicians semi-authentically imitating the Jewish magical tradition in manuscript tradition as well. One potential example is found in AM 732b 4to, a fourteenth century encyclopedic collection from Iceland. On 6v the scribe presents the following nugget, which is clearly demarcated as a discrete unit of knowledge, distinct from the surrounding folios:

Hér standa ebreskir stafir, aleph, beth et cetera.

Notandum est quod aleph interpretatur “doctrina”. Beth, “domus”. Gimel, “plenitudo”. Deleth, “tabularum” seu “scripturarum”. Hæc siquidem est prima connexio literarum ipsarum, ubi dicitur quod doctrina ecclesiæ quæ est domus dei est in plenitudine scripturarum. He, “ista”. Vau “et”. Zay “hæc”. Heth, “vita”. Hæc est secunda connexio, ubi dicitur quod ista et hæc doctrina quam prædeximus est vita quam vivimus. Teth, “bonum”. Ioth, “principium”. Hæc est tertia connexio, ubi dicitur quod bonum principium per scripturas quasi per speculu, saltem in enigmate agnoscere dominum. Caph, “manus”. Lameth, “cor” vel “disciplina”. Hæc est quarta connexio, ubi dicitur quod in utero cordis disciplina exigitur quia nihil facere possumus nisi que facienda erunt agnoverimus. Mem, “ex ipsis”. Nun, “sempiternum”. Hæc est quinta connexio, ubi dicitur ex ipsis scripturis est nobis sempiternum auxilium. Ayin, “oculus”. Phe, “erravit”. Sadech, “justicia” vel “consolatio”. Hæc est sexta connexio, ubi dicitur quod sepe dicta scriptura est oculus errantibus et consolatio. Coph, “aspice”. Res, “caput”. Syn, “super vulnus”. Thau, “signum” vel “consummatio”. Hæc est septima connexio ubi etiam in numero sit mysticus intellectus, ubi dicitur aspice in scriptura contineri caput nostrum a quo habemus medelam super vulnera et consequitur consummationem, id est vitam eternam. Sic ergo Salvatoris exequiæ celebrantur, ut in modico aspice ab aliorem defunctorum exequiis distare videantur.<sup>320</sup>

Here are the Hebrew letters, *aleph*, *beth* and so on.

It is written that *aleph* is interpreted to mean “teaching”. *Beth*, “house”. *Gimel*, “abundance”. *Deleth*, “Of scripture or writing”. Thus, this is the first association of these letters, where it is said that the teaching of the Church, which is the house of God, is in abundance in the scriptures. *He*, “that”. *Vau*, “and”. *Zay*, “this”. *Heth*, “life”. This is the second association, where it is said that this and that teaching which we prescribe is the life which we live. *Teth*, “good”. *Ioth*, “beginning”. This is the third association, where it is said that a good beginning in the scriptures is as if seeing a riddle through a mirror to find God [1 Cor.13:12]. *Caph*, hand. *Lameth*, “heart” or “instruction”. This is the fourth association, where it is said that instruction is weighed up in the depths of the heart, because we can do nothing unless we know what is to be done. *Mem*, “from those”. *Nun*, “eternal”. *Samech*, “help”. This is the fifth association, where it is said that from those scriptures comes our eternal help. *Ayin*, “eye”. *Phe*, “he errs”. *Sadech*, “justice” or “consolation”. This is the sixth association, where it is said that the words of the scriptures are an eye against error and a consolation. *Coph*, “behold”. *Res*, “life”. *Syn*, “against a wound”. *Thau*, “sign” or “perfection”. This is the seventh association, where the number also has a mystical meaning, in which it is said: behold, that in the scriptures our life is contained, by which we have a remedy against wounds and one pursues perfection, that is, eternal life”. Thus, this is how the funeral rite of The Saviour

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320 My transcription and standardisation.

is performed, so that in a short space you should behold how different from other rites of the dead it appears to be.

McDougall has pointed out that the meanings ascribed to each letter correspond to those given in St. Jerome's thirtieth Epistle to St. Paula of Rome, where Jerome clarifies his interpretation of the Hebrew letters which begin each verse of Psalm 119 in the original.<sup>321</sup> There is in fact a perfect intermediary source. The passage on 6v is a precise excerpt from the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* by the Frenchman William Durand (fl. 1264). The *Rationale* was an eight volume study of symbolism in liturgy completed at some point prior to 1286, while Durand was serving the Papacy in Italy. When Durand appropriated Jerome's epistle for the *Rationale*, the relevance to a liturgical context was obvious.<sup>322</sup> Psalm 119 is an interesting site of difference between various liturgical traditions.<sup>323</sup> For example, in Judaism, and indeed Orthodox Christianity, it is often chanted as part of the funeral service, hence Durand's suggestion that it was the rite observed at Christ's own funeral. However, in the context of AM 732b 4to, this excerpt is removed from its liturgical setting. Rather, Durand's commentary is presented as esoteric knowledge. Firstly, this is evinced by its place in the organisation of the manuscript. The material surrounding the Hebrew letters has a notably arcane flavour. The following folio 7r depicts a labyrinth called *Völundarbús* - "The House of Völundr". Amongst other supernatural efficacies attributed to this drawing, it is written underneath that: *A hverium dege eða degri sem þv ser hana fyrir avgvum þer þa mvntv eige braðdavör ok eigi mvntv verþa fyrir giorningvum eða riðv sottvm ok eigi mvntv verþa fyrir ravngvum domvm af hafðingvum eði fyrri-mavnvm.*<sup>324</sup> - "On each day or half-day when you see it before your eyes you will not experience sudden death and not fall prey to spells or become sick, and you will not fall prey to the false judgements of chieftains or prominent men".<sup>325</sup> Secondly, the values for the Hebrew letters presented in AM 732b 4to correspond somewhat with those found in an Old Norse attempt at true "Kabbalistic magic" (i.e. magic based on the meanings of letters). In the Old Norse *Læknisbóke* (Manuscript from 17<sup>th</sup> C but based on 14<sup>th</sup> sources) the following remedies are presented for nightmares, insomnia and sore eyes:

Wid traull-ridu: Res ∙, fres †, pres †, tres †, gres †, visar ec fra mier flaugdum ok flagd-konum, trollum ok illvættum, bid ec sætuztu fru Sanctam Mariam, ath ec lifa bædi mier ok audrum til

321 McDougall 1986-1989, pp. 199-200.

322 For Durand's original text, see: William Durand. *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*. (Lyons: Jean Baptiste Buysson, 1592) pp. 632-633. [Book VI, chap. 72].

323 See for example: Elena Velkovska. "Funeral Rites according to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001) pp. 38-39 ; John F. Peters. "Ritual in the Psalms", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 35, 1 (1916) p. 145.

324 *Alfræði Íslenzk, Íslandsk Encyklpædisk Litteratur*. vol. 3. ed. Kr. Kålund. (Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri, 1917-18) pp. 65 – 66.

325 On the *Völundarbús* and labyrinth traditions more generally, see: Rudolf Simek. "*Völundarbús – Domus Daedali* in Labyrinths in Old Norse Manuscripts", *Nowele* 21 (1993) esp. pp. 323-324.

bata i nafne faudur ok sonar. Wid svefn-leysi rist þetta æ tre ok legg i hægingdit undir hofud hans: Res, refres, prefers, pregi, prodiui, esto labia uolunnt, post hoc dormivit. Vid augna-verk rita æ bok-felli vau, nau, dele, neamon, æ-leph, gimel ok anne; tak konu-miolk er sveinbarn hefir æ briosti, þria dropa, ok lat i blautt egg ok lat þann mann gefa honum, er alldri sæ hann adur.<sup>326</sup>

For nightmares: *Res* ∴ , *fres* †, *pres* †, *tres* †, *gres* †, I shew away from me the ogres and ogresses, the trolls and evil spirits, I pray to the sweetest Virgin Saint Mary, that I might lead both myself and others to redemption the name of The Father and The Son. For insomnia carve this on wood and lay it beneath his head: *Res, refres, prefers, pregi, prodiui esto labia volunt, post hoc dormivit* [I went out, the lips are moving, after which he slept ?]. For sore eyes write on a page *vau, nau, dele, neamon, æ-leph, gimel* and *anne*; take a woman's milk as the male child has on the breast, three drops, and mix it with a soft boiled egg and then have it given to him by a man he has never seen before.

It is interesting to note that the remedies against nightmares and insomnia both invoke the letter *res*, which AM 732 4to places in *connexion* with *caput* “the head”. In the latter case, it is *undir hofud* (under the head) where the amulet should be placed. More strikingly, the charm against eye pain prescribes *delet* - “of writing”, *gimel* - “completeness, wholeness” and most crucially *ayin* - “eye” just as AM 732 4to recommends. The connection of body parts with Hebrew letters, as Segev points out in his study of the *Læknisbók*, is “an authentic reflection of Jewish occult lore”.<sup>327</sup> But as ever in the case of Scandinavian Hebraism there is more affectation than true continuity here. *Neamon* and *nau* are not real Hebrew letters, and aside from *Res*, neither are any of the meaningless syllables presented in the remedies for sleep disturbances. Just as we saw in the case of the distorted Hebrew alphabet from AM 685d 4to, and the mistaken analogues from *The First Grammatical Treatise* and *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, the *Læknisbók* appears to be a product of a desire to mimic the perceived efficacy of Jewish magic, informed by the muffled echoes of a debased Hebraist tradition. Nonetheless, despite their frequent errors and misunderstandings, all the literary sources hitherto discussed demonstrate that Old Norse-speakers did sometimes come to possess both the motive and means to deploy Hebrew terminology, particularly for magical purposes.

### **An answer to an earlier question**

At the beginning of this chapter, a guiding question was posed: “What was the highest possible degree of knowledge about Jewish culture which an Icelander or Norwegian living at any time in the Middle Ages could have attained?”. It is to be hoped that the investigations hitherto presented go some way to making

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326 *Den islandske lægebog. Codex Arnarnagnaanus 434 a, 12 mo.* ed. by Kr. Kålund. (Copenhagen: D. Kgl. Danske Vidensk. Selsk., 1907) p. 365.

327 Segev 2001. pp. 130-131.

that question soluble. Our hypothetical West Norse-speaking intellectual with interests in Jews and Judaism would have been familiar to some extent with Jewish dietary law, and views on the Sabbath. He could be expected to know some Jewish history beyond that of the canonical books of the Bible. Sources treating both the Maccabean period and the exile following the Siege of Jerusalem would have been accessible to him in his own language (we shall discuss this further in the chapter on Brandr Jónsson). If he had studied abroad in Lincoln or Paris, he may well have seen Jews with his own eyes, although demonstrative sources to this effect remain elusive.

It is from such a sojourn abroad that he might have acquired a smattering of the Hebrew language. If any Norwegian or Icelandic students returned to the North as extremely accomplished Hebraists, able to read the Old Testament in the original etc. they have left little evidence. But as we have seen, there are quite a few suggestions in our medieval sources that Scandinavian students learnt the Hebrew alphabet, learnt some vocabulary and perhaps even some mechanics of the language. Moreover, they may have attempted to pass on their knowledge to their own pupils back home, although the lack of Jewish manuscripts in the North did not provide a hospitable climate for its faithful transmission or long-lived preservation. Interspersed with authentic knowledge, there was sometimes 'cod Hebrew'. These were words and inscription practices, often of a magical character, which were nourished by an Orientalist and folkish perception of the Hebrew language.

For a region which, as seen, appears to have lacked Jewish settlement during the Middle Ages, this is not an unimpressive body of knowledge. However, we also ought to note some important lacunae therein. No Old Norse source ever discusses nor demonstrates any awareness of the Talmud. Presumably Norwegian and Icelandic churchmen who studied abroad or attended ecumenical councils could not have avoided hearing the concerns of some European clergy over the Talmud's supposedly pernicious influence.<sup>328</sup> Nonetheless, apparently the issue was not then considered important enough to be reflected in literary production back home. Furthermore, while some texts demonstrate an effort to understand Jewish belief from the very limited sources available, largely the Old Testament, there are still some which make colossal errors in this regard, e.g. the fictional Jewish merchant who, more like a Muslim than an actual Jew, considers Christ to be: *spámaðr ok réttlátr* - "a prophet and a righteous one".

As Alexander Pope put it: "A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing; / Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring; / There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain, / And drinking largely sobers us again".<sup>329</sup> One

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328 On this concern, see: Robert Chazan. "Trial, Condemnation, and Censorship: The Talmud in Medieval Europe" in *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*. ed. by John Friedman *et al.* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012) pp. 1-92.

329 Alexander Pope. *An Essay on Criticism*. (London: W. Lewis, 1711) p. 14.

should stress that the achievements of medieval Norwegian-Icelandic scholars in giving an account of Jewish history, customs, and the Hebrew language ought not to be underestimated. However, these were not projects which would come to dominate the depictions of Jews and their religion in Old Norse literature. Inaccurate, chimerical, and derogatory perspectives were apparently not inhibited by the limited accumulation of “real knowledge”. Indeed, the learning reaped by Old Norse-speaking intellectuals may well have accentuated rather than contradicted anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic sentiments. That is to say, they provided just enough detail to facilitate the acknowledgement of Jews as a *real people*, not to be restricted to the long-faded crowds and abstract prophecies of the New Testament, but known to be still out there abroad in Europe, a people preserving their own history, and guarding a living language that they continued to speak (*Ebrea tungu su er Gyðingar mæla* – note the present tense in *mæla*). Where probably largely well-meaning Norwegian-Icelandic intellectuals thirsted for knowledge, they succeeded in putting metaphorical flesh on the bones of the preacher's *gyðingr* or *júði*. But they apparently failed to give him a face well defined enough to resist its contortion into something monstrous. Appropriately then, the Jewish body and attitudes theretowards in the popular imagination will be the chief matter of the following chapter.

### Chapter 3: Proto-racial thinking and its application to Jews in Old Norse literature.<sup>330</sup>

It was at this time [after the fifteenth century] that Jews, without any outside interference, began to think “that the difference between Jewry and the nations was fundamentally not one of creed and faith, but one of inner nature” and that the ancient dichotomy between Jews and Gentiles was “more likely to be racial in origin than a matter of doctrinal dissension”. This shift in evaluating the alien character of the Jewish people, which *became common among non-Jews only much later in the Age of Enlightenment*, is clearly the condition sine qua non for the birth of antisemitism ...<sup>331</sup>

- Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

First published in 1951, in Arendt's own words, “against a backdrop of both reckless optimism and reckless despair”,<sup>332</sup> *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was an avowed response to the horrors of the twentieth century. It was a book which was intended to expose the innate flaws in modern thought, particularly the intellectual currents which led to, or were fuelled by, anti-Semitism. But for a work which was so open about its focus on modernity, it often resonates with a debate of key importance to our understanding of pre-modern thinking. Arendt, the modernist writing about twentieth century totalitarianism, is frequently in agreement with scholars such as Miri Rubin, Jeremy Cohen, or Amos Funkenstein, medievalists writing about twelfth- to fourteenth-century Jew-hatred. What all these four voices have in common is that, in their view, consideration of the “inner nature” of the Jew did not occur until after the Middle Ages. Rather, the medieval mind apprehended Jewish difference in purely religious terms. In the view of these scholars, until the Enlightenment (the sparks from which Arendt's subject of modernity would ultimately emerge) there was no thought in which notions of race or genetics took precedence over religion. Ergo, one cannot speak of medieval anti-Semitism; during this period, there was only anti-Judaism.<sup>333</sup> Medieval thinkers may have criticised the Jews, medieval doers sometimes took up arms against them, but neither felt any enmity towards a “Jewish people”. In the

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This chapter previously appeared in print as: “*Kyn / Fólke / Þjóð / Ætt: Proto-Racial Thinking and its Application to Jews in Old Norse Literature*” in *Fear and Loathing in the North. Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*. ed. by Cordelia Heß & Jonathan Adams. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015) pp. 239-268.

331 Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) pp. xi-xii.

332 Ibid. at p. vii.

333 Consider Rubin's criticism of Gavin Langmuir: “All too often, narratives of abuse, particularly those about Christians and Jews, are taken as eternal, unchanging”. Miri Rubin. *Gentile Tales. The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) p. 1. Rubin eschews the word “anti-Semitism” in her oeuvre. Cohen speaks of “the harsher, demonic anti-Judaism that I and other historians have deemed characteristic of the later Middle Ages” and also avoids “anti-Semitism” elsewhere: Cohen 1999. pp. 14-15.

line of thought neatly surmised by Arendt, the medieval Jew was despised for his beliefs, not his birth.<sup>334</sup>

Other scholars have had no such qualms about deploying the concept of anti-Semitism alongside anti-Judaism, or at least even if they eschew the word “anti-Semitism” itself, consider factors beyond the religious. After all, when medieval sources depict Jews as hook-nosed, physically weak or effeminate, instinctively untrustworthy, or intellectually deficient, can we really expect the lay audiences who received such images to discern nuanced theological criticism of the Jewish faith? Consider, for example, the Jew of Tewkesbury from the *Polychronicon* (compiled c. 1327-42). In this episode *quidam Judæus per diem Sabbati cecidit in latrinam, nec permisit se extrahi ob reverentiam sui Sabbati*<sup>335</sup> - “a certain Jew fell into a latrine on the day of the Sabbath [Saturday], but did not allow himself to be taken out on account of reverence for his Sabbath”. As Anthony Bale has pointed out, this little *exemplum* “is grounded in the Old Testament stipulations concerning the observance of the Sabbath” and “responds to Jewish polemic and Talmudic material ... [it] reverses Jewish invective and possibly stems from Christian anxieties about controversial, heretical Talmudic material”.<sup>336</sup> Bale's treatment is rigorous and convincing, and arguably situates the narrative in its anti-Jewish context. But there is also a much more immediate discourse at play: the scornful, inane image of a Jew wallowing in shit, a crude alignment of Jews with excrement (I use this vulgarism to highlight the vernacular quality of this reading). At this basic, surface level reception of the Jew of Tewkesbury, it is hard to avoid the feeling that we are in the realm of anti-Semitism. Historians of Christian-Jewish relations who have been willing to accept the suggestion that the medieval mind could sometimes be as fixated on notions of heritage as it was on religious status include Bale, Salo Baron Cohen, and Joshua Trachtenberg.<sup>337</sup> It should be stressed that to maintain such a position is not to deny the religious dimension of hostile sentiment towards Jews (i.e. anti-Judaism). Rather, it is to admit that a national, ethnic or racial element sometimes also exerted its influence. In short, it is to accept that the medieval mind was capable of comprehending “faith and creed, *and* inner nature”.

The intent here is not to evaluate the appropriateness of the term anti-Judaism vs. anti-Semitism - the position of this study on that question has already been discussed - but we will engage with the basic issue underpinning that discussion. The question at hand is this: was there a tendency in medieval

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334 For a good account of the debate over anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, see: Robert Chazan. *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) pp. 126-129.

335 Ranulf Higden. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*. vol. 8. ed. by Joseph Rawson Lumby. (London: Longman & Co., 1882) p. 246

336 Bale 2010. pp. 30-31.

337 Salo Baron Cohen. “Changing Patterns of Antisemitism: A Survey”, *Jewish Social Studies* 38, 1 (Winter, 1976) pp. 14-15.; Trachtenberg largely avoids using the word “anti-Semitic” in a medieval context, but is transparent on his association between the anti-Semitism of his own time, 1943, and the Middle Ages. See: Trachtenberg: 1966. pp. 1-44.

Norway and Iceland to perceive the Jews as a race, as well as a religion? While research on Jews in Old Norse may be rather shallow, the last twenty years has yielded some interesting scholarship on medieval notions of race more generally. A 2001 special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* dedicated to the topic is particularly worthy of note. There, Robert Bartlett elucidated a conception of medieval race rooted in a study of contemporary terminology. Thus, he identified the Latin words *gens* and *natio* as terms which often implied descent groups, while *populus* did not. Examining the medieval reception of Hippocrates, Aristotle and Pliny, together with original medieval authors such as Albertus Magnus and Bartholomaeus Anglicus (both fl. 1240s), Bartlett observed a strong tradition of geographic determinism and interest in skin colour in medieval racial thought. But more than race being a matter of breeding, he also saw a focus on cultural delineation: language and law were just as important as inheritable features such as skin tone when the medieval mind was organising the world into races. Here, he cited examples by William of Malmesbury, John Fordun, and Emperor Charles IV (among others).<sup>338</sup>

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, whose publication in the same volume as Bartlett was later revised in his *Medieval Identity Machines*, stresses the primacy of the body as a site of difference in medieval race theory, rather at the expense of Bartlett's additional consideration of incorporeal alterity. Drawing on diverse sources including the *chansons de geste*, the *Etymologiae*, the *Cursor Mundi* and medieval receptions of the Galenic corpus, he presents a pre-modern conception of race as being an affiliation of bodies. In Cohen's view, when a group all display the same bodily trait, we are witnessing a partition of peoples not religions. True, dark skinned images of Saracens and "Ethiopians" imply symbolic criticism of their Islamic beliefs, as hook-nosed Jews do for Judaism, but the implication of the body in these polemic efforts has shifted the discourse.<sup>339</sup> To apply Cohen's approach to the example provided by Bale earlier, it hardly seems that in the medieval mind, if Mosse-Mokke would only relinquish his beliefs, then his nose would straighten itself, he would be welcomed into Christendom, and all would be well with the world. In Cohen's formulation, race is the somatic manifestation of difference. The body introduces a way of thinking about Otherness that is no longer entirely spiritual: people look different because they were somehow born different.

In the same 2001 volume William Chester Jordan pointed out the expediency of reducing racial thinking to its essence. Whether we call it "racial", "national" or "ethnic", we are describing the same phenomenon: the explanation of a person's characteristics by recourse to the values projected on to the

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338 Robert Bartlett. "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, 1 (Winter 2001) pp. 39-56.

339 Cohen 2003. pp. 190-221.

collective(s) to which they belong. Jordan suggests that “[w]e should not substitute ethnic identity for race... They mean the same thing in [this] formulation, but it would ... be a kind of cowardice to hide behind six syllables when we could speak the language of truth with one.”<sup>340</sup> In a sense, what Bartlett, Jordan and Cohen suggest is fundamentally in agreement with Arendt's definition of racial thought, even if it is at odds with her chronology: race is the business of using outer signs (language, skin colour, law) to reveal “inner nature”. This will be the definition of “race” and “racial” employed in this paper.

Written sources from Iceland and Norway almost entirely avoid descriptions of Jewish physicality of the kind which Cohen and others would find racial. There are two rather marginal exceptions: a skaldic verse describes Jarl Sigvaldi, who betrayed Óláfr Tryggvason at the Battle of Svolder. as having a *niðrþjúgt nef* - “crooked (lit. 'down turned') nose”. This has been interpreted by Theodore Andersson as an allusion to the archetypal traitor, Judas, and would suggest that the “hook nosed Jew” motif had popular currency either at the time the verse was composed (1000) or the saga was written (c. 1190).<sup>341</sup> The only other attestation of the phrase *niðrþjúgt nef* occurs in the Eddic poem *Rígsþula*, which tells of how the pagan god, Rígr, slept with three women and so fathered the three classes of man: *þræll* - “slave”, *jarl* - “earl” and *konungr* - “king”. Attendant to the theme of racial thought, we might note that in this poem, each class is described as an *att*, a term implying a lineage or descent group.<sup>342</sup> This resonates with Bartlett's connection of feudalism with racism, where he describes the Middle Ages as “a world in which blood and descent were seen as fundamental. A noble was *generosus* or *gentle* or *gentil* - 'well born.' A serf was *nativus* - 'b o r n (unfree)’”.<sup>343</sup> In stanza 10 of *Rígsþula*, Þír, the mother of the *att* of slaves, is introduced as so:

Þar kom at garði	gengilbeina;	She came towards the farm, bow-legged;
aurr var á iliom,	armr sólbrunninn,	muddy footed, with sunburnt arms,
niðrþjúgt er nef,	nefndiz Þír. <sup>344</sup>	The nose was crooked, she was named Þír.

There are some interesting echoes of both racial and religious invective here. Aside from the hooked nose, Þír is depicted as dark-skinned, as Jews frequently were in both visual and textual culture.<sup>345</sup> She is

340 William C. Jordan. “Why 'Race?'” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, 1 (Winter 2001) p. 168.

341 Theodore Andersson. Introduction to *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*. by Oddr Snorrason. trans. by Theodore Andersson. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) p. 22.

342 According to Cleasby & Vigfússon: “what is inborn, native, one's own, Lat. *proprium*; one's family, extraction, kindred, pedigree”. Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 760.

343 Bartlett 2001. p. 44.

344 *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. vol. 1. ed. Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983) pp. 281-282. Henceforth cited as *Poetic Edda*.

345 Irvn M. Resnick. *Marks of Distinction. Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages*. (Michigan: Catholic University of America Press, 2012) pp. 301-304 ; Debra Higgs Strickland. *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*.

also unclean, a prejudice levelled against Jews in various tropes: the *foetor judaicus* - “Jewish stench”, the contagious well-poisoner, the *Judensau* pig-suckler etc.<sup>346</sup> More striking than both these resonances, however, is the fact that she is a servant. From Augustine describing the Jews as book-carrying servants for Christian students, to Emperor Frederick II's designation of Jews as *servi camere nostre* - “servants of our chamber”, to the possessive servitude exhibited in the Anglo-Norman “*Judei Nostrī*”, the doctrine of the “Jew in Christian Service” permeated medieval thinking about Jews.<sup>347</sup> Þír might be compelling evidence of a widespread apprehension of Jews in both physical and racial terms, but the dating of *Rígsþula* is unresolved. As Thomas D. Hill notes, it “might be much older than the MS in which it was preserved [1270s], and a product of the pre-Christian period, or it might be the work of 11th- or 12th-century Icelandic or Norwegian poets of a somewhat antiquarian disposition”.<sup>348</sup> The younger dating would support the theory that the poet is drawing from popular thinking about Jews, the elder would rule it out: why would a pagan Scandinavian be anti-Jewish, let alone anti-Semitic? At any rate, neither of these two instances of a *niðrbjúgt nef* is applied directly to Jews. Their allusory nature hints at a widespread racial apprehension of Jews (note, following Bale, the “grotesquely physical register”) but they are not definitive proof thereof.

When Old Norse authors discussed Jews explicitly, they tended to engineer difference through descriptions of their behaviour rather than their bodies *per se*. Consider one of the Norse versions of the *Erubescat* miracle. In this tale, widely known in many medieval literatures, Jews plot to abduct and murder a cleric who torments them by singing a hymn which decries their rejection of Christ. A Jew dresses as a monk in order to kidnap the cleric, and the captive is accordingly executed. The conspirators almost get away with it, until a miraculous intervention by the Virgin Mary reveals their crime. The Christians respond as so:

... kallar konvnggrinn saman mikinn lyð oc stefnir fiølment þing, þviat hann var þar i borginni þann tima, er þvillikir lvtir gerðuz. Er a þvi þingi þetta mal vpp borit af kirkivnnar halfv ok konvngsins, hversu gyðingar hafa prettvissliga gabbat sæðaher guðs. Þar eptir dømir konvnggrinn með beztu manna raði, at fyrir þa grein at gyðingrinn hafði klerkinn gripit vt af kirkivnni vndir siðlætis bunaðe, skulo allir gyðingar taka þa pinv, ef þeir uilia eigi snvaz til retrar trvar, at þeir skulo engi

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) pp. 110-111.

346 On poisoning and the *foetor judaicus* see esp.: Trachtenberg 1966. pp. 47-50, 97-108 ; All these motifs are integrated into a discussion of the antiquity of anti-Semitism, germane to the earlier discussion on terminology, by: Daniel Rancour-Laferriere. *The Sign of the Cross: From Golgotha to Genocide*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011) p. 218.

347 Nina Rowe. *The Jew, the Cathedral and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 167. Krummel 2011. pp. 28-36. Sapir Abulafia 2011.

348 Thomas D. Hill. “Rígsþula” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 535. Hill 1993, 535. As Hill notes, a mid-thirteenth century dating has also been proposed: Klaus Von See. “Des Alter der Rígsþula”, *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 24 (1957) pp. 1-12.

kløði bera nema gvl, ok þo vánd ok felitil at øllvm kosti, at þeir se æðkendir með sinni otrv ok fraskilianligir guðligri hiørð, sem iafnan meinmøla hinn krossfesta Jesumm ok hans dyrðliga moðvr blezaða mey Mariam drotningv...<sup>349</sup>

... the king calls together a great crowd and arranges a large assembly, because he happened to be in town at the time when these things happened. At this assembly the matter was raised on behalf of the Church and the king, how the Jews had cunningly mocked God's flock. Thereafter the king, with counsel of the greatest men, deems that as the Jew had seized the cleric from the Church by wearing the clothing of the righteous all Jews should have the punishment, that if they will not be turned to the correct faith, they will wear no clothes but yellow, and indeed poor and miserable ones in every way, so that they might be recognised for their faithlessness and their separation from the godly herd, as they always abuse Jesus the Crucified and His glorious mother, the Blessed Virgin, Queen Mary ...

Clearly, this episode is couched primarily in religious terms. What the Jews have done is a product of *ótrú* - “faithlessness”. Moreover, the Jews do not exhibit any corporeal difference from the Christians; the Jew can successfully disguise himself as a monk because there is otherwise no outwardly visible difference between himself and a Christian. On these grounds, the message would rightly be described as anti-Jewish, rather than anti-Semitic. But it also contains the very faint beginnings of a deliberation on “the inner nature” of the Jew. The text leaves some important questions unanswered. If to be a Jew is simply to believe erroneous things, why do the Jews not convert when they witness the Marian miracle?<sup>350</sup> What must be wrong with them, to make them so irrational and stubborn? And if Judaism is only a religion, how does it make its adherents so *préttvís* - “cunning”? Elsewhere, Old Norse literature tends to depict personal qualities, particularly moral and intellectual ones, as innate rather than learned. As Paul Bibire remarks succinctly: “Personality traits were ... believed to be inherited; genealogical narrative was therefore a guide to how subsequent descendent would behave in specific narrative situations”.<sup>351</sup> I see no reason for this one miracle to be an exception to this tradition. Its audience would have heard through homilies that the Jews were recalcitrant and crazed back in the time of Christ, thus, through the principle of genetic inheritance the contemporary Jews would be the same.<sup>352</sup> It was their lineage, not their religion, that made them so. In the king's own words, the yellow clothes he enjoins upon the Jews are a way to recognise the fact they are *fráskili* (defined by Cleasby &

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349 “Af klerk ok gyðingvm.” in *MaS*. pp. 203-207.

350 Cf. the discussion on 'being a Jew' provided by: Krummel 2011. pp. 23-26.

351 Paul Bibire. “Old Norse Literature” in *British Writers*. Supplement 8. ed. by Jay Parini. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2003) p. 236.

352 I am thinking here in particular of the Christmas Day homily, the homily on the Passion, and two untitled homilies on St. Stephen: *Homiliu-bók*. pp. 45-49, 66-70, 175-180.

Vigfússon) “separated, isolated, astray”.<sup>353</sup> I do not deny the religious connotations of the word, but what the king also seems to be motioning towards is “difference, Otherness”. Doubtless, the yellow clothes signify religious alterity, but they can also be understood as an outer articulation of an unchangeable “inner nature”. Indeed, a similarly ambiguous mixture of racial and religious thinking stood behind the decision by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 which led to Jews being forced to wear coloured badges in many European polities:

In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews or Saracens from the Christians, but in certain others such a confusion has grown up that they cannot be distinguished by any difference. Thus it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.<sup>354</sup>

Again, the tone is ostensibly religious. Here, Jews are not perceived to have any substantial physical differences from Christians that would otherwise reveal their identity. But the clerics behind this edict do not even consider the possibility that “relations” between Jews and Christians might lead to conversion. They appear to be more concerned that some sort of contamination might occur. Even if Jews do not exhibit external difference, what is it in their inner nature that must be kept away? When pre-marital intercourse is already a sin, why is it considered so much worse to sleep with a Jew that the issue requires its own legislation? When legislators begin to concern themselves over the intermingling of Christian and Jewish bodies, their thinking may yet be described as anti-Jewish, but the drift towards a somatic discourse betokens at least the beginnings of something racial.<sup>355</sup> In this way, the author of the Old Norse *Erubescat* miracle may have misunderstood the historical origins of the “yellow badge”, but his work is a product of the same psychology.

This way of thinking is developed further elsewhere in the Norse *miracula*. In the *Toledo Miracle*, the voice of the Virgin Mary is heard from the heavens, warning the Toledans that the local Jews are planning to re-enact the crucifixion *með mikilli slæð ok illzku* - “with great cunning and evil”. The

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353 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 171.

354 Marcus 1999. p. 154.

355 See also: Geraldine Heng, “The Romance of England: Richard Coer de Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the Politics of Race and Nation” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*. (2000) p. 137. Steven F. Kruger, “Conversion and Medieval Sexual, Religious, and Racial Categories” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*. ed. by Karma Lochrie *et al.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) pp. 167-168.

archbishop summons a crowd, and they begin a search for where the Jews might be intending to carry out their secret rite. The episode is resolved as so:

Ok fóru þeir fyrst til halla þeira, er byskup gyðinga átti, ok rannsökuðu þar. Ok þá er erkibyskup kom í þinghús þeira, þá fannz þar líkneskia gör af vaxi í líking lifanda mannz. Hon var börd ok hrækt, ok þar vóru menn margir af fólki gyðinga ok féllu á kné fyrir líkneskiuna, sumir gáfu henni kinnhesta. Þar stóð ok kross hiá, ok höfðu gyðingar þar ætlat at negla líkneski þetta þar á krossinn til spotz ok svívirðingar við dróttin várn Jesum Krist ok alla þá er á hann trúðu. En er kristnir menn sá þetta, þá brutu þeir þetta líkneski, en drápu alla gyðinga, þá er þar vóru við staddir.<sup>356</sup>

First they went to the hall which the rabbi [*byskup gyðinga*] owned and searched there. And when the archbishop came to their synagogue [*þinghús*] there was found a statue made of wax, in the likeness of a living man. It was battered and spit-drenched, and there were many people of the Jewish race [*fólke*] falling on their knees before the statue, some slapped it on the cheek. Also, there stood a cross nearby, and the Jews had intended to nail that statue to the cross for the mockery and insult of Our Lord Jesus Christ and all who believed in Him. And when the Christians saw this, then they destroyed that statue and killed all the Jews who were present.

While the narrative voice has not introduced the theme of a visibly different Jewish body, when we consider the motivations of the Jewish antagonists a little more closely the author's proto-racial message becomes apparent. What are the Jews really doing in this scene? Superficially, their performance is a straightforward ridicule of Christianity. There is a rich tradition of mockery by sculpting an insulting effigy in Old Norse literature, and although the *Toledo miracle* is a translation, I find it hard to believe that Icelanders hearing it were not at least occasionally reminded of the valences of parodic statues in their own culture. This tradition is known as *trénið* – “wooden insult” (*nið* refers to a particular kind of humiliating denigration, often but not universally understood to have sexual implications. Its chief quality is that it “seek[s] to degrade a person in the opinion of others by referring to him or representing him as a despicable person” and “always conveys contempt”).<sup>357</sup> Indeed, the mockery and irreverence of *nið* would have made a perfect analogue with the stereotype of the sceptic, bileous Jewish assailant. That such a connection was plausible to the minds of medieval Icelanders is confirmed by the Old Norse saga of St. Peter (*Pétrs saga Postula*). It will be remembered from our earlier discussions that there the word *gyðingr* is at one point replaced with *guðniðingr*, lit. “one who commits *nið* against God”.

356 “Af líkneski várs herra.” in *MaS*. pp. 110-111.

357 Preben Meulengracht Sørensen. *The Unmanly Man. Concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*. trans. by Joan Turville-Petre. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983) pp. 28-29. For interesting comment on *trénið*, see: Alison Finlay. “Monstrous Allegations: An Exchange of *jeki* in *Bjarnar saga Híttoelakappa*”, *Árvissmál* 10 (2001) pp. 21-44.

Even when the Jews have very nearly succeeded in their conspiracy, there is still a logical flaw at its core. The whole point of *níð* is that it must have an audience who are thereby shamed and wounded. But this strange performance was never actually intended for Christian eyes. Indeed, were it not for the intervention of the Virgin Mary, it would have remained known only to the Jews who participated. This is the very same conundrum we saw at work in the *Erubsecat* miracle: the inscrutable, irrationality of the Jews. But it is intensified here by the apparent frenzy that apparently consumes them. It is not merely a question of stubbornness, but actual derangement akin to the Jewish *dementia* posited by Bede.<sup>358</sup> There is no sense here that the Jews are guilty of misunderstanding the scriptures. Rather, they are incapable of understanding anything at all. The author has taken a step towards separating “Jews” from “Judaism”: the antagonists of this episode can hardly be said to belong to a structured religion. There is no-one officiating over this frenzied display, nor any sense of congregation, an opposing scripture, or non-Christian ritual. Noticeably, the rabbi's house is empty. The Jews of Toledo present the image of having a leader and being a religious community in their own right, but this is only a pretence. They attack Christianity instinctively, irrationally and ineffectively, quite without the need for the organisational hierarchies characteristic of Christianity. Their incapability to think or reflect also means that apostasy is impossible. In contrast to the *Erubsecat* legend, the Jews are not even offered the chance to be *snúazk til réttrar trúar* - “turned to the correct faith”. Whatever it is in Jewishness that makes the Toledan Jews hostile and crazed, it cannot be undone by conversion. Thus, the only response available to the Christians is to kill them all. The author's concerns over the indelibility of inner nature rather than the mutability of religion are also exposed in his choice of language. He speaks of a *gyðinga fólk* (literally the “people of the Jews” but translated in accordance with Jordan's earlier call for simplicity as “Jewish race”). The author does not speak of a *gyðinga trú* - “Jewish faith”. He does not conceive of Judaism as an erroneous religion to be proselytised away so much as he thinks of Jews as a strange people to be wiped out.

This application of the word *fólk* to the Jews is an interesting development, and it warrants further comment on terminology. *Fólk* is a rather semantically tricky term, quite possibly equivalent to Bartlett's previously cited identification of *populus*, defined in the *Icelandic-English Dictionary* as “folk, people”.<sup>359</sup> Its use in the *Toledo Miracle* may hail a phenomenological shift from thinking solely about Judaism to a further consideration over “the Jews”, but it is not a racial descriptor *per se*. Cleasby & Vigfússon maintained that “the Germ[an] sense of *people, nation* (Dan[ish] *folket*) is strange to

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358 Scheil 2004. pp. 38-49.

359 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 164.

Icelandic]”.<sup>360</sup> Their generalisation is not entirely correct. An Old Norwegian homily on the massacre of the innocents exerts considerable effort in delineating the *gyðinga fólk* from the *gyðinga kyn*, *kyn Palestinorum* and *kyn Jacobs*.<sup>361</sup> It seems hard to believe that the homilist is not conceiving of the term as an ethnic identifier there. Several Old Norse texts also use variations of the term *Israels fólk* to refer the Jews, including *The Old Norwegian Homily Book*, *Stjórn* and *Konungs Skuggsjá*. *Thómas saga Erkebyskups* refers to the French as *Frankaríkis fólk*. Snorri Sturluson frequently uses *fólk* to describe the diverse races of gods, elves and giants who populate his *Prose Edda*.<sup>362</sup> But if *fólk* only very occasionally conveyed a sense of ethnic delineation, there is one example from Old Norse literature where the Jews are referred to with a collective noun that did have explicitly racial connotations. The word *kyn* conveys the idea of genetic extraction, but also of type or species. Thus Cleasby & Vigfússon suggest the Latin translation *genus*, or modern English “kin, kindred ... a kind, sort, species”.<sup>363</sup>



Fig. 8: Malchus struck by St. Peter, *Teiknibók* 9r.

There are several moments in Old Norse literature where people are described in terms of their *kyn*. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, a trader by the name of Nagli is *skozker at kyni*,<sup>364</sup> “Irish by descent”, which Sverrir Jakobsson has proposed as a marker to explain his discomposure and cowardice in battle.<sup>365</sup> Similarly,

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

<sup>361</sup> *Gammel Norsk Homiliebog (Codex Arn. Magn. 619 QV)*. ed. by C.R. Unger. (Christiania: Brøgger & Christie, 1864) pp. 94-97. Henceforth *GNH*.

<sup>362</sup> For these examples and more, see: Degnbol 1989-. s.v. “folk”.

<sup>363</sup> Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 366.

<sup>364</sup> *Eyrbyggja saga*. ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1935) p. 33

<sup>365</sup> Sverrir Jakobsson. “Strangers in Icelandic Society 1100-1400”, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007) p. 153.

Ívarr Ingimundarson in *Morkinskinna* is said to be *íslenzker at ætt ok stórættaðr at kyni, vitr maðr ok skáld gott*.<sup>366</sup> - “Icelandic by descent and noble in extraction, a wise man and fine poet”. Is Ívarr poetically gifted and Icelandic, or poetically gifted *because* he is Icelandic?<sup>367</sup> After all, Theodoricus Monachus and Saxo Grammaticus both praise the Icelanders' reputation as poets, and the majority of known skálds were Icelanders.<sup>368</sup> Demonstrating considerably less subtlety, Bergr Sokkason makes very clear his concept of *kyn* as an ethnic appellation and as a foreshadowing of character. In his *Nikolaus Saga Erkiþyskups*, he tells the story of a troubled merchant who approaches a Jewish moneylender: *sækir hann heim gyðing nokkurn storliga ríkan at gulli ok silfri, sem þess háttar kyni er veniuligt, bidiandi, at hann seli honum sva mikít gull at lani*.<sup>369</sup> - “... he seeks the home of a certain Jew, very wealthy in gold and silver, as those of this kind of race usually are, asking that he might loan him much gold”. Predictably, Bergr's stereotype does not proceed to behave with much integrity in the following transaction. Just as Nagli's Irish *kyn* made him cowardly, Ívarr's *kyn* made him poetic, and the Jewish moneylender's *kyn* makes him wealthy and dishonest. Bergr's moneylender will ultimately convert to Christianity, but in my view the triumph of God's love over “bad blood” does not erase the implication of inherited, innate negative qualities. Just as Bergr chose to end on a theme of divine redemption, he also chose to begin with the notion of *kyn*. He might have spoken of *þess háttar trú* - “this kind of faith”, *þess háttar starf* - “this kind of profession”, *þess háttar stétt* - “this kind of rank” etc. He did not.

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366 *Morkinskinna*. ed. by Ármann Jakobsson & Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2011) p. 102.

367 Cf. The praise bestowed on Sturla Þórðarson's storytelling apparently because of his Icelandic background. See: Stephen Mitchell. “Performance and Norse Poetry: The Hydromel of Praise and the Effluvia of Scorn”, *Oral Tradition* 16, 1 (2001) pp. 187-192.

368 Theodoricus Monachus states that “I have been able to learn by assiduous inquiry from the people among whom in particular the remembrance of these matters is believed to thrive—namely those whom we call Icelanders, who preserve them as much celebrated themes in their ancient poems”. Theodoricus Monachus. *An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*. Trans. by David & Ian McDougall. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998) p. 1. Saxo does not refer to poetry explicitly, but his Icelandic sources for mythology can hardly have been prose: “The diligence of the men of Iceland must not be shrouded in silence; since the barrenness of their native soil offers no means of self indulgence, they pursue a steady routine of temperance and devote all their time to improving our knowledge of others' deeds, compensating for poverty by their intelligence. They regard it a real pleasure to discover and commemorate the achievements of every nation...”. Saxo Grammaticus. *The History of the Danes. Books I-IX*. trans. by Peter Fisher. (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996) p. 5.

369 Bergr Sokkason. *Nikolaus Saga Erkiþyskups II*. pp. 49-158.



**Fig. 9:** Bald, hook-nosed Jew helps apply the crown of thorns. *Teiknibók 6r*.

As seen, textual depictions of Jews from Iceland and Norway may well approach Jewishness as something irremovable, inheritable and therefore racial, but they do not use the body to articulate this Essentialism. Visual culture, on the other hand, is a different matter. Other medieval European cultures frequently used pictures of Jews to communicate anti-Semitic notions of Jewish difference. Students of Old Danish and Old Swedish have a rich array of sources to choose from in this regard, as Denmark and Sweden are richly endowed with surviving examples of church art. Old Norse specialists have a dramatically narrower range with which to engage: There are some impressive manuscript illustrations from Iceland, but virtually no church art survives there, and for depictions of Jews the Norwegian material is only marginally superior.<sup>370</sup> But in the Icelandic case, we have one surviving collection of

<sup>370</sup> On Norway, see: Erik O. Dæhlin. "Maleri. Norge" in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder fra Vikingetid til Reformasjonstid*. Vol. 11. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1981) pp. 291-299. Signe Horn Fuglesang. *Middelalderens bilder: utsmykningen av koret i Ål stavkirke*. (Oslo: J. W. Cappellans Forlag, 1996). On Iceland, see: Jakob Benediktsson. "Maleri. Island" in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon*. (1981) pp. 299-300.

illustrations known as the *Teiknibók* (AM 673a 4to), which is widely reckoned to have served as a model for manuscript illustration and church art throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>371</sup> Naturally, we cannot be certain how closely Icelandic church-painters copied these models, but it is probable that the images contained in the *Teiknibók* were not completely unique, and it seems safe to assume they are broadly representative of the medieval Icelandic visual culture which we have now largely lost.



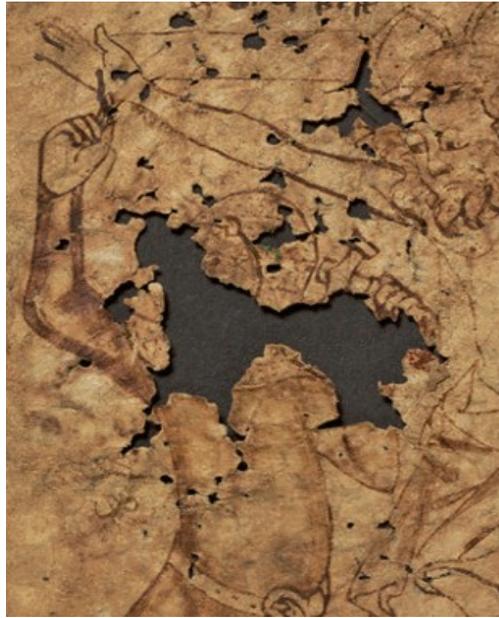
**Fig. 10:** Jew with effeminate eyelashes from Crucifixion, *Teiknibók* 6v.



**Fig. 11:** Detail from Crucifixion, *Teiknibók* 6v.

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371 Jakob Benediktsson 1981, 300.



**Fig. 12:** Dark-skinned Jew? The manuscript is defective and the colouring is most likely accidental rather than original artistic intent. Nonetheless, the face is noticeably darker than the liri pipe it surrounds. *Teiknibók* 6v.

The *Teiknibók* features several images of Jews, many of which exhibit classic racist tropes (I do not mean to put the Middle Ages on trial by using the word “racist” - rather, I intend only to highlight the fact that the artist in question apparently rehearses the notion that Jews look a certain way, and he clearly does not intend his depictions as compliments).<sup>372</sup> Three artists are thought to have worked on the manuscript, but all the depictions of Jews here are by the same hand, dated between 1330-1360.<sup>373</sup> In addition to the usual hooked noses [see **fig. 8.** and **fig. 9.**] there are also some slightly subtler strategies of somatic difference at play. The Jews are generally much less physically imposing than Christ and his apostles. One image [**fig. 11.**] features a particularly dainty, elfin Jew, who would scarcely reach Jesus's armpit were he to stand; like the equally petite Malchus, he can also only muster a wispy stubble in contrast to Christ's full beard. This concept of the Jew as somehow lacking vitality, or indeed masculinity, is wholly lacking in textual sources, but appears on multiple occasions in the *Teiknibók*. In **fig. 11.**, the Jew seems curiously physically degenerate, with sickly, downturned eyes and complete hair loss from the beard upwards. In **fig. 10.**, although the folio is damaged, here we can see that the Jew nailing Christ's left hand to the cross has long, feminine eyelashes. The assertion of Jewish queerness was commonly rehearsed in medieval culture (e.g. the idea that Jewish men menstruate, that

<sup>372</sup> There are three Jewish figures in a crucifixion scene on 6v, two Jewish figures crowning Jesus with the crown of thorns on 6r, two Jews or one Jew and a Roman soldier in the judgement of Pilate on 9v, Malchus and Judas on 9r, one Jew being shown out from the washing of Christ's body on 13v, possibly one Jew in a deposition scene on 13r, Jacob wearing a *pilleus cornutus* on 14r, Jewish doctor attending a deathbed scene on 17v.

<sup>373</sup> Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir. *Íslenska Teiknibókin*. (Reykjavík: Crymogea, 2013) p. 102.

circumcision was sexually damaging, that Jews forcibly circumcise or murder Christian children because they despise their virginity etc.)<sup>374</sup> As Kruger pointed out, the racial and religious implications of this motif were not clearly disambiguated:

The idea of Jewish and queer bodily degeneracy and danger is linked also to a claim about ideas, a belief that homosexuals and Jews were not just physically but *intellectually* perverted, and in particular unable to read and interpret texts properly. Jews of course, were thought willfully to misunderstand the truth of Christ's life, and of Scripture both "Old" and "New"; just as they possess debased bodies, their readings debase texts by focusing only on the material, never the spiritual.<sup>375</sup>

Nonetheless, Kruger describes this medieval Christian avatar for Jewishness as the "the religiously *and racially* queer Jew" who appears in "anti-Semitic texts".<sup>376</sup> The strategy is ambidextrous: the weak, feminised Jews of the *Teiknibók* can be read metaphorically. In that capacity, they serve as symbols of a religion that lacks vitality, that is fading away, that is utterly perverse. But like any metaphor, they can also be read literally – in this case, as a comment on the moral degeneracy and physical alterity inherent to the Jewish people, (or to use a term we saw earlier, the *gyðinga fólk*). A lay audience of uneducated Icelanders, observing copies of these illustrations daubed on church walls while they listened to their preacher tell the *Erubescat* or *Toledo* miracle, may well have understood things in such literal rather than symbolic terms.

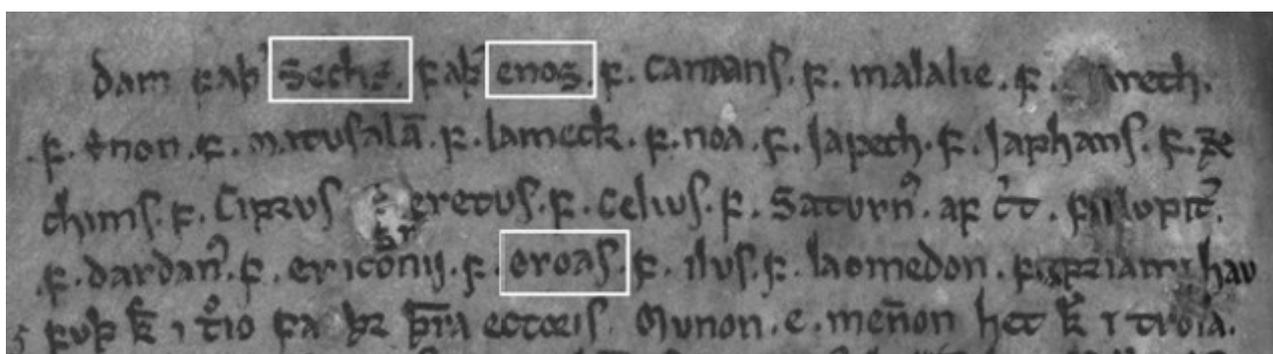


Fig. 13: "Sechz" (cf. Lameck), "Enos", "Eroas" *Codex Upsaliensis* 25v

374 Steven F. Kruger. "The Bodies of Jews in the Late Middle Ages." in *The Idea of Medieval Literature. New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard*. ed. by James M. Dean & Christian K. Zacher. (London: Associated University Press, 1992) p. 303. Bale 2010. pp. 131-132. Resnick 2012. pp. 50-52. Trachtenburg 1966. p. 50, 149-150.

375 Kruger 1993. pp. 34-35. Interestingly, Kruger integrates his general analysis of queerness with Old Norse sources, namely the accusation of *ergi* in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*

376 Kruger 1993. p. 33, 35. [my emphasis]

Lay misunderstanding of Jews exhibited through visual culture can also be found in another, rather more unlikely place. The *Codex Upsaliensis* (DG 11 4to) is an Icelandic manuscript written in the early 1300s. It is most famous for containing a unique recension of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, but it also preserves several other shorter works: *The Second Grammatical Treatise*, *Skáldatal*, *Logsggumannatal* and, most importantly for our purposes, *Ættartala Sturlunga* - "The Reckoning of the Heritage [ati] of the Sturlungs". This text is a short genealogy of the Sturlung clan, who held power over much of western Iceland during the thirteenth century and to which many prominent Icelanders belonged, not least Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) and Snorri himself. It is generically related to the regnal lists of the Norwegian royals previously examined, where the male line begins with Adam, proceeds to the Greeks/Trojans, then the Anglo-Saxons, and continues right up to the incumbent monarch. However, it is unusual amongst such genealogies for the number of errors it contains. Details which would have been common knowledge to anybody with even slight insight into the Bible are quite confused. The son of Adam, for example, is listed not as Seth but "Sech". Similarly, Enoch becomes "Enon". Likewise, details from Classical literature which are elsewhere well understood by Old Norse authors, are corrupted in the *Ættartala*, e.g. Tros becomes "Eroas" (see **fig. 13.**) These may well be simple scribal errors, but if so we can at least be certain that hand responsible was very much a layman – nobody with a modicum of clerical training could have made such mistakes. Here, we should also note that there is no reason why the scribe should not also have been the author, having adapted his own *tala* from the material provided in the genealogy of Óðinn given in the prologue to *Snorra Edda*.<sup>377</sup> This ignorance of Biblical history on the part of the hand should be borne in mind when we consider the illustrations which immediately precede the *Ættartala* on folio 25r.

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377 Einar Ól. Sveinsson. "Svar við aðfinnslum", *Árbók Hins íslenska fornleifafélags* 4 (1940) p. 64.



Fig. 14: Illustrations on *Codex Upsaliensis* 25r



Fig. 15: "Jew" with tally? *Codex Upsaliensis* 25r



**Fig. 16.** Woman making “measuring” motion. *Codex Upsaliensis* 25r.

The popular explanation for the three figures in 25r has been that they are dancers.<sup>378</sup> Olof Thorell described **fig. 15** as a *man i halvfigur med hakskegg, hållande en stav med krycka*<sup>379</sup> - “man in profile with a goatee, holding a staff with a crutch”. There are several reasons to describe it more properly as a caricature of a Jew. Most obviously, there is the *niðrbjúgt nef* that we have seen previously. Thorell acknowledges the goatee, but neglects to add that this style of beard was a staple of anti-Semitic imagery during the Middle Ages.<sup>380</sup> The theme of physical deterioration, manifested in the figure's wearied wrinkles, recalls our earlier example from the *Teiknibók* [**fig. 9**]. The man's headgear is not readily discernible; is the hair covering the ears a crude parody of the *peyot*, is he wearing a *kippah*, or is he sporting a head of tight curls? All three possibilities would resonate with medieval depictions of Jews - and indeed contemporaneous notions of race, particularly if we consider the *peyot* or *kippah* in light of Bartlett and Jordan's definition of medieval race as including law and customs.<sup>381</sup>

A logical question to pose at this point is “why should there be a Jew in the *Codex Upsaliensis*?”. A flippant response might be “why should a troupe of dancers be there either”? However, while I am ready to accept the hypothesis that the scribe of the *Ættartala* drew a Jew simply because he could, we might also be able to relate the image to the text in question, and in doing so illuminate some of the ways that he perceived the concept of *att*. As previously alluded to, the *Ættartala* cleanly shifts from

378 Olof Thorell. Introduction to *Snorre Sturlassons Edda. Uppsala-handskriften DG 11*. vol. 2. ed. by Anders Grape *et al.* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977) p. xviii. This interpretation is followed by: Heimir Pálsson. Introduction to *The Uppsala Edda. DG 11 4to.* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012) pp. xciv-xcvi.

379 Thorell 1977. p. xviii.

380 On the importance of the *Ziegenbart*, and the association with goats more generally, see: Trachtenberg 1966. pp. 44-48.

381 With particular application to Jews, see: Jordan 2001. pp. 166-167. On the racial implications of curly hair in the Middle Ages, see: Higgs Strickland 2003. p. 38, 85 ; on curly hair and Jews, see: Trachtenberg 1966. p. 26.

Biblical names, to Greek names, to Old English names (or approximations thereof, e.g. Sceþ becomes Sesef, Godwulf becomes Guðólf, Hereræd becomes Hereðei etc.) before finally arriving at Old Norse names, which in turn can be divided into the royal Norwegian Ynglingar line and the Icelandic Sturlung clan. It is possible that the *Ættartala* scribe conceived of the first, Biblical portion as being Jews. Anyone with basic knowledge of the Bible would know that they were not. The line goes from Noah to Japheth, and then onwards to the Greeks, following the assertion first popularised by St. Isidore of Seville that Europeans were descended from Japheth.<sup>382</sup> The *Ættartala* diverges several generations prior to the first Jewish patriarch. But as previously seen, our scribe's understanding of Bible history was very much confused. It may be the case that the Jew on folio 25r is a graphic representation of how he believed people such as Lamech and Noah would have looked. It is worth noting that he appears to be measuring between two points on the item that Thorell described as a crutch. Is he, perhaps, indicating the portion of the *tal* or *tala* to which he belongs?<sup>383</sup> The two female figures in **fig. 14.** and **fig. 16.** appear to be making similar measuring gestures, explicating their own demarcations of the Sturlung pedigree. Are they perhaps depictions from another part of the *Ættartala*, possibly the only two named female Sturlungar (Vigdís Svertingsdóttir and Helga Sturludóttir)? Alternatively, one of the women may be the only named female Yngling (Ólöf Vémundardóttir). The figure with a sword in **fig. 14.** might be any number of the warriors in the *Ættartala*, from Hector to Sighvatr Sturluson.

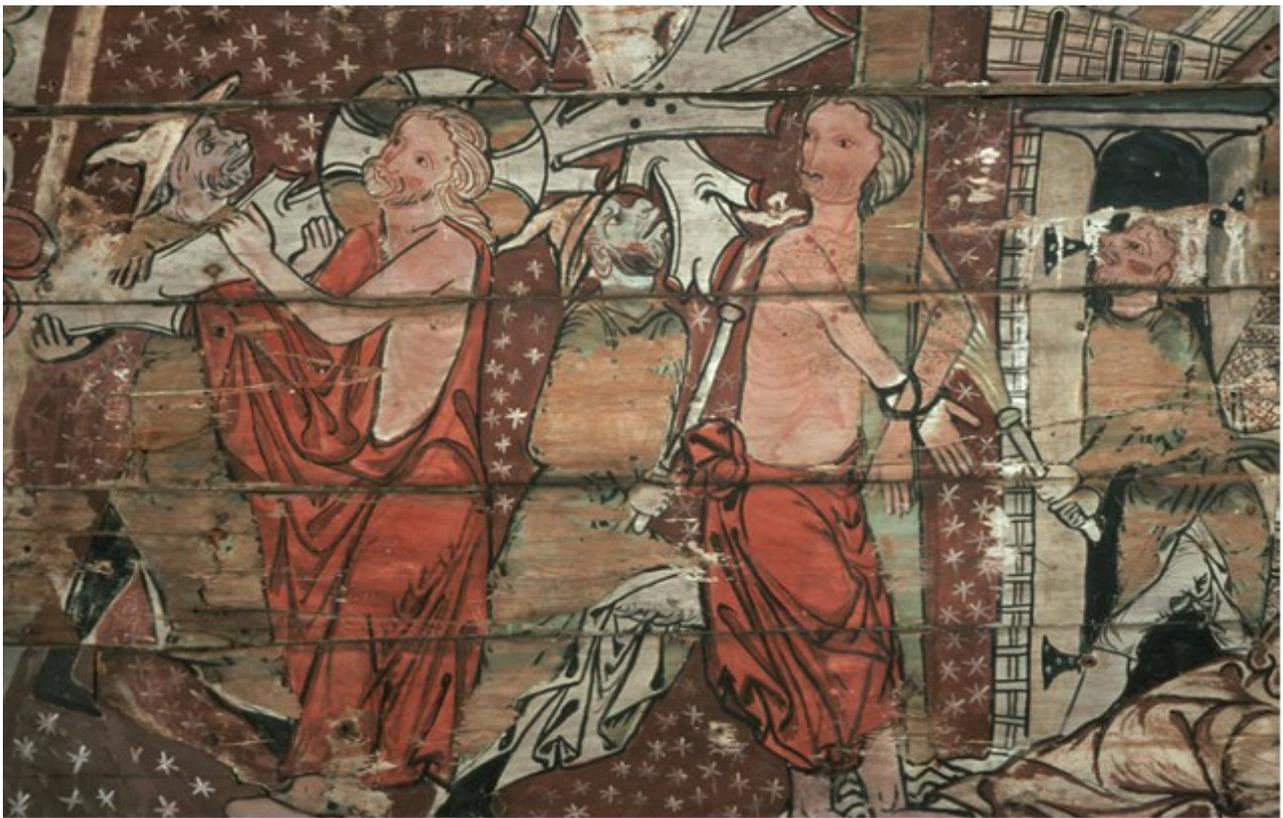
If the illustrations surrounding the *Ættartala* are indeed inspired by the scribe's understanding of the text, then **fig. 15.** is a striking visualisation of a “Jewish”<sup>384</sup> *att*, just as we earlier encountered the *att* of slaves in *Rigspula* or the *att* of Icelanders in *Morkinskinna*. Moreover, it stresses the ethnic/genetic component of “Jewishness”. The Sturlung line does not become Christian until the Scandinavian branch (and then quite late on; this line even includes Óðinn himself), so it cannot be religious status that undoes the hooked nose and wizened appearance. In the mind of the scribe, the fact that the contemporary Sturlungar did not “look Jewish” must have been attributed to an idea that “Jewishness” was something that was inherited and could therefore be bred out over the generations. His identification of Noah *et al* as Jews might well have been idiosyncratic in medieval Iceland, but as we have seen such notions of hereditary characteristics were not. In any case, even if **fig. 15.** is quite unrelated to the adjacent text, the image's rehearsal of the anti-Semitic tropes previously outlined constitutes a further example of medieval Icelanders expressing hostile sentiments about the inner nature of the Jews via the site of the body.

382 St. Isidore of Seville 2006, 193.

383 The title *Ættartala Sturlunga* is a modern descriptor, although both *attartala* and *attartal* are medieval words used to describe this kind of genealogy or pedigree. The noun *tala* refers to a tally or number, while *tal* refers connotes a list more specifically. See: Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. pp. 624-625, 760.

384 Scare quotes are used throughout this section because, as seen, the people described were obviously not Jews.

I will conclude with one more example of what I believe to be a racialised image of the Jewish body from the Old Norse-speaking world. Ål Stave Church was constructed during the twelfth century in what is now Ål Kommune, south east Norway. During the early 1300s a lavishly painted chancel ceiling was added, depicting 23 scenes from the Bible. Although the church was demolished in 1880, these paintings were recovered and survive to date. Imagining being packed into the church, staring up at the vibrantly coloured images while the priest read material from the *Old Norwegian Homily Book* or the *miracula*, one can understand how powerful the lay experience of Old Norse religious literature must have been. Returning to earlier observations made on the reception of the *Teiknibók*, we might even speak of “the multimedia Jew”. An illiterate Old Norse-speaking layman could look from panel to panel on the chancel ceiling of Ål stave church, following visual depictions of Jewish cruelty during the Passion at the same time as the preacher narrated them (we might even make an educated guess at what such a sermon might have been like, e.g. *Dominica palmarum sermo* from *The Old Norwegian Homily Book*).<sup>385</sup> What the written/spoken word did not say of the Jewish body, church art could show.



**Fig. 17:** Jews from Passion scene (detail), Ål Stave Church. Note skin tone in relation to Jesus. Photograph by: Eirik Irgens Johnsen.

<sup>385</sup> For the original text, see: *GNH*. pp. 111-116.



**Fig. 18:** Malchus detail, Ål Stave Church. Photograph by: Eirik Irgens Johnsen.



**Fig. 19:** Detail from Last Supper, Ål Stave Church. Note skin colour of Judas (L) in relation to the other disciples. Photograph by: Eirik Irgens Johnsen.

Some of the imagery from Ål is conversant with what we have previously seen from the *Teiknibók*. The Icelandic **fig. 8.** and the Norwegian **fig. 18,** both depict Malchus as hook nosed and diminutive. As suggested in **fig. 12.** from the *Teiknibók*, the Ål Jews have visibly darker skin. In **fig. 17.** and **fig. 19** Jesus and his disciples exhibit a ruddy, fleshy tone. Judas and the Jews are of a browner hue, which somehow simultaneously conveys the image of being more pallid and sickly, while also not being quite as “white”.<sup>386</sup> Again, the visual and literary cultures of West Norse-speaking Scandinavia coalesce on this

<sup>386</sup> On medieval notions of “whiteness”, see: Cohen 2003. pp, 197-198. Suzanne Conklin Akbari. “From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*. pp. 19-34.

topic: dark complexions in general were often distrusted by Old Norse authors, being seen as ugly or suggestive of loutishness, impudence or malevolence. It is a common trope in the *Íslendingasögur*, that of two brothers the one with a darker complexion will be a troublemaker (e.g. Grímr and Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, then Egill and Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsson in *Egils saga*).<sup>387</sup> The sociologist Christian T. Jonassen went as far as to claim that this eulogising of fair features at the expense of the dark was part of “a rather complete racist theory which was integrated with ... mythology and [the Scandinavian] total value system, and which in most respects paralleled the myths of modern racist dogma”.<sup>388</sup> It is particularly relevant for our purposes to stress that in Old Norse literature dark skin was considered to be a heritable trait, derived from ones *att*. In *Bragða-Mágus saga*, for example, King Karl interrogates the titular hero, who has presented himself at his court in the guise of a man who is half Ethiopian (*blámaðr*) and half Scandinavian:

“Hvar lannda ertu feðingr?” segir keisara. Hann mælti: “Ek em barnfeðdr a Blálanndi. Enn blamaðr var faðir minn, enn moðir min var ettuð norðan yfir haf; ok því em ek blár óðrum megin, at mer bregðr þui til feðr mins; ok marga megi þer þar sé aBlálanndi sva vorðna, sem ek em, ok micklu endimligri, ok sva aSithia hinni Micklu ...”<sup>389</sup>

“Of which country are you a native?” says the emperor. He said: “I was born in Bláland. My father was a *blámaðr*, but my mother was descended [*attuð*] from the north over the sea, and thus I am black on one side, which I get from my father, and you can see many in Bláland who look like me, and much more hideous besides, and also in Greater Scythia ...”

For a Norse-speaking congregation, who had never seen actual Jewish people and so had no reason to suspect that the iconographic traditions used to depict them might not be intended literally, it seems unlikely that the skin tone of the Jews would have been interpreted as a religious metaphor, but rather as a biological reality. The same can probably be said for the facial features of the Jews in **fig. 17**, which are distorted to the point of looking scarcely human. Their noses are so hooked that they merge

387 On the Kveld-Úlfssynir: *Var Þórólfr manna vestr ok gerviligast; hann var líkr móðurfrændum sínum, gleðimaðr mikill, qrr ok ákafamaðr mikill í qllu ok inn mesti kappmaðr; var hann vinsall af qllum monnum. Grímr var svartr maðr ok ljótr, líkr feðr sínum, bæði yfirliðs ok at skaplyndi...* - “Þórólfr was the most beautiful and accomplished of men. He took after his mother's side, a very cheerful man, generous and enthusiastic about everything and the greatest champion. He was popular with everyone. Grímr was a black and ugly man, like his father both in appearance and disposition”. On the Skalla-Grímssynir: *Þórólfr var gleðimaðr mikill ... varð hann brátt vinsall af alþýðu ... [Egill] myndi verða mjök ljótr ok líkr feðr sínum, svartr á háir ... hann var brátt málgur ok orðvís; heldr var hann illr viðreignar, er hann var í leikum með qðrum ungmennum.* - “Þórólfr was a cheerful man ... he soon became popular with the common people ... [Egill] would turn out very ugly like his father, black of hair, he was often talkative and witty. He was rather hard to get on with, when he was playing with other youths”. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*. ed. by Sigurður Nordal. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1933) p. 5, 80.

388 Christen T. Jonassen. “Some Historical and Theoretical Bases of Racism in Northwestern Europe”, *Social Forces* 30, 2 (1951) p. 157. Although not written by a medievalist, this neglected article presents some novel arguments and deserves further attention. See also: Jochens 1997, 313-314.

389 *Magus saga jarls in Fornsögur Suðurlanda*. ed. by Gustaf Cederschiöld. (Lund: F. A. Brockhaus, 1884) pp. 34-35.

back into the face like a snout, their ears are oversized and flapping, their mouths are twisted into snarls. The rather canine impression conveyed by their grimaces may well have been intentional on the part of the artist. The “Jewish dog” was common in anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic invective in the Middle Ages, and Jews are described as dogs twice in the Norse *miracula*.<sup>390</sup> In one legend, it is said of a Jew who steals a statue of the Virgin Mary that *eptir glöþzkevfulla hvndz gerð helldr enn mannz hvarf hann allr i brott, sva at hann fannz alldri síðan*<sup>391</sup>- “in the manner of a malice-filled dog rather than a man, he completely disappeared so that he was never found again”. In an Old Norse account of the host desecration trial that took place in Güstrow in 1330, the Jews allegedly responsible are described as *hinu vondu hundar*<sup>392</sup>- “those evil dogs”. By accident or design, this is an example of the verbal and visual languages of anti-Semitism overlapping.

If the Ål congregation sometimes heard sermons or miracle tales which were focussed on a purely religious conception of Jews, the images which surrounded them nonetheless articulated an overwhelmingly racial paradigm. The trope of dark skin and implications of a bestial nature do little to communicate the impression of Judaism as a rival belief system, and much to enforce the suggestion of the instinctively, corporeally 'Othered' Jew. Such a propensity to complement engagement with Judaism as a religion with striking criticism of the Jews as a people is the common theme in all the textual and visual encounters we have discussed. Obviously, Old Norse-speaking culture reached its apex long before the rise of the Enlightenment ideals which Arendt and the medievalists who, by accident or design, follow her intellectual footsteps consider to be necessary for the apprehension of race. Nonetheless, many of the requisite concepts for racial thought had long been attendant to the medieval Scandinavian *Weltanschauung*. As we have seen, Old Norse literature exhibits an awareness of hereditary traits, concerns over skin colour, de-humanising invective, and sophisticated terminology for describing kinship and descent groups. In the examples presented here, *kyn*, *fólk*, *þjóð*, and *att* are really “race” by any other name.

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390 Kenneth Stow. *Jewish Dogs: An Image and its Interpreters: Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006)

391 “Einn gyþingr for svivirðvliga með likneski varrar frv.” in *MaS*. pp. 255-256.

392 “Af vndarligum atburd i þyveska landi.” in *MaS*. pp. 1058-1059.

## Chapter 4: Snorri Sturluson and the Jews

“And who are the capitalists? The Jews, the rulers of our time. The Revolution last century cut off the head of Louis Capet. This century's revolution ought to cut off the head of Moses. I shall write a book about it. Who are the Jews? They're all those who suck the blood out of the defenceless, the people. They're Protestants, Freemasons. And of course, the people of Judah.”<sup>393</sup>

- Umberto Eco. *The Prague Cemetery* (Alphonse Toussenel to Captain Simonini)

Hostility towards Jews was an unpleasant and recurrent feature of Snorri's lifetime. The European Jewish population, numbering perhaps some 450,000 souls were subjected to rhetorical attacks by Christian preachers, repressive laws, and occasional outbreaks of violence.<sup>394</sup> To frame this chronology of persecution within the life and times of Snorri Sturluson, we might begin by noting that *Snorra Edda* was written just a few years after the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This edict included the infamous proclamation that “Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress”<sup>395</sup>. The ruling ultimately led to the enforced wearing of yellow badges or hats in many countries. Similarly, by the time that Snorri died in 1241, the Jews of London, York, Oxford, Bury St. Edmonds and Fulda had all been implicated in blood libels, Crusaders had massacred more than 2,500 Jews in northern France, and Pope Gregory IX had put the Talmud on trial in Paris.<sup>396</sup>

### **Prior Scholarship on Snorri and (anti-)Jewish traditions**

The extent to which Snorri might have been influenced by Christian thinking about Jews, and/or Jewish learning, are not novel questions. Sophus Bugge, Gabriel Turville-Petre, and Heather O'Donoghue all pointed out some arresting similarities between Jewish material and certain aspects of Snorri's Baldr tale.<sup>397</sup> For readers who are not closely acquainted with Old Norse, it may be worth

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Umberto Eco. *The Prague Cemetery*. trans. by Richard Dixon (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011) p. 192.

394 Salo W. Baron “Population” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*. vol. 16. ed. by Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik. (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2007) p. 389. The initial description of medieval Europe as a “persecuting society” was provided by R.I Moore. He pays particular attention to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his book: R.I. Moore. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society. Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) pp. 144-171.

395 Marcus 1999. p. 154.

396 Chazan 2012. passim. Gerd Mentgen. “Crusades” in *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*. vol. 1. ed. by Richard S. Levy. (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2005) p. 155. Israel Jacob Yuval. “Jewish Messianic Expectations towards 1240 and Christian Reactions” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*. ed. by Peter Schäfer & Mark R. Cohen. (Leiden: Brill, 1998) pp. 113-116.

397 Sophus Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og heltesagns Oprindelse*. (Christiania: A. Cammermeyer, 1881-1898) p. 45. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: the religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964) p. 119. O'Donoghue 2003. pp. 90-91.

briefly recapitulating its key features. According to Snorri, the god Baldr was the most beloved, most radiant and most beautiful of the gods. After a premonition of his own death, his mother Frigg makes everything in creation swear not to harm her son. The only exception, she says is “*Sá er mistilteinn kallaðr. Sá þótti mér ungr at krefja eiðsins*”<sup>398</sup> - “The one which is called Mistletoe. I thought it too young to demand an oath from”. The troublesome Loki, whom scholars have compared to Satan, wishes to kill Baldr, who has been compared to Christ.<sup>399</sup> He fashions a dart from mistletoe, and hands it to Baldr's blind brother to throw (a detail which has been compared to the story of Lamech). In the *Sefer Toledot Yeshu* (‘Book of the Generations of Jesus’), a text with a number of variants which can be no older than the tenth century, there is a curious detail that all trees have agreed not to harm Jesus.<sup>400</sup> Excepted was the cabbage, or sometimes the carob (the words are very similar in Hebrew, being כרוב and חרוב respectively). One version reads:

ואתו רשע התנה על העצים שלא יקבלו אותו כשהין האותיות עמו מפני שידע שלא [י]היו מניחין אותו וכל עץ שהיו  
 401 תולין אותו עליו היה נשבר אצלו עד שהביאו עץ שלכרוב ותלו אותו עליו ולא נשבר שלא התנה על הכרוב

And that wicked one [Jesus] made it so that he had agreements with the trees because of his cunning that they would not receive him, and so all the trees they were to hang him on would break. Then they led him to the tree made of cabbage and hung him on that, but the cabbage had not agreed to break.

In some versions, the reason for the exception of the cabbage is said to be that it is not considered a tree, but a plant. Thus, it is either the cabbage stalk or the carob that must be used either to shape Jesus's cross, or from which to hang him. O'Donoghue sums up the analogue between mistletoe and the cabbage/carob as so:

It is striking that the carob might thus have been overlooked not only because of its manifest inherent unsuitability for the job, being physically – one might almost say botanically – unsuitable for such a role, but also because of a 'category error': like the mistletoe, a parasitic plant with no independent stem, belonging midway between heaven and earth, it fell between the usual anthropological categories. Nevertheless, in both cases the overlooked item becomes the instrument of death without explanation of how it proves, after all, effective in its lethal role.<sup>402</sup>

398 *Gylfaginning*, p. 45.

399 Arthur D. Mosher. “The Story of Baldr's Death: the Inadequacy of Myth in the Light of Christian Faith”, *Scandinavian Studies* 55, 4 (Autumn 1983) pp. 313-314.

400 Joseph Dan. “Toledot Yeshu” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 20. ed. by Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007) pp. 28-29.

401 *Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen*. ed. by Samuel Krauss (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1902) p. 120.

402 O'Donoghue 2003. p. 91. The article also points to a further analogue with the Aramaic *Targum Sheni*, (‘Second Targum’) where no tree will allow itself to be used as the gallows upon which Haman is hung.

Of course, none of the scholars who have appreciated this parallel suggest a direct borrowing on behalf of Snorri, who obviously could never have read the *Sefer Toledot Yešū* for himself. As O'Donoghue puts it “we can do little more than wonder, Casaubon-like, at these ancient correspondences, which also include ... the overarching similarity between the circumstances of the deaths of both Baldr and Christ”.<sup>403</sup> Snorri almost certainly never spoke to a Jew, but it is quite plausible that he spoke to people who had. We have already examined fairly extensively the Norwegian (and to a lesser extent Icelandic) connection with centres of learning such as St. Victor. With this context in mind, the prospect that Jewish traditions might have exerted an influence on *Snorra Edda* becomes increasingly plausible. Elsewhere, I have drawn attention to the similarities between Snorri's Mǫkkurkálf, a clay giant fashioned by the giant magician Hrungr, and the golem, as presented in medieval Jewish sources.<sup>404</sup>

### **Incognito Jews in *Snorra Edda*?**

*Snorra Edda* obviously does not feature any Jewish characters proper, but as we have seen in the case of Hrungr, there are some who are perhaps “Jew-ish”.<sup>405</sup> That is to say, they are not intended to be direct comments upon the Jews or their religion, but they do freely make use of the potent typological armoury of anti-Judaism. I use the word “typology” here in a sense that encompasses both its literary and exegetical meanings. The most obvious typological project was the foreshadowing of Christ projected back into the Old Testament, beginning with the authors of the New Testament and enthusiastically continued by the church. Romans 5:14 is an early example, and the one that gives us the word 'type': “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come” (Koiné: τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος; Vulgate: *forma futuri*). Importantly, the business of figurative interpretation was also applied to non-Biblical texts and concepts. As Eric Auerbach put it concerning the case of Dante Alighieri's (d. 1321) *Divina Commedia*:

Not only the world of the Christian religion, but also the ancient world is included in Dante's figural system; the Roman empire of Augustus is for Dante a figure of God's eternal empire, and the prominent part Virgil plays in Dante's work is based on this assumption. Dante is not the first to subject all the material of human history to the figural conception [i.e. typological reading]; biblical

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403 Ibid.

404 Richard Cole. “The French Connection, or Þórr versus the Golem”, *Medieval Encounters* 20 (2014b). I would now consider some of my proposals there overly ambitious, although the question of Victorine influence on Snorri remains pertinent.

405 Jeffrey J. Cohen. “Was Margery Kempe Jewish?”, In the Middle. 21st April, 2006.  
<http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2006/04/was-margery-kempe-jewish.html>

history, Jewish and Christian, came to be seen as universal human history, and all pagan historical material had to be inserted and adapted to this framework<sup>406</sup>

Typology in this sense becomes the pursuit of what St. Augustine called *obscura quaedam figura rerum*<sup>407</sup> - “the obscured figure of a thing”. For the typologically-minded reader, all narrative elements can be aligned with a predictive type, drawn from the rich *dramatis personae* of Christian tradition. The identity of this type will then serve as a predictor for the qualities and behaviours of the character to whom it has been appended. E.g. the Roman Empire is aligned with the Kingdom of Heaven, and therefore becomes a state charged with safeguarding spiritual perfection. Rahab becomes aligned with Ecclesia, and thus the scarlet rope she hangs from her window becomes a symbol of Christ's blood: the sacrifice which saves Ecclesia just as the rope saves the harlot of Jericho.<sup>408</sup> For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the manipulation of one type, namely the Jew(s) as perceived by thirteenth century Christendom, and its potential influence upon Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, a literary product of that age. Snorri borrows from a given tradition where its imagery inspires or the typological allusion is particularly striking, but it should be stressed that I do not believe he was dealing in allegory *per se*. This is especially true in the case of Snorri's use of the anti-Jewish tradition. Snorri did not intend to enter into anti-Jewish polemic, much as the more astute in his audience might have drawn that inference. Rather, amongst many other additional influences, he was inspired by contemporary ideas about Jews and Judaism, which he then deployed, liberated from their original frame of reference, in the fantasy world of his *Edda*.

Although, as stated, there are no Jewish personalities in the *Edda*, the Jews as a collective do make an explicit appearance in one particular recension, namely the *Codex Wormianus* from the middle of the fourteenth century. There we find the following elaboration on the device of euhemerism:

Enn sem nofnín fiqlguðuz. þa tyndiz með þui sanleikrinn. Ok af fyrstu uilla þa blotaði huerr maðr epterkomandi sinn formeistara dyr eða fugla loptin ok himintunglín ok ymisliga dauðlega lutí þar til er þessi uilla gekk um allan heím ok sua uandlegha tyndu þeir sannleikum at æingi uissi skapara sinn. utan þeir æinir menn sem toluðu ebreska tungu þa sem gekk firi stöpul smíðina ...

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And as the names [for God] multiplied, the true one was lost. And from the initial heresy, every man and his descendants worshipped as their master animals or birds, the sky and the heavenly

406 Eric Auerbach. “Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature”, *Yale French Studies* 9 (1952) p. 6.

407 St. Augustine of Hippo. *Enarrationes in Psalmos. Patrologia Latina* vol. 37. ed. by J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1845) p. 1788.

408 Auerbach 1952. pp. 3-4.

409 *Codex Wormianus*. p. 3.

bodies and various inanimate objects until this heresy went all around the world, and so they habitually lost the truth, so that no-one knew his Creator, except for those men who had spoken the Hebrew language preceding the construction of the tower [of Babel]

Coming from an interpolation found solely in the *Codex Wormianus*, this episode is surely “Eddic” even if it probably isn’t “Snorric”. Nonetheless, it is enlightening for our understanding of *Snorra Edda*’s connections to the Christian conception of the Jews. There is a reminder here of the antiquity of Judaism, and implicit therein a nod to St. Augustine’s paradigm of “Jew as Witness”.<sup>410</sup> That is to say, this apparently casual remark stresses to the reader that the Jews had been the guardians of God’s law even while Scandinavians and the other gentile nations had been off worshipping “inanimate objects”. There is almost a tone of mocking admonishment in the narrative voice. It is also significant that the Jews are not referred to by any of their usual names in Old Norse, e.g. *gyðingr* or *júði*. The somewhat oblique appellation of “men who had spoken the Hebrew language” seems to anticipate any negative connotations which might have accompanied the word “Jew”. The separation of the Jews from their language was a common psychological mechanism in medieval culture which accommodated anti-Judaism with reverence for one of the languages of scripture. We have already cited Signer and Itzkowitz’s excavation of St. Jerome on this theme. This “doublethink” can also be observed elsewhere in Old Norse literature. For example in the *Messuskyringar* we find the statement: *Því er á inu vinstra horni alltaris miðblutr messu sunginn, at nú standa aðrar þjóðir undir trú. Enn þeir eru nú mjök útan brautar gyðingarnir.*<sup>411</sup> - “This is why the Mass is sung on the left side of the altar, so that other nations might submit to faith. But those Jews are now way off track”. This pronouncement is not in any way at odds with the commentator’s joyous assertion that: *ina æðztu tungu er ebreska*<sup>412</sup> - “the highest language is Hebrew”. However, there is no reason to suppose that the author was attempting such intellectual gymnastics in the prologue of the *Codex Wormianus*. It might be an aside, but his intent is clear: “you may not like the Jews, but they were a great deal closer to God than we were, back when we were worshipping Óðinn, rocks, puddles or who-knows-what-other-*dauðligar-blutir*”.

Snorri himself, however, tends to borrow from the more dramatic, hostile perception of Jews. The example of this which has probably received the most attention is the role of anti-Jewish typology in Snorri’s story of Baldr’s death and abortive resurrection. Baldr’s Christ-like credentials are well known, which begs the question, which character in the narrative then represents the Jews? Noting the long standing characterisation of “Synagoga” as blind, Arthur Mosher proposed that Hǫðr must have been

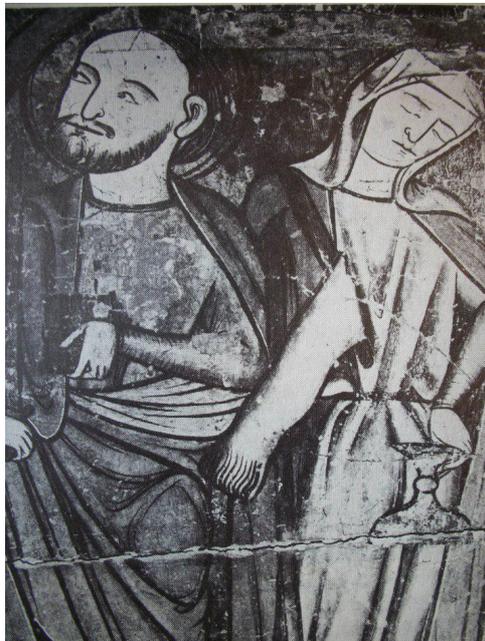
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410 Cohen 1999. pp. 23-65.

411 *Messuskyringar*. pp. 47-48.

412 Ibid. at pp. 45-46.

intended to refer to the Jews, with Loki, as the orchestrating power, acting as a cipher for Satan.<sup>413</sup> Mosher's overtly Christological interpretation of this episode has not been universally accepted. His hypothesis can perhaps be modified and enhanced with some concomitant examples of the tropes he discusses. To my knowledge, Jews are described as blind five times in Old Norse literature, including one reference in the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*.<sup>414</sup> In addition to these textual attestations, one pictorial depiction of the blind Synagoga survives from the Old Norse-speaking period in a church painting in Kinnsarvik, Norway [see **fig. 20**]. Moreover, the Gospel motif of the Jews as unwitting instruments for Satan's plan to kill Christ also features in *Niðrstigningar saga* (1220s or older), the Old Norse translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which Christopher Abram has argued may have inspired Snorri elsewhere in the Edda, specifically his account of Hermóðr's *Helreið*.<sup>415</sup> In *Niðrstigningar saga* it is written that the Devil *eggiat gyþing[a] byþ fiandscaþar víþ hann*<sup>416</sup> - “incited the Jewish nation to enmity against Him”.



**Fig. 20:** Blind Synagoga with St. Paul. From Kinnsarvik Church, Norway. c. 1200.

Thus, I agree that it is not unreasonable to adduce that Snorri would have been familiar with the trope. But Mosher's argument is open to criticism on two fronts: 1) it is perhaps too allegorical. It implies that

413 Mosher 1983, pp. 313-314.

414 “Mariu gratr” in *MaS* pp. 890-893. “Vor frv hialpadi iuda” in *ibid.* at pp. 963-965. *Inventio Crucis* in *Inventio Crucis* in *HMS*, vol. 1, ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877) pp. 302-308. *Flagellatio Crucis* in *ibid.* at pp. 308-311. “Apparicio Domini” in *Homilubók*, p. 58.

415 Christopher Abram. *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen*. (London: Continuum, 2011) p. 220. By the same author: “Snorri's Invention of Hermóðr's *helreið*” in *The Fantastic in Old Norse / Icelandic, Sagas and the British Isles: Preprints of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference*, vol. 1, ed. by John McKinnell *et al.* (Durham: The Centre of Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2006) p. 13.

416 *Niðrstigningar saga* in *HMS*, vol. 2, p. 16. cf. pp. 3-4, 19.

*Snorra Edda* is a sort of *roman à clef*, where characters are façades for one discrete referent. As we have seen in the case of the *Dokkálfar*, that is not how Snorri's mind worked. Behind a single character may lie a genealogy including any number of influences, and a single influence may manifest itself in many different characters simultaneously. 2) Mosher does not draw on the most tangible and credible source of typology for Snorri's writing, namely the kind of preaching material now best exemplified by the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*. Abram, who also argues for the presence of incognito Jews in Snorri's work, says this on the matter:

In his eighth homily on the Gospels ... Gregory the Great (590-604), specifies that not quite *everything* acknowledged Christ's divinity by their sorrow at his death. Gregory enumerates the ways in which the different elements of creation – including the rocks, sea and sun – perceived Christ as Lord ... But, continues Gregory, the Jews who turned away from Christ were harder hearted even than rocks, refusing 'to acknowledge him whom ... the elements proclaimed to be God either by their signs or by being broken' ... When combined with the relatively well-known idea that all creation wept at Christ's death, Gregory's homily may lead us to suspect that at some point in the transmission of the Baldr myth it has been susceptible to Christian influence. Gregory's homilies were known in Iceland and translated into Old Norse, and they provided an important source for the types of sermon that Snorri might have heard preached each Sunday in church.<sup>417</sup>

Abram's argument is fortified when we confirm that the relevant excerpt from the Gregorian homily he is describing is indeed attested in an Old Icelandic sermon on the Apparition of Christ:

En oss er þeckandi að í öllum tócnom þeim er sýnd er að bómum drótne og deyianda. hve mikil illzka hever veret í hiorptom neqverra gyþinga er hvártke kendosc þeir við gylf fyrir spár ne fyrir iarteiner. þuiat allar hofþskepnor vóttoþo komet hafa scapera sín. J þui kendo himnarner guþ. er þeir sendio stiornona. Hafet kende hann. þuiat þat spratt eige vndan fótum hans þa er hann geck yver þat. Jorþen kende hann. þuiat hon skalf at honom deyianda. Sólen kende hann. þuiat hon gerþe eigi skína. Steinar kendo hann. þuiat þeir sprungo a tíþ dauþa hans. Helvíte kende hann. þuiat þat varþ aftr at selia þa dauþa men es þat helt áþr. En þóat allar hofþskepnor váttape hann guþ vera. þa villdo öllvngis eige hiorpto ótrúra gyþinga trúa hann guþ vera. og harþare steinom villdo þau eige klíufasc til iþronar. og vilia eige iáta þeim er allar skepnor skilia guþ vera.<sup>418</sup>

It is known to us in all wonders, those which were seen both at the Lord's birth and death, how much evil has been in the hearts of some Jews, who neither acknowledge God for prophecies nor for miracles. Because all the elements affirmed that their creator had come. The heavens

417 Abram 2011. pp. 219-220.

418 "Apparicio Domini" in *Homilubók*. p. 58.

acknowledged God, for they sent the stars. The sea acknowledged him, because it did not part under his feet when he walked over it. The earth acknowledged him, because it shook upon his death. The sun acknowledged him, because it did not shine. The stones acknowledged him, because they cracked at the time of his death. Hell acknowledged him, because it came again to deliver back those dead men, whom previously it held. But even though all of the elements attested that He was God, then the hearts of the faithless Jews would by no means believe Him to be God, and harder than stones they would not be cracked for [their] repentance, and would not yield to Him, whom all of creation understands to be God.

Considered alongside Snorri's own words, the influence from this scene on the *Edda* becomes quite transparent:

Því næst sendu Æsir um allan heim orindreka at biðja at Baldr væri grátinn ór Helju. En allir gerðu þat, menninir ok kykvendin ok jörðin ok steinarnir ok tré ok allr málmr, svá sem þú munt sét hafa at þessir hlutir gráta þá er þeir koma ór frosti ok í hita. Þá er sendimenn fóru heim ok höfðu vel rekit sín eyrindi, finna þeir í helli nokkvorum hvar gýgr sat. Hon nefndisk Þökk. Þeir biðja hana gráta Baldr ór Helju. Hon segir:

“Þökk mun gráta / þurrum tárur / Baldrs bálfarar. / Kyks né dauðs / nautka ek karls sonar: / haldi Hel því er hefir.”

En þess geta menn at þar hafi verið Loki Laufeyjarson er flest hefir illt gert með Ásum.<sup>419</sup>

The next thing that happened, the Æsir sent word around the whole world, asking for Baldr to be wept out of Hel. And everyone did so, humans and animals and the earth and the stones and trees and every kind of metalwork, as you will have seen that these things weep when they are brought out of the cold and into the warm. Then when the messengers came home and had almost completed their task, they find in a certain cave a giantess sitting in a cave. She was called Þökk. They ask her to weep for Baldr, to get him out of Hel. She says:

“Þökk will cry / dry tears / at Baldr's funeral. / Living nor dead, / I did not delight in the old man's son [Baldr] / May Hel keep what she has.

But most people think this was really Loki, son of Laufey, who committed the most evil against the Æsir.

Besides the allusion to Gregory's homily, there are other factors contributing to Loki's Jew-ishness. There appears to be a subtle irony in the choice of Loki's *alter ego*. Þökk means “thanks” or “gratefulness”. Cleasby and Vifgússon assert that this is a coincidence and that Þökk's name must

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419 *Gylfaginning*, pp. 47-48.

originally have a different root.<sup>420</sup> However, for typological purposes, this double meaning is quite appropriate. After all, from a medieval Christian perspective, it was gratefulness that was sorely lacking when Christ revealed himself to the Jews. They were given a great gift, but they rejected it. In the end, it was the gentiles who would show appreciation, and so form the Church. As the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* says: *iorsala býr oc gyþingar georþesc vinstre handar meN. þat ero recningar fyr ótrú sína. en hann valþc epter písl sóma beógre handar meN sér af heþnom monnom ór norþre*<sup>421</sup> - “the people of Jerusalem and the Jews were made left hand men [i.e. enemies], that is a sign of their faithlessness, and after his crucifixion he chose for the honour of his right hand men heathen peoples from the north”. Furthermore, there is something very Jew-ish in Loki's function amongst the Æsir. Loki in Ásgarðr, and the Jew in Western Christendom are both relationships predicated on the notion of “being in service”. In both cases, the servant is held in contempt, perceived as anti-social and disloyal. Like the Jew amongst Christians, Loki is an ethnic Other, because his father Fárbaumi belongs to the race of the *jötnar* (“giants”).<sup>422</sup> And in both cases, the cunning, magic-wielding outsider is tolerated only because of his unique qualities. The parallel also extends perfectly to the way they are treated. Both are righteously abused for the profit of their masters. Robert Grosseteste, a contemporary of Snorri, succinctly articulated the consensus regarding the status of the Jew within Christendom: “it is the infliction of a just punishment that this people labour hard at tilling ground that, although it produces abundantly from their efforts, nevertheless bears its fruits not for them, but for the princes under whom they are held captive”<sup>423</sup>; a metaphor which could just as well be applied to Loki under the Æsir.

The characterisation of Hqðr may yet have been coloured by the trope of Jewish blindness, but I hope I have shown that, if so, he does not have a monopoly on Snorri's use of the anti-Jewish tradition. Indeed, Loki's Jew-ish credentials are further enhanced when we consider his fate. When the Æsir suspect his role in Baldr's death, their vengeance is grisly in the extreme. There is a brief allusion to the fact that Loki has been bound in stanza 14 of *Baldrs draumr*, where the poem refers to: *er lauss Loki liðr ór bõndom*<sup>424</sup> - “when Loki gets free from his bonds”. Some details are also given in the prose epilogue to *Lokasenna* in the *Codex Regius*, which corresponds quite closely to the description provided by Snorri. *Snorra Edda*, however, is our chief source for the details of the scene. As Hár explains to Gangleri:

420 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 756.

421 “De Sancta Cruce” in *Homilíu-Bók*. p. 37.

422 The relationship could even be conceived of in postcolonial terms. Krummel reads the “Red Jews” motif in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* as an anxiety that the Christian oppression of the Jews will be inverted during the apocalypse (Krummel 2011. pp. 80-87). Ragnarøkkr will also see the Æsir fall prey to the giants they have oppressed for so long, led by Loki, a half-giant in their midst.

423 Robert Grosseteste. *The Letters of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln*. trans. by F.A.C Mantello & Joseph Goering. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) pp. 67-68.

424 *Poetic Edda*. p. 279.

“Nú var Loki tekinn griðalaus ok farit með hann í helli nokkvorn. Þá tóku þeir þrjár hellur ok settu á egg ok lustu rauf á hellunni hverri. Þá váru teknir synir Loka Váli ok Nari eða Narfi. Brugðu Æsir Vála í vargs líki ok reif hann í sundr Narfa bróður sinn. Þá tóku Æsir þarma hans ok bundu Loka með yfir þá þrjá steina – einn undir herðum annarr undir lendum, þriðji undir knésfótum – ok urðu þau bönd at járni. Þá tók Skaði eitrorm ok festi upp yfir hann svá at eitrit skyldi drjúpa ór orminum í andlit honum. En Sigyn kona hans stendr hjá honum ok heldr mundlaugu undir eitrdropa. En þá er full er mundlaugin þá gengr hon ok slær út eitrinu, en meðan drýpr eitrit í andlit honum. Þá kippisk hann svá hart við at jörð qll skelfr. Þat kallið þér landskjálpta. Þar liggr hann í böndum til ragnarøkrs.”<sup>425</sup>

“Now, without mercy, Loki was taken and brought to a certain cave. Then they took three slabs and turned them on their edges and drilled a hole in each. Then the sons of Loki were taken, Váli and Nari or Narfi. The Æsir transformed Vála into the shape of a wolf and he tore his brother Narfi to shreds. Then the Æsir took his entrails and bound Loki with them over the three stones – one under his shoulders, the second under his hips, the third under his knees, and they turned those bonds into iron. Then Skaði took a poisonous serpent and seured it above him so that the poison would drip out of its mouth onto his face. And Sigyn, his wife, stands by him and holds a cup under the dripping poison. But when the cup is full then she goes and throws the poison away, and in the meantime the poison drips onto his face. Then he thrashes so hard that the whole earth shakes. That's what you call an earthquake. He lies there in his bonds until Ragnarøkrs.”

And when Ragnarøkrs comes, this is what happens:

Í þessum gný klofnar himinninn ok ríða þaðan Muspells synir. Surtr ríðr fyrst ok fyrir honum ok eptir bæði eldr brennanndi. Sverð hans er gott mjök. Af því skínn bjartara en af sólu. En er þeir ríða Bifröst þá brotnar hon sem fyrir er sagt. Muspells megir sækja fram á þann vøll er Vígríðr heitir. Þar kemr ok þá Fenrisúlfr ok Miðgarðsormr. Þar er ok þá Loki kominn ok Hrymr ok með honum allir hrímþursar, en Loka fylgja allir Heljar sinnar. En Muspells synir hafa einir sér fylking; er sú björt mjök.<sup>426</sup>

In this clamour, the sky splits in two and the sons of Muspell ride forth. Surtr rides out first, before and after him there is burning fire. His sword is very great. The shine from it is brighter than the sun. And as they ride on Bifröst, then it breaks as previously said. The troops of Muspell head forth to the field which is called Vígríðr. Fenrisúlfr and Miðgarðsormr also arrive. Loki has also arrived, and Hrymr, and with him all the Ice Giants, and all the champions of Hell follow

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425 *Gylfaginning*, p. 49.

426 *Ibid.* at p. 50.

Loki. And the sons of Muspell take up one complete formation. It shines a great deal.

Snorri quotes stanza 51 of *Völuspá* as his source here: *Kjóll ferr austan / koma munu Muspells / og lög lýðir, / en Loki stýrir. / Þar ró fflmegir / með freka allir / Þeim er bróðir / Býleists í för*<sup>427</sup> - “A ship journeys from the east / the sons of Muspell are coming / across the waves / There are the monstrous brood / with all the wolves / Those are the brothers / of Býleist, on their way”. But Snorri's description of the imprisonment and counter-attack of the Muspellssynir also has much in common with another popular medieval narrative. “The Red Jews” is a motif, seemingly emanating from German-speaking Europe in the twelfth century, where a nation of Jews are imprisoned in a remote area, often in a mountain tomb somewhere around the Caucasus. Upon their release in the build-up to the Apocalypse the Red Jews will attack Christendom, resulting in an apocalyptic bloodshed that will bring on the End of Days. There are many variants to the legend – sometimes the Red Jews are identified with Gog and Magog, sometimes the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Sometimes, as in *The Travels of John Mandeville*, they will seek out the Jewish Diaspora, and act as a globally co-ordinated threat. Sometimes they are directly answerable to the Anti-Christ or they ride with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Elsewhere, they are in league with the forces of Islam.<sup>428</sup> The first textual witness to the tale is from *Der Jüngere Titurel* (c. 1272) but it is undoubtedly dependent on much earlier material from Alexander romances.<sup>429</sup> The Red Jews proper are not attested in the West Norse corpus. However, an antecedent tradition appears in the Old Norse *Elucidarius* (c. 1200):<sup>430</sup>

Anti christus man berast i babílon hinní miclu or kýni dan fra port kono ... Oll tacn hans ero lýgín. Hann man endr nya hína fornu iorsala borg, þat er íherusalem. oc lata sic þar gofga sem guð. Við honum monu gýðingar taka fegensamlega. oc koma til hans or ollum heímí. En þeir monu snuast til tru af kenningum enocs oc elias. Oc ta-ka mioc sua aller harðar píníngar fyrir guðs nafne.<sup>431</sup>

The Anti-Christ will be born in Greater Babylon to a woman of easy virtue from the tribe of Dan ... all his miracles are false. He will rebuild the ancient *Jórsalaborg*, that is to say, Jerusalem, and have himself worshipped there as God. The Jews will receive him eagerly, and they will come to him from all over the world. But they will be converted to the faith by the teachings of Enoch and Elijah. And they will receive very harsh punishments in the name of God.

427 Ibid. at p. 51. cf. *Poetic Edda*. p. 12.

428 Andrew Colin Gow. *The Red Jews. Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age 1200-1600*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) pp. 55-56, 157.

429 Ibid. at pp. 70-76.

430 I am grateful to Arngrímur Vídalín for pointing out to me that this tradition was still current in the early fourteenth century, as it is repeated in: *Hauksbók. Udgiven efter de Arnemagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4a*. vol. 1. ed. by Finnur Jónsson. (Copenhagen: Thieles Bogtrykkeri, 1892) pp. 170-171.

431 *The Old Norse Elucidarius*. ed. by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow. (Columbia: Camden House, 1992) p. 84.

There is no suggestion here that the Jews have been contained, or that they will embark on a premeditated annihilation of Christendom. However, there is the notion that the Jews will unite all over the world, and that they will act in a co-ordinated fashion in the service of the Anti-Christ until Enoch and Elijah show them the errors of their ways. These 'proto-Red Jews' are a noteworthy example of the kind of thinking about Jews which was circulating in the Old Norse world. However, they clearly did not at any point shape Snorri's perception (or depiction) of the Muspellsynir. If we are in search of a strain of the Red Jews tradition which is more analogous to the apocalyptic agents of *Snorra Edda*, we must look elsewhere.

As the continental material concerning the Red Jews is so diverse, I have opted to compare the Muspellssynir with the tradition as it appears in Old Swedish.<sup>432</sup> Doubtless, there can be no suggestion of direct transmission between the two, as the Swedish *Konung Alexander* (c. 1380) is over a century younger than *Snorra Edda*. However, the particular Latin text of which it is a translation, the *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni*, dates from the tenth century. The Old Swedish account thus has the advantage of having a strong connection to the one of the oldest known ancestors of the Red Jews. Furthermore, owing to the linguistic affinity between Old Swedish and Old Norse it can also give us a hint at what a rendering of the Red Jews tale might have looked like in Snorri's own language - not that there necessarily was a written vernacular version. The tale could well have been told by foreign guests or cosmopolitan scholars at King Hákon's court, for example. We know that people in that very circle were discussing – and evaluating the plausibility of – another Orientalist fantasy, namely the *Letter of Prester John*. Written at the court of King Hákon for the king-in-waiting, Magnús Hákonarson, *Konungs skuggsjá* (c. 1250s) refers to: *þá bok er gior var a indija landi ... þar sie margt vndarliga j sagt*<sup>433</sup> - “that book which was made in India ... in which many wondrous things are said”. Indeed, it ought to be noted that some versions of the *Letter* actually contained references to the Red Jews.<sup>434</sup> Obviously we are in the realm of the deeply speculative here, but it does not seem unthinkable that a discussion similar to the one hinted at in *Konungs skuggsjá* might have taken place concerning the Red Jews.

[OLD SWEDISH]

han foor tháðhan ower sitiam

óster borter ij wárlina fram

432 An overview on this tradition in East Norse more broadly is provided by: Adams 2013. pp. 75-77. On *Konung Alexander* and the sources of the *Historia* see Stephen A. Mitchell. “The Middle Ages” in *A History of Swedish Literature*. edited by Lars G. Warme. (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) pp. 37-38. Oswald Zingerlie. *Die Quellen zum Alexander des Rudolf von Ems*. (New York: G. Olms, 1977). Gow 1995. p. 77.

433 *Konungs skuggsjá*. ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen. (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, 1983) p. 13. See also: Carolyne Larrington. “Undruðusk þá, sem fyrir var”: Wonder, Vinland and Medieval Travel Narratives”, *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 14 (2004) pp. 91-114.

434 Gow 1995. p. 307, 309-310.

enkte land laa thiit wt mere  
ther man wiste aff sighia flere  
han fan ther folk wårre ån trull  
thz hafdhe tho råt mårniskio hull  
rådhelikith ok mykith oreent  
them gat ångin opa seet  
the hafdho syyn å swa grym  
at ånghin thordhe se a them  
thz lifdhe alt widh trulla sidh  
ångin mårniskia fik ther fridh  
thz aat folk mz huld ok krop  
inbyrdhis hwart annath op  
ok alla handa creatwr  
håst ok wargh foghil ok diwr  
hwath som fõdhis a iordh åller wådher  
thz åta the alt saman mådher  
...  
the plågha enkte ther a iordha  
the åtar them op a ther a bordhe  
hwath man kan hålztt lifwande nåmpna  
...  
orena gerninga margha handa  
sa alexander aff them ganga  
ther lofflika åra skriffwa  
thz år alt ont thz the drifwa  
Rõdhe iudha mon thz heta  
swa finder han ån hwa them wil leta  
tha alexander hafdhe thetta seet  
badhe hòrt ok widha leet  
at thetta folk dreff tholik last  
han thånkte ij sinom hoghe rast  
vtan thetta folk forgaar  
al wårlin åpter dõme faar  
ok smittas ij tholik gerning snõdh

all wårlin hafwer thås stora nõdh  
om thz skal ganga sin fram gang  
åpter ther a sidh tha smittas mang  
ok lifwa ij ther a åpter dõme  
thz ware båtra at man them gõme  
Alexander fan et ful got raadh  
thz folkith han saman drifwa badh  
ij en flok badhe mårn ok qwinna  
swa then mera som then minnda  
swa at enkte ater bleff  
nor ij wårlina alla them dreff  
swa langan wågh råt ij nor  
at thiit ångin fara thõr  
Thz war alexanders idhelic bõn  
til gudh som allom gifwer lõn  
at wårlin skulle ekki smittas  
aff tholikt lifwerne ekki hittas  
...  
han badh swa långe gudh hòrdhe han  
gudh giordhe vnder the åra san  
ey stort fore alexanders saka  
vtan mårniskio helso til maka  
han bõdh tvem berghom the standa ån  
ganga til saman badhin ij sån  
the waro hògh ok mykith lang  
gingo saman vtan alt bang  
...  
ther år stort rwm innan til  
som et ganzt land iak thz sighia wil  
...  
bårghin åra alt kringom brant  
som annar mwr thz år sårnt  
the åra som andre mwrwåggia hòghia  
ther kan ångin op fore õghia

the ródha iudha ára ther inne  
badhe flere ok swa minne <sup>435</sup>

[ENGLISH]

He goes from there over Scythia.  
Away, far to the east of the world.  
There was no land out there any more  
that anyone knew of. Many say  
there he found a people worse than trolls  
Although they had human skin  
angry and most unclean  
No-one could bear to look upon them  
They had such an ugly appearance  
that no-one dared to look upon them  
they all lived in the manner of trolls.  
No human there could find any peace.  
They ate people with skin and body  
including each other  
and all kinds of creatures,  
horses and wolves, birds and beasts,  
whatever lives on earth or sea,  
they ate it all in the same way  
...  
they do not tend to their land.  
On their tables, they eat up  
whatever living thing you can name.  
The committing of many impure deeds [spells?]  
Alexander saw them do  
There, it is written in law  
that everything they do is evil.  
They are called "Red Jews"  
so he seeks them, and wants to see them.  
When Alexander had seen that,  
both heard it and clearly observed,

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435 *Konung Alexander. En Medeltids Dikt från Latinet Vänd i Svenska Rim.* ed. by G.E. Klemming. (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1862) pp. 130-133.

that this people behaved in such a way  
he thinks in his booming voice  
all the world will be judged  
unless this people are destroyed  
and will be smote by such sordid actions.  
The whole world is in great need.  
If things were to go their own way  
according to their custom many would be smote  
and live ever after in their power  
it would be better if one could hide them away  
Alexander had a great idea.  
He had that people rounded up  
in one group, both men and women  
the short and the tall  
so that not one was left behind at all  
he had them driven north in the world  
such a long way north  
that no-one would dare to go there.  
It was Alexander's pious prayer  
to God who rewards all  
that the world would not be smote  
and never encounter such a way of life  
...  
he prayed so long that God heard him.  
God did it, it's true  
not for Alexander's sake alone  
but for the good of all humankind.  
He commanded two mountains – they still stand -  
to come together as one  
they were tall and very long  
they went together without any noise  
...  
Inside there is a lot of space  
like a huge country, I should say  
...  
the mountains are steep all around  
like another wall, it's true  
they are like other tall walls

no one can climb it  
the Red Jews are in there

both short and tall.

There are several striking affinities between the coming of the Muspellssynir according to Snorri, and the Red Jews according to the Alexander romances. Both are entombed: Loki in a cave, the Red Jews in the mountains. Both engage in cannibalism. The Red Jews *aat folke mǫ buld ok krep / inbyrdbis hvar annath op* - “eat people and their flesh and blood / they'll even munch each other up”. Similarly, according to Snorri, Loki's son Váli eats his brother, Narfi. The release of either the Red Jews or the Muspellssynir will lead to the apocalypse. Alexander, as a Christianised king, can pray to the one true God and prevent it from happening. Snorri's tragically flawed pagan deities, on the other hand, must vainly await their doom. Indeed, on one detail, *Snorra Edda* is closer to the Red Jews motif than he is to *Völuspá*. In the Eddic poem, the Muspellssynir approach over water with a ship, a *kejöll*. But in *Snorra Edda*, despite the citation of the poem, the accompanying prose clearly states that they ride on horseback into Ásgarðr. This suggests that the image of the Muspellssynir conjured by Snorri's mind's eye probably resembled something like the example provided in **fig. 21**, rather than a nautical setting drawn purely from *Völuspá*.



**Fig. 21:** “*riða þaðan Muspells synir*”? Actually a depiction of the Red Jews from: *Der Antichrist*, fol. 14V (1480). A similar image can also be found in Ms. Germ 2mo 129, fol. 15v (c. 1320). Otherwise, the earliest surviving pictorial representation pertaining to the Red Jews shows the entombed Gog and Magog eating human flesh, from the *Ebstorf World Map* (1235). See Gow 1995. pp. 383-390.

**Table 1:** The Sons of Muspell compared to the Red Jews.

	Muspellssynir in <i>Völuspá</i>	Muspellsynir in <i>Snorra Edda</i>	The Red Jews
Appear at the apocalypse?	Yes	Yes	Yes
How will they arrive at the apocalypse?	Sea, boat ( <i>kejóll</i> )	Land, on horse and foot ( <i>at ríða</i> )	Land, on horse and foot
Where are they prior to the apocalypse?	Muspell, specific location unknown	Underground, inside a cave	Underground, inside a mountain
Depicted as a military force?	Uncertain, a <i>fiðlmegir</i> - “a monstrous brood”.	Yes. They march in a <i>fylking</i> , a medieval defensive unit. They are also referred to as the <i>Muspells megir</i> - “troops of Muspell”.	Frequently, e.g. the <i>Gottweiger Trojanerkrieg</i> (late 1200s): 'Dar under stachel ringe gantz / Ir helm waren hartte glantz' (Gow 1995: 193) (There under [their armour] they wore huge steel rings / their helmets had a fearful gleam)

As is so often the case with Snorri's work, the sons of Muspell are not drawn exclusively from any one tradition. *Völuspá* clearly provided the basic structure upon which Snorri could tell his own narrative of Ragnarøk. <sup>436</sup> But Snorri does seem to be permitting his ancient, pagan materials to draw colour from the potent images of the High Medieval cultural canon in which he was immersed. Snorri was not insulated from the intellectual climate to which he was contributing, and thus could no more avoid being influenced by the powerful typologies of anti-Judaism than he could avoid any other aspect of the medieval Christian experience. Indeed, the emphasis on the “sons of Muspell” as a descent group based on lineage makes them feel more like a contemporary ethnic group than a venerable cosmological construct. <sup>437</sup>

As if to highlight the originality of the thirteenth-century-eddic hybrid he has created, it is only Snorri who employs the name “Muspellssynir” to refer to these agents of the apocalypse. In *Völuspá*, they are elliptically named *Muspells* – lit. 'Of Muspell'. We may attribute the uniqueness of Snorri's appellation by proposing that he is the only surviving witness of a naming-tradition which was already at least two centuries old by the time he wrote it down, having apparently survived in oral record from some time around Iceland's official conversion in the year 1000 until the 1220s. More soberly, we might consider Snorri's own era and consider if there were any group in the thought of that period whose presence

436 I use the spelling Ragnarøkkr throughout as it is specifically Snorri's version of events as depicted in chs. 50-51 of *Gylfaginning* to which I am referring. On this problem, see: Haraldur Bernharðsson. “Old Icelandic *ragnarök* and *ragnarökkr*” in *Verba docenti: Studies in historical and Indo-European linguistics presented to Jay H. Jasanoff*. ed. by Alan J. Nussbaum. (Ann Arbor: Beech Stave, 2007) pp. 25-38.

437 On the notion of descent and race in the Middle Ages, see: Bartlett 2001. pp. 39-56. On the importance of lineage for understanding Jewishness in Old Norse literature, see: Cole 2015. pp. 239-268.

was associated with the apocalypse and who were known -*synir* - 'sons of'. Readers of the latter persuasion will note the similarity between the phrases *Muspells synir* and *Isræls synir*, the term frequently used in thirteenth century works such as *Stjórn* to refer to the Jews. Both are based on the formula of geographical location + *synir*. They are also phonologically similar. In Snorri's days the /els syni:r/ of *Muspells synir* would have made a half rhyme with the /ε:ls syni:r/ of *Isræls synir*. Admittedly, the proposition that there are resonances of anti-Jewish imagery in *Snorra Edda* may be unpalatable, but it is a crucial to considering Snorri in his comparative context. Much as scholars may employ the *Edda* to recover details of the pagan past, it is also necessary to acknowledge Snorri's Christian present. Thinking about the Jews was an inalienable aspect of that experience.

## Chapter 5: The Importance of Elsewhere: Iceland, *Judenreinheit*, and Homotopia.

“These are my customs and establishments  
It would be much more serious to refuse.  
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.”<sup>438</sup>

- Philip Larkin, “The Importance of Elsewhere”

In Larkin's 1955 poem, he describes his experience of being an Englishman abroad. The strangeness of Ireland, where he was a librarian at Queen's University Belfast, excused his personal shortcomings and provided a convenient analgesic for his sense of *ennui*: “Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home / Strangeness made sense ...”. Back in his native country, Larkin laments that his surroundings no longer absolve him of his failings. When he could not employ the justification of being a foreigner, his awkwardness and his existential doubts became once again his own burdens. The experience illustrated by Larkin is quite coherent, but it is not universal. In truth, we often use an “elsewhere” to “underwrite our existence” without ever visiting there at all. The first Anglo-Norman settlers in Ireland probably never needed to cross The Pale (Irish: *An Pháil*) to feel that they were on the right side of it. Many Russian Gentiles in the nineteenth century derived a sense of security from living outside the Pale of Settlement, knowing that the Russian Jews were confined to a distant region they would never have to visit. Families moving into “White Flight” towns in modern Britain do so because they no longer want to live in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. The satisfaction they feel in their new home is underwritten by the place they have left, and to which they never return.<sup>439</sup> All these examples are built not only on a fear of the Other, but also on the abjection of “Other spaces”. Moreover, there is an attendant desire to preserve the purity of “here” - to prevent its contamination from beyond the bounds of elsewhere. The importance of such an elsewhere for the medieval Icelandic relationship to Jews is the principle subject of this chapter.

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438 Philip Larkin. “The Importance of Elsewhere” in *The Whitsun Weddings*. (New York: Random House, 1964) p. 34. The dating of the poem is from: Philip Larkin. *Collected Poems*. ed. by Anthony Thwaite. (London: Faber, 1988) p. 104.

Naturally, there is a some irony in quoting Larkin in a work such as this, given that he apparently entertained some anti-Semitic notions himself. See: Edward Hirsch. “Philip Larkin, 1922-1985: Sour Majesty”, *The Wilson Quarterly* 17, 3 (Summer 1993) pp. 118-119.

439 It has been estimated that by the nineteenth century, 97% of Russian Jews lived inside the Pale of Settlement, a reality that cannot have escaped the notice of Russian anti-Semites when they considered the region: Zvi Gitelman. “Glasnost, Perestroika and Antisemitism”, *Foreign Affairs* 70, 2 (Spring 1991) p. 142. Naturally, culture within The Pale quickly came under Irish influence. However, attempts have been uncovered by Anglo-Norman Lords to remake their Irish manors in the shape of those they had known in England. See: Margaret Murphy & Kieran O’Conor. “Castles and Deer Parks in Anglo-Norman Ireland”, *Eolas: The Journal of the American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* 1 (2006) pp. 64-66. On “white flight” in Britain, see: Deborah Phillips, Cathy Davis & Peter Ratcliffe. “British Asian Narratives of Urban Space”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, 2 (April 2007) pp. 217-234. The empirical reality of “white flight” in the U.K. has been disputed, although it still exists in the popular consciousness. See: Ludi Simpson & Nissa Finney. “Parallel lives and ghettos in Britain: facts or myths?”, *Geography* 95, 3 (Autumn 2010) pp. 124-131.

## Heterotopias and Homotopias.

Important theoretical clarification for understanding Other spaces was provided by Michel Foucault in his lecture, “Des Espaces Autres”.<sup>440</sup> There, he introduced the notion of heterotopias. These were spaces defined by five principles: 1) that all cultures produce them, 2) that their function was adaptable over time, 3) that they could symbolically incorporate impossible foldings of space – Foucault cited the traditional Persian garden which he described as “sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center”,<sup>441</sup> 4) that they could produce a feeling of being apart in time, or of existing in their own peculiar chronology, 5) that they have a permeable but definite sense of within and without, e.g. prisons, anonymous motel rooms shared by illicit lovers, Finnish saunas, the Spanish galleys of the seventeenth century. In short, heterotopias are weird spaces. They permit unusual, perhaps transgressive, experiences. They are concentrations of diversity so intense that they harmonise mutually exclusive *topoi*. To my knowledge, the only two implementations 141-146 of Foucault's notion in medieval Scandinavian studies have been by Sverrir Jakobsson, and later by Sheryl Werronen. Sverrir explains *Hauksbók* as “a small parcel of the world and the totality of the world, a universalizing heterotopia ... [conveying] a notion of a wider world, a catholic past replete with heroes and events which had resonance even at the most extreme outposts of the known world”.<sup>442</sup> Werronen deploys Foucault's model as a means to understanding the fantastical zones of the late medieval *hygisögur*.<sup>443</sup>

Heterotopias are a productive way to understand space. Considered from one perspective, medieval Iceland itself would be an excellent heterotopian candidate: a country containing glaciers and volcanoes, belonging to strange cultural sphere all of its own, providing chronologies and settings that often feel set aside from the rest of European literature. However, here we are more concerned with another aspect of the Icelandic experience. Not the exotic, but the mundane, domestic, feeling of home; that is to say, the perspective of Iceland as Self rather than Other. Foucault described heterotopias as deriving their power through opposition to another variety of space established in the Middle Ages, “medieval space: the space of emplacement [*espace de localisation*]”. The space of emplacement was a union of “where things had been put because they had been violently displaced” and, probably more importantly, “places where things found their natural ground and stability”.<sup>444</sup> The

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440 Michel Foucault. “Of Other Spaces” trans. by Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, 1 (Spring 1986) pp. 22-27.

441 Ibid. at p. 25.

442 Sverrir Jakobsson. “State formation and pre-modern identities in the North: A synchronic perspective from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century”, *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 124 (2010) p. 79. See also: p. 68, 74-75, 79-80.

443 Sheryl Werronen. “Transforming Popular Romance on the Edge of the World: *Nítíða saga* in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland”, unpublished PhD thesis (The University of Leeds, 2013) esp. pp. 141-146.

444 Foucault 1986. p. 22.

space of emplacement is the realm of everyday life. For a medieval Icelander, the power of emplacement might have been felt trudging along a well-worn path to toil in the fields, or sitting down to enjoy the same-old dish of porridge and herrings for supper. It was a space where medieval Icelanders would have anticipated no unusual happenings. In the space of emplacement, one is untroubled by questions of cosmology, or of what supernatural events may or may not be possible. One feels as though one knows exactly where everything is in our immediate environs, why it is there, and what it may do. Here, we feel secure in our knowledge of the rules of reality. Our surroundings leave us undisturbed by any strong, unusual sensations. We are soothed by their familiarity, and thus they permit us to relax into the mindless rhythm of day-to-day existence.

Building on this delineation, we can introduce the proper opposite of heterotopian space: *homotopia*. Where heterotopias derive their affective potency from promising experiences out of the ordinary, homotopias exercise power by being homogeneous, familiar and safe. They are spaces of emplacement, magnified and concentrated. Unaugmented, Foucault's schema does not account for the fact that sameness has the potential to be a transformative force in its own right. Tremendous leverage can be exerted on the human psyche by calling for the defence of the familiar, the domestic, the status quo, etc. Homotopias are the spacial manifestation of such rhetoric. They have an affinity with spaces of emplacement in their form, that is to say, in the sense that they are “known quantities” where we feel comfortable and assured in our surroundings. However, they are more like heterotopias in their function. Homotopia, unlike the more sedate space of emplacement, makes bold claims from which we cannot avert our attention – that “here” is the safest, most dignified, most pleasant place one can be. They have the ability to affect strongly our feelings, particularly our attitudes towards Others. They may inspire us to remarkable feats of creativity in their homage. Perhaps they may lead us to stay where we are, when we know we ought really to move on. Sometimes they stir us to attack others in their defence. Limitations of space prevent further definition of homotopias here, but in the following chapter we will attempt to “show by doing”. One particular homotopian project will be examined: the establishment of thirteenth to fourteenth century Iceland as a place of security and esteem through its (supposedly) ethnically homogeneous population. This imagining of Iceland was, as shall be seen, at least partly underwritten by the denigration of the ethnically heterogeneous world beyond its borders, wherein tales of distant Jews played no small part.

### **On *Judenreinheit***

The final concept to be defined at the outset is the quality of *Judenreinheit* - “Purity/cleanliness from Jews”. *Judenrein* and *judenfrei* are terms from National Socialist jargon, which were originally used to

describe the Nazi goals in respect to the Jewish populations under their control. A dictionary of National Socialist terminology provides the following definitions: *judenfrei*. *Bezeichnung für die vollzogene Verdrängung der Juden aus Institutionen, Berufen, Wirtschaftszweigen, Wohnstätten usw. Gelegentlich auch: frei von jüdischen Einfluß ... judenrein. Gleichbedeutend mit judenfrei*<sup>445</sup> – “*judenfrei*. Designation for the completed expulsion of the Jews from institutions, professions, industry, homes, etc. Occasionally: free of Jewish influence ... *judenrein*. Synonymous with *judenfrei*”. Robert Michael's authoritative *Nazi-Deutsch* glossary defines the term more generally as: “Free of Jews. Clearing all Jews out of a specific German area or European community, the overriding goal of the 'Final Solution’”.<sup>446</sup> Although obviously freighted with its wartime connotations, the term has been used by medievalists to give a name to a way of thinking that had previously manifested in many periods and places. *Judenreinheit* in all but name was a mental fixture which did not mysteriously appear in 1930s Germany. Jeremy Cohen has argued that the erosion of St. Augustine's injunction to preserve Jewish communities, based on Psalm 59:11 “Slay them not, lest my people forget”, constituted a dangerous paradigm shift. As Europeans began to find expelling their Jewish neighbours more attractive than maintaining them as theological witnesses to the era of the Gospels, Cohen writes that by the sixteenth century “[t]he idea of a Europe *Judenrein* began to take its place in the mentality of Western Christendom”.<sup>447</sup> In this formulation, *Judenreinheit* is the notion that Christendom had been contaminated by Jewish presence, and that its complete removal should be a desideratum.

Other scholars have argued that *Judenreinheit* was feeding the European imagination even earlier. Prior to 1500, Jews were expelled *en masse* from England, and from the Kingdom of Naples in 1290, from certain regions of Germany in 1350, from France in 1394, and notoriously from Spain in 1492.<sup>448</sup> Langmuir explicitly associated all of these purges with a desire to render Christian nations *judenrein*, noting that so long as Augustine's protective dogma remained a spiritual abstraction, “the possibility of extirpation was always open”.<sup>449</sup> The expulsion from England in 1290 has received particular attention in this regard. Sylvia Tomasch and Miriamne Ara Krummel both explore the post-expulsion climate with reference to the term.<sup>450</sup> Although some may be wary of deploying an originally *Nazideutsch* word

445 Cornelia Schmitz-Berning. *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000) pp. 333-334.

446 Robert Michael & Karin Doerr. *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi German. An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich*. (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 226.

447 Jeremy Cohen. “Traditional Prejudice and Religious Reform: The Theological and Historical Foundation of Luther's Anti-Judaism” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*. ed. by Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991) p. 97.

448 On *Judenreinheit* and 1492 in Spain, see: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi “Baer's History, Translated and Revisited” in *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*. ed. by David N. Myers & Alexander Kaye (Lebanon NH: Brandeis University Press, 2013) p. 133.

449 Langmuir 1990. p. 303.

450 Sylvia Tomasch. “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew” in *Chaucer and the Jews. Sources, Contexts and Meanings*. ed. by Sheila Delaney (New York: Routledge, 2002) esp. p. 80. Krummel 2011. pp. 7-14, 65-67

in a medieval context, it is in principle little different from other descriptors coined by modern scholars to describe aspects of medieval thought for which medieval people themselves did not have vocabulary. For example, the Structuralists in Old Norse literary criticism frequently apply terminology from a very particular mid-twentieth century intellectual milieu to their medieval sources, e.g. “liminality”.<sup>451</sup> “*Íslendingasögur*”, “Eddic poetry” or “the Icelandic Commonwealth” are also scholarly terms which had no currency in the medieval vernacular, but which scholars commonly use to excavate medieval experiences. Certainly, Michael's definition of *Judenreinheit*, “Free of Jews. clearing all Jews out of a specific European community”, would seem to be a perfectly accurate description of the goals of English administrators in 1290, and indeed many other expulsion schemes during the Middle Ages.

### Homotopian views of Iceland

A famous scene from *Njáls saga* depicts Gunnarr Hámundarson leaving his farmstead at Hlíðarendi in southwest Iceland. He has become embroiled in a feud with the family of his closest friend, Njáll Þorgeirsson. To save his life, he must go into exile. On the road away from his home, followed by his brother Kolskeggr, his horse stumbles and casts him off into the dirt. This is what happens next:

Honum varð litit upp til hlíðarinnar ok bæjarins at Hlíðarenda ok mælti: “Fögr er hlíðin, svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnzkt, bleikir akrar ok slegin tún, ok mun ek ríða heim aptr ok fara hvergi.” “Ger þú eigi þann óvinafagnað,” segir Kolskeggr, “at þú rjúfir sætt þína, því at þér myndi engi maðr þat ætla. Ok máttú þat hugsa, at svá mun allt fara sem Njáll hefir sagt.” “Hvergi mun ek fara”, segir Gunnarr, “ok svá vilda ek, at þú gerðir”.<sup>452</sup>

He turned to face the hillside and the farm at Hlíðarendi, and said: “The hillside is beautiful, so much so that it has never seemed so beautiful, pale fields and freshly cut hay. I will ride back home and go nowhere”. “Don't do this, playing into the hands of our enemies”, says Kolskeggr, “you'll break the deal you made, and nobody wants that. And think, everything will go just like Njáll said”. “I'm not going anywhere”, Gunnarr says, “and I wish you would do the same”.

Putting questions of *Judenreinheit* aside for a moment (I am not implying that Gunnarr, *extra narratum*, turns to Kolskeggr again and says “plus, not a Jew in sight!”) it is worth considering the feelings this moment inspires. Here, Hlíðarendi's *bær*, the basic unit of social and economic organisation in Iceland,

451 For a thorough summary of the Structuralist influence on readings of mythological material see: John Lindow. “Mythology and Mythography” in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*. ed. by Carol J. Clover & John Lindow. (London: Cornell University Press, 1985) pp. 42-54. For an account of the influence on saga scholarship, see: Carol Clover. “Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*)” in *ibid.* pp. 42-54. Concrete examples of this trend can be found in: *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New approaches to textual analysis and literary criticism*. ed. by John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth & Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 1986) *passim*.

452 *Brennu-Njáls saga*. ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954) pp. 182-183.

is a place of serene beauty. For a rare moment in Old Norse literature, the Icelandic farmstead has ceased to be a mute backdrop for transgressive happenings. We could name any number of examples of the *bar* performing its function as a silent proscenium: the roaming undead at Fróðá in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the incestuous desire of Gísli Súrsson at Sæbol in *Gísli saga Súrssonar*, the sentinel burial of Víga-Hrappr under the doorway at Hrappsstaðir in *Laxdæla saga*. In Gunnarr's brief panegyric to Hlíðarendi, the *bar* and the Icelandic landscape are no longer a passive setting for strangeness, but the object of narrative attention themselves. Gunnarr is mesmerised by the stillness and beauty of the land, so comfortable and inviting that for an instant it has paradoxically become peculiar to him (“*befir hon aldri jafnfögr sýnæke*”). For a moment, Iceland emerges as a homotopia, a compelling force of familiarity and belonging that alters Gunnarr's view. Even though he knows the decision will end in his death, the place convinces him to stay.<sup>453</sup>

The scene from *Njáls saga* is not the only instance in Old Norse literature where Iceland, its geography and landscape, is positively appraised and identified as the site of the Self. This praise and identification is not homotopian thinking in and of itself but it is a prerequisite thereof (we shall examine the further psychological ingredients in a homotopia shortly). In the opening of *Laxdæla saga*, Ketill Flatnefr “Flatnose” has crossed the Norwegian king, Haraldr Hárfagri, and decides he needs to emigrate. He consults with his sons, Björn and Helgi, on where they should go:

Björn ok Helgi vildu til Íslands fara, því at þeir þóttusk þaðan mart fýsiligt fregnt hafa; sögðu þar landskosti góða, ok þurfti ekki fé at kaupa; kölluðu vera hválrétt mikinn ok laxveiðar, en fiskastöð qllum missarum. Ketill svarar: “Í þá veiðistöð kem ek aldregi á gamals aldri.” Sagði Ketill þá sína ætlan, at hann var fúsari vestr um haf; kvazk þar virðask mannlífi gott.<sup>454</sup>

Björn and Helgi wanted to go to Iceland, because it seemed to them that there was a place with many promising qualities. They said there were good lots of land, and you didn't need money to purchase them. They reckoned there were great whale scavenging rights and salmon fishing grounds, and fishing grounds for all seasons. Ketill replies: “To that fishing ground, I will never go in my old age”. Ketill then declared his intention, that he would be more at home west over the sea [to Scotland]. He said there seemed to be a good living there.

453 It has been argued that the power stirring Gunnarr is what Yi-fu Tuan, following John Kirtland Wright termed “geopieté”, a certain nexus of the divine and the human as articulated by the landscape. I prefer a more secular reading here, as this scene betrays no sign of religious inspiration. See: Gillian R. Overing & Marijane Osborn. *Landscape of Desire. Partial Stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) pp. 57-59. See also: Lars Lönnroth. *Njáls saga. A Critical Introduction*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976) pp. 157-158 .

454 *Laxdæla saga. Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar. Stúfs þáttir*. ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934) p. 5.

Ketill's irreverent dismissal of Iceland as a *veidistöð* is self-deprecating humour on the part of the Icelandic author. There is an irony in Ketill's scepticism. His immediate preference for Scotland will not prevent his family heading to Iceland in the long run. Moreover, the decision to take his family to live amongst the Scots has fatal consequences: *Skotar heldi eigi lengi sattuina, því at þeir sviku hann í tryggð ... at hann felli á Katanesi.*<sup>455</sup> - "The Scots did not observe their agreement for long, for they betrayed him [Ketill] in peacetime ... so that he died at Caithness". When his daughter, Unnr in djúpúðga "the Deep Minded", hears the news she prepares a ship and island-hops across the North Atlantic to Iceland, travelling via Orkney and the Faroes. Björn, Helgi, and Iceland itself are vindicated. A medieval Icelandic audience hearing this vignette might well have chuckled and congratulated themselves and their ancestors. They might have conceded that Iceland was indeed somewhat monotonously dependent on "whale scavenging rights and salmon fishing grounds, and fishing grounds for all seasons", but settling there was the best decision their forebears had made. Some, like Ketill, had scoffed at the chance to emigrate. The opening of *Laxdæla saga* smugly but gently reminds the audience that a belly full of fish is better than being slain by treacherous foreigners. Iceland is thus denoted as safe, reliable, and the correct place to be. This quality of correctness or even policing - the judgement that the homotopia is superior to other spaces - is integral to the concept. Indeed, it is striking that when Gunnarr makes his plainly suicidal decision, he turns to his brother, Kolskeggr, and utters the words "*ok svá vilda ek, at þú gerðir*" - "and I wish you would do the same". Is it the fraternal bond alone that gives Gunnarr moral authority to demand Kolskeggr's self-destruction, or is the affective force of the homotopia at play too?

There is some prior theoretical speculation which re-enforces the contention that Icelanders at least occasionally perceived of their country as familiar, safe, perhaps even superior, much like people of any country. Kirsten Hastrup has argued that the *bær*, or more properly the *garðr* "yard, enclosure", served as a microcosm by which Icelanders understood global space.<sup>456</sup> According to this formulation, those *innangarðs* "within the fence" constituted the "self", those *útangarðs* "beyond the fence" embodied the Other. In Hastrup's own words, "this cosmological model [provides] a general model for conceiving of the opposition between the security of the 'familiar' and the danger of the 'foreign' or the 'unknown'". Kevin Wanner, as we have seen, stresses that while Icelanders often located mythic, social and/or ethnic Other on the periphery, they were not "unable to perceive their own marginal status, to recognize that they were themselves situated along a periphery rather than at the center of the known world".<sup>457</sup> He provides a series of examples where the biblical demonisation of the North (e.g. Jeremiah

455 Ibid. at p. 7. On the potentially negative connotations of being *skoðker at kyni* in Old Norse, see: Sverrir 2007. p. 153.

456 Kirsten Hastrup. "Cosmology and Society in Medieval Iceland. A Social Anthropological Perspective on World-view", *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 11 (1981) pp. 65-66.

457 Wanner 2009. p. 50.

1:14 “Then the Lord said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land”) was internalised by Norwegian and Icelandic clerics. Crucially, however, Icelanders could deploy psychological strategies that acknowledged their northern strangeness, but rendered it righteous and proper. One example cited by Wanner of this contrapuntal tendency is particularly germane to our theme.<sup>458</sup> The sermon *De Sancta Cruce* in the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* contains the assertion that:

Sedulius scáld seger svá fra písl hans. Höfviþ iesus horfþe austr en feótr vestr en heógre hönd norþr. en in vistre suþr. Hann vas píndr fyr norþan iorsalaborg. Hæfoþ crisz merker guþdóm hans. en feótr mandóm. þuiat hofþ horfþe til himins en feótr niþr til iarþar. svasem guþdómr com af himne oc tók mandóm a iorþo. Austr merker vprisv hans. en vestr dauþa hans. þuiat sól renr vpp i austre en seze i vestre. Hæfoþ crisz horfþe austr en feótr vester. þuiat mandómr hans tóç dauþa. en guþdómr eflde hann til uppriso. En vinstre hönd hans horfþe suþr. en norþr en heogre. þuiat iorsala lýþr oc gyþingar georþesc vinstre handar men. þat ero recningar fyr ótru sína. en hann valþc epter písl sóma heógre handar men sér af heiþnom monnom ór norþre.<sup>459</sup>

The poet Sedulius says this of His crucifixion: Jesus's head pointed east, and his feet west, and the right hand north, but the left pointed south. He was crucified to the north of Jerusalem. Christ's head denotes His divinity, and His feet His humanity, because His head pointed to heaven and His feet down to the earth, just as divinity came from heaven and put humanity on the earth. The East denotes His resurrection and the west His death, because the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Christ's head pointed east and His feet west, because His humanity received death, but His divinity strengthened Him for resurrection. His left hand pointed south, and the right north, because the people of Jerusalem and the Jews were made people of the left hand [i.e. enemies] – that ostracism is for their faithlessness – but after His crucifixion He chose for His right hand men heathen people from the north.

As an aside, we may note that no such pronouncement can be found in the extant works of either Sedulius Scotus (fl. 840-860) or Coelius Sedulius (fl. 470). Scotus does mention the Scandinavians in his poem *Idem ad Ludewicem Regem*, but his reference is not flattering: *Uos timidi trepidant Germani bellipotentis Nortmannique truces...*<sup>460</sup> “The Germans, the wild and warlike Northmen, are afraid of you [King Louis the German, d. 876]”. But wherever the homilist got this citation, its implication remains the same. Here, the north and its *heiðnir menn* are aligned with righteousness and special divine favour. The Jews are *sudr*, elsewhere both geographically and spiritually. Medieval Icelanders would have heard this

458 Ibid. at pp. 59-60.

459 “De Sancta Cruce” in *Homiliubók*, p. 37.

460 Sedulius Scotus. “Idem ad Ludewicem Regem” in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Poetarum Latinorum Medii Aevi*, vol. 3. ed. by Ludwig Traube (Berlin: Weidmann, 1896) p. 196.

homily (or one like it) preached in their churches of a Sunday.<sup>461</sup> Its exaltation of the north is certainly not at odds with the aforementioned scenes in *Njáls saga* or *Laxdæla saga*. Indeed, reconstructing an audience for *Njáls saga* who were also familiar with this homiletic image allows for an interesting homotopian symphony. Gunnarr Hámundarson, the Ketilssynir, and “Sedulius” all praise the north or northern landscapes and locate there a superior space. From this hypothetical synoptic viewpoint, Iceland is a place of beauty, life-giving resources, and heavenly favour. In the homotopian glorification of “here”, there is necessarily a denigration of “elsewhere”. *Laxdæla saga* juxtaposes the plentiful Icelandic *fiskistöð* with the murderous Scots to the east. In *De Sancta Cruce*, the divinely appointed *heiðnir menn* in the north stand in opposition to the faithless Jews, *vinstri handar menn*, in the south.

Iceland's homotopian credentials extend beyond praise of its native geography and into treatments of ethnic homogeneity. Of course, it is a historical reality, acknowledged by most of the *Íslendingasögur*, that Iceland in the settlement period was an ethnically diverse society. For example, while *Laxdæla saga* affirms the “Iceland-as-Self” position, it also acknowledges the presence in medieval Iceland of a travelling Russian merchant, and Irish slaves, one of whom teaches Gaelic to her Icelandic son. *Kjalnesinga saga* depicts Kjalarnes as a region where people are noticeably in touch with their Irish heritage. The saga opens with a man named Ørlygr, *hann var írsker at allri att*<sup>462</sup> “he was Irish throughout his whole family”, who is (anachronistically) commissioned by St. Patrick to found a church in Iceland. The Icelandic lawcode, *Grágás*, contains the statute that *ef byskopar koma vt higat til landz eða prestar sem eigi eru lærðir a latinu tungu huart sem þeir eru ærmskír eða girzķir ok er monnum rett at hlyða a tíðir þeirra ef vilia*<sup>463</sup> - “if bishops or priests come here to the country who are not learned in the Latin language, whether they are Armenian or Greek, people have the right to attend their services if they wish”, making Iceland the only Western European country during the Middle Ages to sanction non-Catholic observances.

But Old Norse literature is not always frank about this heterogeneity. *Íslendingabók* (1122-1133) written by the priest Ari Þorgilsson (d. 1148) depicts an Iceland made *rein* of all non-Scandinavian heritage. His first task is to write away the *papar*, the Irish monks who were often thought to have preceded the Norwegian settlement in the ninth century:

Í þann tíð vas Ísland viði vaxit á fjalls ok fjöru. Þá váru hér menn kristnir, þeir es Norðmenn kalla papa, en þeir fóru síðan á braut, af því at þeir vildu eigi vesa hér við heiðna menn, ok létu eptir

461 My wording here deliberately echoes: Abram 2011. pp. 219-220.

462 *Kjalnesinga saga* in *Kjalnesinga saga. Jökuls þátrr Búasonar. Víglundar saga. Króka-Refs saga. Þórðar saga Hreðu. Finnboga saga. Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfjfls*. ed. by Jóhannes Halldórsson. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1959) p. 3.

463 *Grágás*. p. 117.

bækr írskar ok bjöllur ok bagla; af því mátti skilja, at þeir vǫru menn írskir.<sup>464</sup>

In those days Iceland was widely forested, from the mountains to the shore. There were Christians here then, those whom Scandinavians call *papar*, but then they went away because they did not want to be here alongside heathens, and they left behind them Irish books and croziers and vestments. From this we may discern that they were Irishmen.

Ari admits that Iceland was not discovered by his own ancestors, but in a couple of sentences dismisses the indigenous population. They quietly and conveniently *fara á braut* “go away”, without any apparent bloodshed or protest.<sup>465</sup> His minimisation of the Irish contribution to Icelandic history permeates *Íslendingabók*. Apart from the spectral *papar*, there is not one non-Scandinavian settler mentioned in his history. In some cases, Norwegian colonists who are recorded as arriving with Celtic slaves in *Landnámabók* appear to turn up alone in *Íslendingabók*, e.g. Ingólfr Arnarson and his thralls, Vífill and Karli.<sup>466</sup> Transient non-Scandinavian churchmen are occasionally admitted, including even three *ermiskir* “Armenian” missionaries, Petrus, Abrahám and Stephánu.<sup>467</sup> But these foreigners are asides to Ari's central narrative, where Iceland is settled entirely by Norwegians. As Grønlie has observed, Ari's own roots were not straightforwardly Norwegian. He was a descendant of the same Unnr (a.k.a Auðr) in djúpúðga we saw in *Laxdæla saga*, so his family would have migrated via Scotland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faroes before arriving in Iceland.<sup>468</sup> Nonetheless, Ari drastically simplifies the Icelandic story to an easy formulation where Norwegian émigrés establish a new land to the west, receiving their new laws and their new faith (Christianity) from the parent nation across the sea. This fiction is particularly arresting in light of the historical reality, both as acknowledged in other medieval Icelandic sources and re-enforced by modern research. The usual caveats about mitochondrial DNA surveys must be borne in mind here, of course, but it should be noted that, according to the most recent genetic studies, just 37.5% of the gene pool would have been Scandinavian in origin.<sup>469</sup>

The chimera of a monocultural Iceland can quite sensibly be reduced to the political expediencies of the age: “The privileging of this particular origin is likely to reflect contemporary power relationships

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464 *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*. vol. 1. ed. by Jakob Benediktsson. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1968) p. 5.

465 I have elsewhere pointed out that the literary treatment of the *papar* has parallels in historic gentile attitudes towards Jews. See: Cole 2016, forthcoming.

466 On the acknowledgement and negotiation of Celtic presence in Iceland, see: William Sayers. “Management of the Celtic Fact in *Landnámabók*”, *Scandinavian Studies* 66, 2 (Spring 1994) pp. 129-153.

467 *Íslendingabók*. p. 18. On the plausibility of the *ermiskir* priests, see: Margaret Cormack. “Irish and Armenian Ecclesiastics in Medieval Iceland” in *West Over Sea. Studies in Scandinavian Sea-Borne Expansion and Settlement before 1300*. ed. by Beverley Ballin Smith *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) pp. 225-233.

468 Grønlie 2006. pp. xxv-xxvi.

469 Agnar Helgason *et al.* “mtDNA and the Islands of the North Atlantic: Estimating the Proportions of Norse and Gaelic Ancestry”, *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 68 (2001) p. 733. Estimates have varied over time, cf. Sayers 1994. p. 129.

and Iceland's dependence on a political relationship with Norway".<sup>470</sup> This is a convincing explanation for why viewpoints like Ari's emerged. However, we can investigate further by asking what kinds of effects or implications the fantasy of homogeneity might have had, intentional or otherwise. The version of history proposed by Ari implies the desirability of Norwegian-Icelandic lineage at the expense of any other ethnic identity. The tendency to denigrate non-Icelanders, or deny their historical existence, continued into the thirteenth century. Indeed, it extended from introspective national histories towards other organs of the Old Norse literary project. The *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur* abound with duplicitous Celts, malevolently magically inclined Finns, and belligerent Islamic *Serkir* and *Blámenn*. In contrast with the more cosmopolitan *Landnámabók*, however, most ethnic Others from these two genres are not to be found in Iceland itself, but in various locations abroad.<sup>471</sup> As Nichole Sterling writes:

The same people that the thirteenth-century Icelanders want to write out of the past could not be completely written out of the bloodlines of the Icelanders. The *Íslendingasögur* manipulate foreign characters to accomplish a reworking of the past that shows the thirteenth-century Icelanders, the descendants of the saga Icelanders, in the best possible light. The thirteenth-century composers of these sagas were conscientious in labeling people who were not Icelandic, but there was a continual struggle to determine why some "others" were allowed in while some were shut out ... the *Íslendingasögur* reflect a growing need to be called Icelandic and to renegotiate what it meant to be Icelandic in the face of change.<sup>472</sup>

Rendering absent people(s) who were historically present is an important strategy in the management of national identity. To abbreviate Sterling's thesis, we decide who we are by deciding who we are not. In the Icelandic case, it is a tactic that seems to have been ultimately successful. By the thirteenth century, Icelanders appear to have entirely relinquished any non-Scandinavian identity. Indeed, the emergence of *Íslendingr* "Icelander" as a viable self-identification has been dated at least as far back as the 1100s.<sup>473</sup> The substantially diverse tenth century population at which *Landnámabók* hints (and which genetic studies have subsequently revealed) is absent or dramatically minimised in many of the *Íslendingasögur*. Jenny Jochens summarises the situation when she writes that: "[t]he adaptability of the original Celts and the corresponding receptivity of the Norse eliminated racial and ethnic tension and produced in Iceland a culture remarkable for its homogeneity, but forged by a population which was

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470 Grønlie 2006. p. xxvi.

471 cf. Cole 2016.

472 Sterling 2008. pp. 3-4.

473 Kirsten Hastrup. "Establishing an ethnicity; the emergence of the 'Icelanders' in the Early Middle Ages" in *Island of Anthropology. Studies in Past and Present Iceland*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1990) esp. pp. 75-79. See also: Sterling 2008. pp. 1-8. Ari Þorgilsson provides the earliest attestation with the opening line *Íslendingabók gerða ek fyrst ...* "I first composed the Book of Icelanders ...".

and has remained more varied than elsewhere in the North ...”.<sup>474</sup> Acknowledging and esteeming this homogeneity was a crucial step in the production of medieval Iceland as a homotopia. After all, the ethnically fractured landscape depicted by *Landnámabók* would have made an unsuitable backdrop for projecting the power of sameness. But if silencing the voices of Iceland's tenth century Celtic slaves was part of the original constitution of Iceland as a homotopia, further literary effort was necessary for its ongoing maintenance.

### *Í nokkuri fjölmennri borg* “In a certain populous city”: Spaces for Jews in Old Norse Literature

Homotopias are, to commandeer Larkin's words, “underwritten by an elsewhere”. They can only be preserved under the threat of chaotic, heterogeneous places in comparison with which the safety of “here” is made apparent. A number of locations provide this supportive contrast in Old Norse literature: Bjarmaland with its *Finnar*, Bláland with its *Blámenn* etc. Naturally, it is the *Gyðingar* upon whom we shall focus here. Jews are of particular import for the study of the Icelandic homotopia because unlike the Celts, the Finns, or even the *Blámenn* they do not appear at any point in Old Norse literature within the borders of Iceland or Norway.<sup>475</sup> As we have seen, according to the *Historia Norvegie* there were once *papar* in Orkney who *Affricani fuerunt iudaismo adherentes*<sup>476</sup> “came from Africa and adhered to Judaism”. As a Latin work, this episode must fall outside the bounds of Old Norse literature. Even so, it is worth noting that the only medieval Scandinavian source to record a Jewish presence inside Scandinavia wastes no time in rendering Orkney *judenrein*. Haraldr Hárfagri is said to have *de diuturnis sedibus exutas ex toto deleuerunt ac insulas sibi subdiderunt* - “deprived them of their long established dwellings and totally eradicated them, and made the islands subject to himself”. The use of the verb *delere* “to abolish, destroy, annihilate”<sup>477</sup> here is worth noting. It was a word frequently used in medieval sources describing systematic attempts to rid a particular area of Jews, e.g. Ekkehard of Aura (d. 1126) and Otto of Freising (fl. 1140s) on the First Crusade massacres in the Rhineland.<sup>478</sup> All that

474 Jochens 1997. p. 322.

475 In *Kjalnesinga saga*, King Haraldr Hárfagri has a captive *blámaðr* at his court of whom the hero Búi remarks “*trölli sýnist mér þat líkara*” - “he seems to me more like a troll [than a man]”. *Kjalnesinga saga* pp. 34-37. Less fantastically, *Hákons saga Hákonarsonar* records that in the year 1241 [þ]á kom til Hákonar konungs sendimaðr Friðreks keisara er Mattheus hét með mǫrgum ágætum gjöfum. Með honum komu útan v. Blámenn - “Then an emissary of Emperor Frederick who was named Mattheus came to King Hákon with many excellent gifts. Five Black Men arrived with him”. *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar etter Stb. 8 fól., AM 325 VIII, 4o og Am 304, 4a.* ed. by Marina Mundt (Oslo: Norsk Historisk Kjeldeskrift-Institut, 1977) p. 136 [my standardisation].

476 *Historia Norvegie* p. 66.

477 Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907) s.v. “*dēlēō*”.

478 On the nuances in Ekkehard's *deletus* of the Jews, see: Kate McGrath. “The 'Zeal of God': The Representation of Anger in the Latin Crusade Accounts of the 1096 Rhineland Massacres” in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: “Slay Them Not”*. ed. by Kristine T. Utterback & Merrall Llewelyn Price (Brill: Leiden, 2013) esp. pp. 39-43. The similarity between Ekkehard's and Otto's representations have been pointed out by: Susanna A. Throop. *Crusading as an Act of Vengeance, 1095-1216*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) p. 67. In the *Flores Historiarum* (early 1300s) the pontifex *Judaeorum* Helias of London in 1234 asks that the English Jews might be allowed to leave the country, “*O domini, videmus quod dominus rex nos delere proponit de sub celo*” - “O Lords, we see how the Lord King means to erase us from under heaven”. From: Matthew of Westminster [pseudo-author]. *Flores Historiarum*. vol. 2. ed. by Henry Richards Luard. (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode,

remains of them are their books containing their curious Jewish script. Thus, whether or not we include the *Historia Norwegie* in our reading, it is clear that if we could ask a medieval Icelander or Norwegian whether his native land were to be considered *judenrein* (or words to that effect) the answer would surely have been affirmative.

While Icelanders and Norwegians never permitted their imaginations to project Jews onto their domestic landscapes, they do appear to have had certain settings which were deemed appropriate for narratives featuring Jewish presence. These backdrops would have been deeply foreign to the medieval Icelandic experience. Firstly, they are universally urban. Jews in Old Norse literature always live in a *borg*, a lexeme which in its sense meaning “city” is never used of any settlement in medieval Iceland or Norway (the word originally refers to a mounded lava formation).<sup>479</sup> Urbanisation did not take place in Iceland at all during the Middle Ages. For many Icelanders the *borg* must have been an almost fantastic setting. Medieval Norwegians, and Icelanders who visited Norway, would probably have known a little more of urban life. Towns such as Niðarós or Tønsberg had been developing steadily since the late tenth century.<sup>480</sup> However, even the more metropolitan Old Norse-speakers would have recognised the relative provinciality of their own urban experience. As seen, no medieval Norwegian town is ever described as a *borg*. The only settlements that were judged large enough for this designator were all further abroad. Constantinople is one such place that earned the aforementioned toponym. It was the largest conurbation in Christendom for much of the Middle Ages. Indeed, along with Rome, it contributed significantly to the archetypal city in the medieval imagination. Old Norse recognises this primacy in its exonym for the city, *Miklagarðr*, which Cleasby and Vigfússon charmingly translate as “the 'Muckle-yard' [or] the Great town”.<sup>481</sup> Logically for a Judaeophobic Icelandic mind, who might well also have been suspicious or at least ignorant of urban landscapes, the world's largest city also possesses the greatest number of Jews. A survey of the cities in which post-Biblical Jews appear in Old Norse literature yields the following results:

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1890) p. 397. To my knowledge, the earliest source to speak of the *deletus* of Jews from a particular area is the apocryphal *Vindicta Salvatoris* (c. 700). There, Emperor Titus prays “*adiuva me, domine, ut possim eos delere et mortem tuam vindicare: tu domine trade eos in manu mea*” - “Help me, O Lord, that I may be able to destroy them [the Jews of Jerusalem] and avenge your death. O Lord, deliver them into my hands”. The Jerusalemites are subsequently besieged, slaughtered and crucified. From: *Evangelia Apocrypha*. ed. by Constantine Von Tischendorf. (Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1876) p. 475. A reference to the events of the *Vindicta Salvatoris* is found in the Old Norse *Origo Crucis*: “Origo Crucis” in *HMS*. vol 1. p. 301.

479 Degnbøl *et al.* 1989- s.v. “borg”, nr. 3.

480 Inge Skovgaard-Petersen. “The Coming of Urban Culture to Northern Europe”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 3 (1978) pp. 1-19, esp. pp. 14-16. A very thorough survey on the topic is provided by: Hans Andersson. “Urbanisation” in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*. vol. 1. ed. by Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) pp. 312-342.

481 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 192.

**Table 2:** Geographical Settings in which Jews appear in the Old Norse corpus.

Norse Name <sup>482</sup>	Modern Name	Country (where given)	No. of occurrences <sup>483</sup>	Citations
Miklagarðr	Byzantium	Girkland (Greece)	8	“Um halld Marie” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 87-92. “Ríkr madr setti líkneski vors herra i pant” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 1064-1067. “Frá enum greypa gyðing” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 132-133. “Item iartegn hręðilig af líkneski varrar frv.” in <i>MaS</i> p. 254. “Einn gyþingr for svivirðvliga með líkneski varrar frv” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 255-256. “Gyðingsvísur” ed. by Katrína Attwood in <i>Poetry on Christian Subjects. Part 2: The Fourteenth Century</i> , ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007) pp. 515-525. <i>Alfræði Íslenzk. Ísländsk Encyklopædisk Litteratur I. Cod. Mbr. Am. 194, 8vo.</i> ed. by Kr. Kálund. (Copenhagen: S.L. Mollers Bogtrykkeri, 1908) p. 26. “Frá Karlamagnúsi” in <i>Íslenzk. Æventyri. Ísländische Legenden Novellen und Märchen.</i> vol. 1. ed. by Hugo Gering (Halle: Verlag Der Buchhandlg Des Waisenhauses, 1882) p. 38.
Libia/ Líbioborg	?	Gyðingaland (Palestine)	2	“Af líkneskiu sællar Marie” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 113-115. “Postolar fengu kirkiu með hialp vorrar frv” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 690-691.
Bericho	? scribal error for “Biritho”, i.e. Beirut? <sup>484</sup>		1	H Recension of <i>Jóns Saga Hólubyskups ens Helga</i> , ed. by Peter Foote (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 2003) pp. 129-130.
Guðstrú	Güstrow	Þýveskaland (Germany)	1	“Af vndarligum atburd i þýveska landi” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 1058-1059
Jórsalaborg	Jerusalem	Gyðingaland (Palestine)	2	<i>Inventio Crucis in Heilagra Manna Sögur, fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder.</i> vol. 1. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877) pp. 302-308. <i>Geiplur I in Rímnasafn. Samling af de ældste islændske rimer.</i> vol. 2. ed. by Finnur Jónsson. (Copenhagen: S. L. Mollers & J. Jørgensens Bogtrykkeri, 1913-1922) p. 363.
Kartágo	Carthage		1	<i>Homiliu-Bók. Ísländska Homilíer efter en Handskrift frá Tolfte Árhundradet</i> , ed. by Theodor Wisén (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerups

482 Norse names of cities and countries are standardised orthographically where plausible, e.g. *Guðstrú* rather than manuscript *Gvðstrn*. No morphological changes have been made from the toponyms in the cited source texts, thus *Eingland* where manuscripts use the *ei* diphthong, *England* where they do not, *þýveskaland* rather than *þýðverzkaland*, *Róma* rather than *Róma* etc.

483 Quantifying the number of occurrences of a particular trope in a medieval literature is an obviously fraught business. Ought we to count individual manuscript attestations or discrete “stories”? If the latter, then how different should one version of a Marian miracle be from another before we regard it as an independent tradition? As any such quantification will be arbitrary, here I have opted to follow the judgment of previous editors over what constitutes a distinct text.

484 The toponym is first found in the Old Norse version of the *Flagellatio Crucis: J Biritho bygdi fioldi Gydinga ok þar attu þeir mikát þingbuss* - “A multitude of Jews lived in Beirut and there they had a large synagogue”. *HMS* vol. 1. p. 308. The identification of Bericho with Biritho is posited by: DuBois 1999. p. 37.

				Förlag, 1872) pp. 206-207.
Lúndunum	London	England (England)	1	“Vor frv hialpadi iuda” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 963-965.
Mirree	Myra	Licia (Lycia)	1	<i>Nikolaus Saga Erkihyskups II in Heilagru Manna Sagur</i> . vol. 2. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877) pp. 133-139.
Norðvík	Norwich	England	1	“Af Lanfranco” in <i>Islandzke Æventyri</i> . vol. 1. p. 305.
París	Paris	Frakkland (France)	1	“Frá Karlamagnúsi” in <i>Islandzke Æventyri</i> . vol. 1. p. 38. [Isaac and Samuel visit as emissaries from Constantinople]
Pisana	Pisa	Lumbardia (Lombardy)	1	“Af klerk er Judar drapu fyrir (þui er) hann söng af vorru frv” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 779-780.
Róm	Rome		1	“Af Boni(facio)” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 694-698.
Tolhús	Toledo	Spánjaland (Spain)	1	“Af líkneski várs herra” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 110-111.
Anonymous city introduced with formula: <i>Í nokkuri fjölmennri borg / í einni borg</i> etc.			6	“Af gyðingsbarni” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 71-72. “Af klerk ok gyðingvm” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 203-207. “Af Teofilio” in <i>MaS</i> p. 1082. “Af Teophilo fogr iarteign” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 1092-1101. “De Theophilio” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 402-411. “Af sýslumanni ok fjánda” in <i>Islandzke Æventyri</i> . vol. 1. pp. 157-160.
Tales not explicitly set in a city.		England, Cyprus	7 (of which 3 are different recensions of the same tale, and a further 2 are annal entries describing the same event)	“Vor frv hialpadi iudakonu” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 980-981. “Af iuda syne A” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 987-988. “Af iuda syne B” in <i>MaS</i> p. 989. “Af iuda syne C” in <i>MaS</i> pp. 989-990. Storm, Gustav. <i>Islandske Annaler indtil 1578</i> . (Christiania: Grøndahl & Sons Bogtrykkeri, 1888) p. 22, 39, 119.

It is immediately obvious from the above table that Old Norse literature strongly connected Jews with urban settings. This is by no means a unique position. The city was often construed as site for articulating the (from a medieval Christian perspective) problematic nature of Jewish presence. Scholars of pre-Expulsion England have identified similar concerns. Geraldine Heng writes that “[Jewish] presence in major cities like London and York, and in Eastern and Southeastern England ... must have been a troubling focus in the social culture that conduced to the rise of the medieval English nation”.<sup>485</sup> From the same premise but reaching a subtly different conclusion, Krummel has theorised that the presence of Jewries in English cities, themselves microcosms of urban life, undermined rather than prompted the ideal of the medieval English *nacioun*.<sup>486</sup> Addressing medieval Europe more generally Chazan imputes to urbanism the fact that “Jews in medieval western Christendom were

485 Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic. Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) p. 84.

486 Krummel 2011. pp. 14-17.

disproportionately in the public eye – both for good and ill’.<sup>487</sup> That is to say, settlement in urban centres rather than rural backwaters contributed to the on-going importance of Jews in the medieval gentile psyche. We should also remember that the association of Jews with urban spaces (and by implication morally correct gentiles with the countryside) was similarly integral to certain twentieth century thought processes that sought to render Europe *judenrein*.<sup>488</sup>

If the Jew, as imagined by medieval Icelanders, was an urban creature, there were also particular types of city settings to which he was more suited. Few of the cities listed above would have been obscure to an Icelandic audience. Jews were known to be present in the three greatest cities in the medieval world, Constantinople, Jerusalem and Rome. The Icelandic manifestation of the William of Norwich legend (or to give him his Norse name, *Vilhjálmr af Norðvík*) would also probably have had particular geographical resonances for an Old Norse-speaking audience. The attempt to establish a cult of William was not an overly successful venture, and the evidence suggests it did not thrive outside of Norwich and its environs.<sup>489</sup> The reference to him in a fifteenth century Icelandic *avintýri* is, to my knowledge, one of only two from the medieval period found outside England.<sup>490</sup> How the Icelandic attestation came about may well be an accident of manuscript transmission. How it might have been received by its Icelandic audience is another matter. Norwich’s role as an important North Sea trading hub would have made the town more than just a vague, impossibly distant place for many Scandinavians. As we have seen, Norwegians were trading and settling in East Anglia throughout the Middle Ages. Some medieval Icelanders may well have even visited Norwich, or at least known people who had. History at least furnishes us with one connection between the neighbouring town of Lynn and Iceland. In 1429 an English merchant there was ordered to return eight Icelandic children whom he had procured on a voyage to their homeland.<sup>491</sup> For an Icelandic narrative to detail Jews in Norwich/Norðvík would have been a way to place Jews in an urban setting that was as proximal as possible to the Icelandic-Norwegian self without having to imagine fictitious Jews inside Scandinavia

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487 Robert Chazan. *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 243.

488 Martin Ulmer. “The Stereotype of the Jewish Modernizer as Illustrated by Anti-Semitic Criticism of the Big City” in *Antisemitismus, Paganismus, Völkische Religion. Anti-Semitism, Paganism, Voelkish Religion*. ed. by Hubert Cancik & Uwe Puschner (Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2004) esp. pp. 34-35. The situation in Eastern Europe is introduced by: Daniel Romanovsky. “The Soviet Person as a Bystander of the Holocaust: the Case of Eastern Europe” in *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*. ed. by David Bankier & Israel Guttman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003) pp. 289-292.

489 Anthony Bale. “Fictions of Judaism in England before 1290” in *The Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary, and Archaeological Perspectives*. ed. by Patricia Skinner (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003) p. 131.

490 The other is an illustration in the German *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). See: Augustus Jessopp & Montague Rhodes James. Introduction to *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* by Thomas of Monmouth. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896) pp. lxxxvii-lxxxviii. The parallel cult of Little Hugh of Lincoln, by comparison, was much more popular. A song descended from the popular medieval ballads of the tale was even recorded in nineteenth century New York. See: Patricia Healy Wasyliv. *Martyrdom, Murder and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe*. (New York: P. Lang, 2008) pp. 124-125. On the dating of the *avintýri*, see: Hugo Gering. Introduction to *Islendzka Æventýri*. vol. 1. pp. viii-xiii.

491 Anna Agnarsdóttir. “Iceland’s ‘English Century’ and East Anglia’s North Sea World” in *East Anglia and its North Sea World in the Middle Ages*. ed. by David Bates & Robert Lilliard. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013) p. 215.

proper.

It is also worth noting that most of the countries in which Jewish settlement is supposed are large states that would have political or cultural significance in the Icelandic mind, e.g. *England*, *Frakkland* and *Dýðverzkuland*. From the time of Bishop Ísleifr Gizurarson (d. 1080), these were places where Icelanders went to study.<sup>492</sup> Moreover, they were settings that would have been familiar, though still somewhat spiced with the feeling of adventure, from the *Íslendingasögur* and *Riddarasögur*. England was where important saga characters such as Egill Skallagrímsson or Kormákr Ógmundarson had gone on viking raids or to serve as mercenaries. France provided the setting for many chivalric tales, particularly the *Strengleikar* (translations of Marie du France's *Lais*) and the influential *Tristams saga ok Ísöndar*. Amongst an ill-defined web of cities in Germany was where Icelanders often identified the geography of the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*. For example, Abbot Níkulás Bergsson in his *Leiðarvísir* (c. 1154) writes: *þa er IIII [sic] daga fjar til Meginzō-borgar, þar i milli er þorp, er Horus heitir, annat heitir Kiliandr, ok þar er Gnitaheidr, er Sigurdr va ath Fabni.*<sup>493</sup> “Then it is four days' journey to Mainz, in between there is a village named Horhausen, another called Killienstädten, and that is where Gnítaheiðr is, where Sigurðr vanquished Fafnir”. *Völsunga saga* or the fantastic *Bragða-Mágus saga* also take place between a sprawling web of metropolitan –*borg* named cities, indistinctly envisioned in an inchoate image of continental Europe, e.g. *Vífilsborg* (Avenches), *Spiransborg* (Speyer), *Vernizuborg* (Worms). Indeed, I have suggested elsewhere that the character of the *Skeljarkarl* “Shell Man” in *Bragða-Mágus saga* may be an allusion to the Wandering Jew tale.<sup>494</sup> Was it obvious to the saga author that Speyer and Worms, prominent centres for Europe's Jews during the Middle Ages, were appropriate settings for such a character; a kind of geospatial punning?<sup>495</sup> The *Skeljarkarl*-Ahasuerus connection is unprovable, of course, so we must limit ourselves to speculation on this particular detail.

In some scenes, such as the *Jew of London* legend, there is nothing apparently deleterious about Jewish presence in a particularly city. However, it is more normal for Jews to act as a villainous foil to the Christian townsfolk. Consider, for example, the Old Norse version of the *Toledo Miracle*:

Þat er sagt, at í Toleta, er Norðmenn kalla Tolhus – sú borg stendr á Spanialandi, ok byggva þriðjung borgarinnar kristnir menn, annan þriðjung gyðingar, enn þriðia heiðnir menn ... Þá var heyrð rödd upp í loptit, er erkibyskup söng lágasöng í messu, sú er á þessa lund mælti með grátsamligu yfirbragði: „Hó, hó, ofharmr, ofharmr þat, er gyðingar með mikilli slægð ok illzku

492 Peter Foote. “Aachen, Lund, Hólar” in *Aurvandilstá. Norse Studies*. ed. by Michael Barnes *et al.* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1984) esp. pp. 104-120.

493 *Alfræði Íslenszk.* vol. 1. p. 13.

494 Richard Cole. “When Did The Wandering Jew Head North?”, *Scandinavian Studies* (2015a, forthcoming)

495 On the importance of Speyer and Worms, see: Chazan 2006. pp. 171-190, 279.

skulu búa svá nær guðs hiörðu ok þessum sauðum, er merktir eru hiálparmerki ens heilaga kross, því at nú vilja gyðingar spotta ok hæða ok krossfesta í öðru sinni son minn." En þetta varð til mikils ótta ok áhyggju kristnu fólki. Ok eptir messu þá leitaði erkibyskup við lýðinn, hvat til ráðs skyldi taka, ok urðu á þat allir sáttir, at fara skyldi til húsa gyðinga ok herbergia, ok rannsaka sem vandligaz, hvat þar væri títt. Ok fóru þeir fyrst til halla þeira, er byskup gyðinga átti, ok rannsökuðu þar. Ok þá er erkibyskup kom í þinghús þeira, þá fannz þar líkneskia gör af vaxi í líking lifanda mannz. Hon var börð ok hrækt, ok þar vóru menn margir af fólki gyðinga ok féllu á kné fyrir líkneskiuna, sumir gáfu henni kinnhesta. Þar stóð ok kross hiá, ok höfðu gyðingar þar ætlat at negla líkneski þetta þar á krossinn til spotz ok svívirðingar við dróttin várn Jesum Krist ok alla þá er á hann trúðu. En er kristnir menn sá þetta, þá brutu þeir þetta líkneski, en drápu alla gyðinga, þá er þar vóru við staddir. En fyrir þenna lut ok alla aðra, þá sem en sæla María dróttning gerir sér til lofs ok dyrðar en oss til fagnaðar, þá eigum vér dróttni várum ok hans móður lof fyrir at gera, þeim er lifir ok ríkir um allar alldir allða.<sup>496</sup>

It is said that in Toledo, which Scandinavians call Tolhús (this city is in Spain and a third of the town's population are Christians, the second third Jews, the third heathens) ... a voice was heard in the sky ... which thus spoke with a piteous tone: "Ha! Ha! An affliction, what an affliction, that Jews with such cunning and evil should live so near to God's flock and these sheep which are marked with the protecting symbol of the Holy Cross, because now the Jews wish to scorn and mock and crucify my son for a second time". This prompted much fear and concern amongst the Christians. And after the mass the Archbishop consulted with the common people what course should be taken, and everyone agreed to go to the houses and shacks of the Jews as search them as carefully as possible for whatever might be going on. First they went to the hall which the rabbi [*byskup gyðinga*] owned and searched there. And when the archbishop came to their synagogue there was found a statue made of wax, in the likeness of a living man. It was battered and spit-drenched, and there were many people of the Jewish race falling on their knees before the statue, some slapped it on the cheek. Also, there stood a cross nearby, and the Jews had intended to nail that statue to the cross for the mockery and insult of Our Lord Jesus Christ and all who believed in Him. And when the Christians saw this, then they destroyed that statue and killed all the Jews who were present. Now, because of this event and all the others which the Blessed Queen Mary does for her honour and glory, and our joy, we have to give praise to Our Lord and His mother, who live and rule forever and ever.

There are a number of resonances here that are germane to a discussion regarding the meaning of place. Most immediately, Toledo is shown to have an Old Norse name, despite being situated over 1800 miles from Iceland, and in a country with which Icelanders had virtually no relations. Whether *Tolhús* is

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496 "Af líkneski várs herra" in *MaS* pp. 110-111.

an original Icelandic coinage or a word carried over from Norway is hard to say. Historically, Norwegians appear to have had more direct contact with Spain, either crusading there in the early twelfth-century or raiding during the Viking Age.<sup>497</sup> However, whether these brief periods of interaction necessitated the coining of a more comfortable Scandinavian form is doubtful. The prospect that the word should then survive into Old Icelandic is even more so. Rather, it seems more plausible that Toledo was being discussed with sufficient frequency that a Norse form emerged precisely because of texts such as the one where it is attested above. As seen, many *bæklingar* “booklings, little books” circulated in Iceland relaying miracle stories, long before they were compiled into legendaries such as AM 667 III 4to from the fourteenth century onwards. Tales such as the one above may well have been commonplace. If Toledo became a familiar backdrop for the alleged misdeeds of Jews, it follows that it would have acquired a more familiar-sounding name.

The second point is the general atmosphere of Toledo. It is *a borg [sem] stendr á Spanialandi, ok byggva þriðjung borgarinnar kristnir menn, annan þriðjung gyðingar, enn þriðia heiðnir menn* - “city [which] is in Spain, and a third of the town's population are Christians, the second third Jews, the third heathens [i.e. Muslims]”. *Tolhús* is obviously urban, being a *borg*. There is a hint that the Jews live in a more dilapidated area than the other citizens. They live in *hús ok herbergia* - “houses and lodgings”. This is a stock phrase that is only preserved otherwise twice in the corpus, but belongs to the kind of alliterative tautologies which were commonly favoured in Old Norse prose.<sup>498</sup> It was used by Snorri to describe Troy: *Nar miðri veröldinni var gört þat hús ok herbergi er ágætast hefir verit, er kallat var Troja ... Þessi staðr var myklu meirr gorr en aðrir ...*<sup>499</sup> - “Near the centre of the world those houses and lodgings [lit. 'house and lodging'] which are the most excellent there have ever been, which was called Troy ... this city was made much greater than others”. The second attestation is from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* as preserved in *Flateyjarbók* (c. 1394). There the young Óláfr is raiding an unidentified Wendish city, said to be *fiolmenna ok miog sterka*<sup>500</sup> - “populous and very strong” when the defenders come rushing *med aluefni or husum ok herbergjum ok eggjudu at eingi konungs manna skyllde med fiorui vndan koma*<sup>501</sup> - “out of the houses and lodgings fully armed, and they ranted that none of the king's men would escape with their lives”. While it is clear that the expression *hús ok herbergi* pertained to especially *fiolmennr* - “populous” cities, we should also consider its literal meaning. A *herbergi* was, according to Cleasby & Vigfússon, “a harbour

497 Compiled sources on the Viking incursions into Iberia can be found in: Jón Stefánsson. “The Vikings in Spain. From Arabic (Moorish) and Spanish Sources”, *Saga-Book* 6 (1909) pp. 31-46. For the original account of King Sigurðr Jórslafari (r. 1103-1130) in Spain, see: Snorri Sturluson. *Magnússona saga in Heimskringla*. vol. 3. ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954) pp. 239-254. Comment on this episode is provided by: Gary B. Doxey. “Norwegian Crusaders and the Balearic Islands”, *Scandinavian Studies* 68, 2 (Spring 1996) pp. 139-160.

498 Cleasby & Vigfússon, 1874. p. 257.

499 *Gylfaginning*, p. 4.

500 *Flateyjarbók. En Samling af Norske Konge-Sagaer*. vol. 1. ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon & C.R. Unger (Christiania: P.T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1860) p. 93.

501 Ibid.

(prop. 'host-shelter') ... an inn ... in mod. usage, room”.<sup>502</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that in general a *herbergi* was of lesser stature than a *hús*. The latter has connotations of permanence and long term dwelling. The former might be anything from a chamber to a temporary shelter.

The alliterative phrase rather encourages the mind's eye to imagine a cityscape of irregular homes, some tall and some squat, some fine *hús* and others smaller *herbergi*. The visualisations this phrase evoked would have heightened the alterity of the setting. No jagged city skyline was to be seen anywhere in Iceland. We should also bear in mind that the *Toledo Miracle* is not the only source where Jews are said to live in *herbergi*. The Byzantine Jewish moneylender in the Old Norse version of the *Jew lends to Christian* miracle also dwells in such an abode, as does the Jewish magician of the *Theophilus* legend.<sup>503</sup> Jews are said to live in *herbergi* in the anonymous *fjólmenri borg* of the *Erubescat* miracle.<sup>504</sup> A host-desecration legend set in Güstrow speaks of the *herbergis gyðinganna* - “lodgings of the Jews”.<sup>505</sup> For many Icelanders, a city itself would have been strange enough to imagine, but the idea of the impermanent, diminutive *herbergi* wherein the Jews dwelt would have added a new layer of Otherness and menace.

Tolhús is also strikingly multicultural. There are not only Jews but Muslims in the city. Indeed, Christians are said to be a minority in the town – a state of affairs which would have been unthinkable in northern Europe by the time this miracle ended up in Iceland. There could not be a better backdrop before which to articulate concerns regarding two deeply foreign concepts to the Icelandic experience: urbanism and Jews. The language deployed by the Old Norse translator prevents an image of a space ostensibly within Christendom, *Spánjaland*, but whose landscape is uncannily alienating. The rabbi is the *byskup gyðinga* “bishop of the Jews”. This is clearly a vernacular rendering of the Latin *episcopus Judaeorum*, a common Christian designation for a rabbi or *Kohen*.<sup>506</sup> In the German and Anglo-Norman context in which this term first emerged its value must have been chiefly explanatory. Living alongside Jews it would have been easy to see the similarities between the role of an *episcopus* to his flock and those of a learned Jew to his own community. Hearing this term at a distance, and scrubbed of its connotations by translation, the reaction must have been quite different. Tolhús was already an alien area of Christendom, urban and heterogeneous in contrast to Iceland's universal rurality and monoculturalism. To add to its strangeness, the *gyðingar* there are said to have a *byskup*. Words such as *prestr* “priest” or *godi* “pagan priest” communicated a broad sense of pastoral function. Using one of these terms, i.e. *\*prestr gyðinga* would simply convey the idea of a priestly class within the Jewish (*ótrú*.

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502 Cleasby & Vigfússon, 1874. p. 257.

503 “Um halld Marie” in *MaS* pp. 87-92. “De Theophilo” in *ibid.* at p. 409. “Af Teophilo fogr iarteign” in *ibid.* at pp. 1092-1094.

504 “Af klerk ok gyðingvm” in *ibid.* at pp. 203-207.

505 “Af vndarligum atburd i þyveska landi” in *ibid.* at pp. 1058-1059.

506 Isaac Levitats. “Episcopus Judaeorum” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. vol. 6. p. 463.

*Byskup*, on the other hand, was a word that was intrinsic to the organisational hierarchy of the Christian church. How could the stateless, leaderless Jews have ecclesiastical structures which paralleled those of Christendom? A medieval Icelandic audience may well have interpreted this term as a baffling expression of Otherness: a contradiction-in-terms which signified the inscrutable alterity of Jewish life. Alternatively, some may have read the title as a blasphemous parody of Christian life on the part of the Toledan Jews. The trope of Jews persistently mocking Christendom was a frequent fixture in anti-Jewish thought. Indeed, it will be remembered in an Old Norse context from our earlier discussions of the possible folk etymology in *Pétrs saga Postola*, where *gyðingr* is conflated with *guðniðingr*, “apostate, lit. One who commits *nið* against God”.

A further atmospheric resonance added to the Toledo miracle in its translation into Icelandic is the use of the word *þinghús* meaning “synagogue”. *Þinghús* is a compound of two elements, *hús* being “house” and *þing*, which Cleasby & Vigfússon define as “an assembly, meeting, a general term for any public meeting, esp. for purposes of legislation, a parliament, including courts of law”.<sup>507</sup> Exactly how *þinghús* became the common translation for *Synagoga* is not clear. It is certainly not an ad hoc coinage. Its first attestation is in AM 677 4to, a Gregorian homiletic compilation dated 1200-1225. The term is then used consistently and almost exclusively to refer to synagogues over the following three centuries.<sup>508</sup> Interestingly, *þinghús* is closer in meaning to one of the Mishnaic Hebrew words for the Jewish temple than the Greek συναγωγή and its Latin derivative, *Synagoga*. The original Greek simply means “a bringing together” or an assembly.<sup>509</sup> The Mishnaic Hebrew בֵּית־הַכְּנֶסֶת *Beit Ha-kneset* means “house of [the] assembly”, precisely the same as the Old Norse.<sup>510</sup> It is tempting to attribute this striking similarity to the Norwegian students who passed through centres of Hebraist learning. The only other explanation, other than sheer co-incidence, might be that *þinghús* is a calque for *domus ecclesiae*. However, the latter term could be applied to synagogues only very rarely, and then only during the Apostolic Age where the line between Christianity and Judaism was not clearly demarcated.<sup>511</sup>

Regardless of the potential Hebrew origins of the Toledan *þinghús*, the term must have been freighted with peculiarly Scandinavian connotations. The *þing* was an assembly which resolved legal disputes and passed legislation. Cleasby & Vigfússon list over thirty regional *þing* which are attested in Old Norse

507 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 736.

508 Degnbol 1989-. s.v. 'þinghús'.

509 Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon. revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940) s.v. 'συναγωγή'

510 Chayim Yehoshua Kasovsky. *Thesaurus Mishnae. Concordantiae verborum quae in ex Mishnae ordinibus reperiuntur*. vol. 1. (Jerusalem: Massadah Publishing Co. Ltd, 1956) pp. 366-367. The term has since become the standard appellation for a synagogue in Modern Hebrew: בית כנסת

511 Lee I. Levine. *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) pp. 185-186. See also: L. Michael White. “Architecture: the first five centuries” in *The Early Christian World*. vol. 2. ed. by Philip F. Esler. (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 17.

literature, all of them from Scandinavia and most of them from Iceland in particular.<sup>512</sup> By giving the Jews of Tolhús a *byskup* and a *þing*, the translator of the *Toledo Miracle* creates a troublingly uncanny narrative space. The city has a Norse name, and the Jews appear to have social structures broadly reminiscent of those with which Icelanders would have been familiar (the *Alþingi* was still meeting in its capacity as a court long after it lost its legislative powers in 1262).<sup>513</sup> In shifting the cityscape closer to the safe familiarity of Icelandic life, its most hazardous site of difference is brought into sharp relief: the Jews. Dylan Trigg provides a summary of how uncanny spaces such as these counteract the mollifying power of the mundane:

The uncanny refuses to concede to stillness, and instead presents us with something genuinely novel: *an augmented familiarity*, thus (un)familiar to the core (*unheimlich*). Close enough to be recognized as broadly familiar, the world of the uncanny nevertheless subtly manipulates that familiar screen, thus engineering a shiver down the spine of anyone caught in its rays.<sup>514</sup>

The space which Trigg describes as being violated by the uncanny is essentially the space of emplacement. Homotopias are invulnerable to such intrusions because they have no “stillness” to be interrupted. Because homotopias are anything but “still” they can appropriate the disturbing power of the *unheimlich* to enhance their own emotive impact. The sameness of homotopian space is all the more alluring when it contrasts with other, more heterogeneous places. As seen, Gunnarr Hámundarson himself did not rejoice in the *Judenreinheit* of the sloping hills surrounding Hlíðarendi. However, it is quite thinkable that a fourteenth century audience for *Njáls saga* felt the affective potency of the scene to be enhanced when they contrasted landscapes such as Gunnarr's Hlíðarendi with what they had heard of far away places such as Tolhús. We will return to the theoretical clarification of the medieval Icelandic homotopia later, but now we must continue our survey of the spaces which Jews inhabited in Old Norse literature.

A further example of Jews in distant metropolises which ought to be mentioned comes from the text *De Spinea Corona* (c. 1275).<sup>515</sup> Although written in Latin rather than Old Norse, and of Norwegian rather than specifically Icelandic provenance, its interest in locating and describing a distant, eastern Jewry warrants its inclusion here, as does its possible affinity with the Icelandic *Jóns saga Hólabyskups*, to which we shall return at the conclusion of this thesis. Being composed in thirteenth century Niðarós, it came

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512 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 736.

513 Jesse Byock. “Alþingi” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia*. p. 11.

514 Dylan Trigg. *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2012) p. 27.

515 Lars Boje Mortensen. “De Spinea Corona”, *Medieval Nordic Literature in Latin*. ed. by Stephan Borgehammar *et al.* (2012) Available at: [https://wikihost.uib.no/medieval/index.php/De\\_spinea\\_corona](https://wikihost.uib.no/medieval/index.php/De_spinea_corona). Last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

would have come from a milieu in which Icelanders, both clerical and mercantile, frequently moved.<sup>516</sup> *De Spinea Corona* relates how the Norwegian Archbishop of Niðarós, Jón Rauði (r. 1267 - 1282), was given a thorn from Christ's crown by the French King Philip III (r. 1270 – 1285). Here, support is argued for the translation of the relic to the Church of The Apostles to be commemorated annually on November 9<sup>th</sup>:

Cum autem requisitum fuisset pro signando in kalendario translationis hujus diem, compertum est, quod ipso die habetur memoria illius praeclari miraculi, quod non longe ab Antiochisa apud civitatem Beryttum contigit de iconia, in qua dominicae passionis opprobria per Iudaeos renovata sunt, ut ex chronicis haberi potest anno domini septingentesimo quinquagesimo ... Et quia miraculum istud a multis ecclesiis, etiam Romae in ecclesia sancti salvatoris recolitur: Christo enim odibiles Iudaei (quorum multitudo copiosa in Berytto fuit propter studium legis Mosaicae, quod ibi vigebat) quandam iconiam passionis dominicae in domo quadam vicina scholis eorum a quodam christiano neglectam invenerunt; quam primo pedibus in detestatione crucifixi conculcantes et cuncta in ea dominicae passionis opprobria itaverunt ... Cumque ventum esset secundum ordinem opprobriorum Christi, ut latus lancea perforarent, confestim ex latere sanguis et aqua ubertim profluxit et suppositam per eos ampullam implevit, quae Romae in ecclesia sancti salvatoris a Iudaeis conversis ad fidem per istud miraculum cum isto sanguine tradita hodierna die conservatur, et solemne festum in memoria dominicae passionis ac in hujus miraculi veneratione quinto Idus Novembris agitur.<sup>517</sup>

Furthermore, what also argues for the designation of the translation on the calendar on this day, is that it is known that on this day is the commemoration of a famed and splendid miracle, which happened not far from Antioch in the city of [Beryttum], concerning an icon on which the Passion of The Lord through the taunting of the Jews was renewed, and which according to the chronicles [The *Golden Legend*]<sup>518</sup> can be said to have occurred in the 750<sup>th</sup> year of Our Lord ... And that miracle is revisited in many churches, also in Rome in the church of The Holy Saviour:<sup>519</sup> Christ is indeed hateful to the Jews (of whom a copious multitude were in Beirut for the study of the Mosaic law, which thrives in that place). There was a particular icon of the Passion of The Lord in a certain house in the vicinity of their school, which they found after it was lost by a Christian; In hatred of the crucifix they trampled it with eager feet and all walked upon the Passion of the Lord with taunting ... Ever they went in a

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516 Jón Rauði appears several times in *Árna saga biskups*, for example. Some detail on his rather tumultuous career is provided by: Magnús Stefánsson. "Church Organization and Function" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. pp. 89-92.

517 *De Spinea Corona* in *Monumenta Historica Norvegia. Latinske Kildeskrifter til Norges Historie i Middelalderen*. ed. by Gustav Storm. (Kristiania: A. W. Brøgger, 1880) p. 162. I am grateful to Joel Anderson for bringing this text to my attention.

518 Suggested by Gustav Storm. Notes to *De Spinea Corona*. p. 162.

519 Possibly originally intended to refer to the Lateran Basilica, although whether the late thirteenth century Norwegian author had a specific location in mind is open to debate. For comment on Icelandic knowledge of Rome, see: Tommaso Marani. "*Leiðarvísir*. Its genre and sources, with particular reference to the Description of Rome", unpublished PhD thesis (University of Durham, 2012). Cf. Joyce Hill. "From Rome to Jerusalem: An Icelandic itinerary of the mid-twelfth century.", *The Harvard Theological Review* 76, 2 (1983) pp. 175-203. The now lost *Flos Peregrinationis* by Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206) may have provided invaluable information in this regard. On the Icelandic map tradition, which of course often features Rome but about which has very little descriptive content in contrast to Jerusalem, see: Dale Kedwards. "Cartography and Culture in Medieval Iceland", unpublished PhD thesis (University of York, 2014).

second organisation of the mockeries of Christ, thus when they pierced it with a lance, immediately out of the flank blood and water flowed out abundantly and filled out a vessel they had placed below, which in Rome in the church of The Holy Saviour is conserved to this very day, as the Jews had converted to the faith owing to this aforementioned miracle, and a ceremonial feast in commemoration of the Passion of The Lord and the veneration of this miracle takes place on the 9<sup>th</sup> November.

The notion that Beirut has “a copious multitude” of Jews, gathered together for “the study of the Mosaic law, which thrives in that place” is unusual amongst the other medieval descriptions of urban Jewish communities hitherto presented, because it explains *why* there is a Jewish presence in the city. The detail that the Beirut Jews should have established their community not out of happenstance but in order to pursue a uniquely Jewish pastime, i.e. the *studium legis Mosaicae*, underlines a sense of imminent reality here. It is as though the narrative voice is attempting to stress to his audience that Jews are not merely allegorical stooges, making two-dimensional cameos in formulaic *miracula*, but that they are a real people with a real presence in the wider world. They have their own lives in which they make their own plans for their own reasons. Of course, *De Spinea Corona's* Jews are still allegorical stooges. The plausibility which they are given via having a reason to be in Beirut is that not of being real, rounded, human characters, but of being a real threat: an example of the sort of foreign hazard that lies far beyond the borders of the author's native land.

A tale with noticeable affinities with both the *Toledo Miracle* and *De Spinea Corona* is an Old Norse translation of a miracle concerning the alleged host desecration in Güstrow in 1330, and the subsequent foundation of the Kapelle des heiligen Bluts. The theme of host desecration is fascinating, but it has been well treated elsewhere and is not our purpose here.<sup>520</sup> More relevant is not so much what happens, but where:

I þeim stad i þyveska landi, er Gvdstru heitir, vard einn vndarligr atburðr vpp æ sialfan þæscadaghinn. Þa er prestr saung messv ok kristnir menn skyldi taka gvds likama, þa geck til altaris ein kuinna vndir þeiri æsynd, at hun vilde bergia corpus domini sem adrir menn. Enn sia hin vonda kona hafdi ædr iatat gydingvm nockurum, þeim er þar vorv i stadnum, ok þegit peninga til, at færa þeim þat sama braud, sem prestrinn offradi hinum kristnvm monnum, enn bergia eigi. Hun vesul gerir sua, at hun gengr til altariss takandi corpus domini, eigi bergiandi heldr uandliga i sinum munni geymandi, ok geingr heim til herbergis gydinganna, þeim brædit af hendi fæandi, sem hun iatadi.

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520 On the classic theory that host desecration allegations were a subconscious response to doubt over the doctrine of transfiguration, see: Langmuir 1993. pp. 300-301. For an intriguing gendered reading, see: Rubin 1999. pp. 73-77. Berulfsen briefly discusses this Old Norse translation and supports the dubious (to my mind) theory that the “bleeding host” was an illusion caused by the mold of the bacterium *Micrococcus Prodigius*: Berulfsen 1952. pp. 129-130. For treatment of the theme of Real Presence in an Old Norse context, see: Cole 2016.

Enn sem þeir hinu vondu hundar hafa með tekit, þá setiá þeir niðr í kranz hafandi meðal sín einn bordskutil leggiandi þessa oblatam niðr á bordit, ok gera sua fordæmdan glæp, at þeir stanga ok þiacka oblatuna, sumir með knifun, sumir með sverðum, enn svmir með spiotum, þar æ it beinasta ofan í, sem þeir sia, at Jesus er myndadr á krossinum. Her verðr frabær atb(u)rdr, þuiat hvar sem þeir stinga í oblatuna, þá sprettr heitr blodbogi upp í mot. Ok sem þeir hinir vmildu gydingar lita þesse stormerki, verða þeir akafliga hræddir ok ottafullir, skammaz nu miok sins illvirkis ok vilia sem skiotaz hylia með nockutu moti þetta sitt niðingsverk, sua at þeir gydinglig vtru verd eigi opinber. Þui fara þeir til ok grafua þessa oblætuum langt í iord niðr ok ausa á moldu, rekandi ofan yfir þá hinu grænu torfu, er fyrst stvngu þeir upp, ok ganga fra sidan. Enn at lidnum vel tveim manudvm þadan ifra, þá sa menn um nætr geisla standa alt upp til himins, ok þar ofan yfir eina fagra stiorno. Foru menn sidan til ok grofu í iord niðr, þar til er þeir fundu eitt hardla vænt propicatorivm, í hueriv sia hinn same guds likame var í geymdr með því blodi, er or stvngunum hafði runnit. Allir þeir menn, er vidr voru edr heyrdu, lofudu almættigan gud. Var sidan yfir þá sámu grof reist kirkia með stein. Geraz þar margar iarteinir gudi til lofs (ok) dyrdar. Er í þessa minning haldinn enn dyri dagr á vorit, at guds likami fanz. Allzualldanda gudi drotni Jesu Kristo Mario syne se lof ok dyrd, þeim er lifir ok rikir einn gud í þrenningu ok þrennr í einingu per omnia secula seculorum.<sup>521</sup>

In that city in Germany, which is called Guðstrú [Güstrow], a wonderful event took place on Easter itself. When the priest recited the mass and the Christians were taking the body of God, a woman went to the altar under the pretence that she would taste the body of God like other people. But this evil woman had previously agreed with some Jews who were there in the city, and accepted money for it, to bring them that same bread which the priest offered to the Christians, but not to taste it. The wretched one does as so: she goes to the alter, taking the body of God, but not tasting it. Rather, she evilly hides it in her mouth and goes home to the shacks of the Jews. They get the bread from her, as she agreed. And when those evil dogs had received it, they sit down in a circle around a little table, laying the host down on it, and do this condemnable deed: they stab and prick the host, some with knives, some with swords and even some with spears – always right precisely where they can see that Christ on the cross has been drawn. Now a wonderful event occurs, because wherever they stab into the host, then hot gushes of blood shoot out. And when these horrible Jews see this great sign they become terribly scared and afraid, and now they very much regret their evil deed and they want to hide their insulting behaviour as soon as possible, so that their Jewish faithlessness does not become apparent. Thus they go and bury this host deep in the ground and cover it with earth, placing green turf on top of that which they had stabbed, and then they departed. And more than two months went by until one night people saw a beam shooting up into the sky, and atop of it a beautiful star, Then people went and dug down into the ground until

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521 “Af vndarligum atburð í þyveska landi” in *MaS*. pp. 1058-1059.

they found a very handsome mercy seat in which the very same body of God was preserved together with the blood which had run out with all those stabs. All those who were there or heard about it praised Almighty God. A church of stone was then erected on that same turf. Many miracles happen there for the praise and glory of God. It is still held in memory, that precious day in Spring, when the body of God was found. The omnipotent God, Lord Jesus Christ, son of Mary, be praised and glorified, He who lives and rules as one God in three and three in one for ever and ever.

Again, there is a nativisation of the city's name. This time, however, the exonym is imbued with an extra layer of meaning beyond uncanny familiarisation. *Guðstrý*, which is interpreted in standardised Old Norse orthography as *Guðstrú*, literally means “the faith of God”, an ironic appellation given the blasphemous host desecration or *níðingsverk* “insulting behaviour” which subsequently unfolds there. Again, the Jews apparently dwell in more squalid conditions than their Christian fellow citizens. These are *herbergi*, not *hús*. The alterity of *Guðstrú*'s urban setting is further highlighted by the emphasis that the Kapellen des heiligen Bluts is a “church of stone”. Stone churches were not built in Iceland until 1763, when the cathedral at Hólar was rebuilt.<sup>522</sup> For medieval Icelanders, the Güstrow cityscape in which this miracle took place must have been imagined as compellingly metropolitan, and therefore alien. Despite this alterity, as observed earlier, settings like Tolhús and *Guðstrú* are brought uncannily close to the Icelandic experience by their intelligible Old Norse names. Thus, did they perhaps offer a glimpse into an alternate reality, one where Iceland *did* have bustling cities and, logically enough for an Icelandic mind which, as we have seen, strongly connected Jews with cities, therefore also had a troublesome Jewish population? At the very least, these tales raise the possibility of Jewish presence in towns with plausibly Icelandic names. There is a thin line between rejoicing that a place (in this case an Icelandic Jewry) does not yet exist, and dreading the possibility that it one day might.

It is not unreasonable to think that Icelanders looked abroad to specific foreign towns, feeling a sense of dread that their supposedly bustling, shabby, ethnically diverse streets present a strongly undesirable model for what one day might become of domestic, Icelandic settlements. We should note that such a psychological fixture is not unique in Scandinavian history. It is hard not to remember the mass murderer Anders Breivik's concerns over Luton, an English town which he had never visited. Its supposedly dirty, hazardous, multi-cultural streets provided a terrifying (for him) counterpoint to the idealised, chimeral homotopian Norway he imagined himself to be defending when he killed 77 and wounded 319 on the island of Utøya and in Oslo in 2011. He recoiled against Luton's supposed “warlike conditions” with “more than 1,000 Islamic no-go zones where police do not dare pass

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522 Gils Guðmundsson. *Gestur; íslenskur fróðleikur gamall og nýr*. vol. 3. (Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1986) p. 181.

through”.<sup>523</sup> Psychologically, Breivik's Luton serves a similar purpose to the Old Norse *Guðstrúi* and *Tolbús*. These narratives establish foreign, threatening, perhaps impending spaces, which assure the mind of the desirable qualities of the native homotopia. This thesis is not the venue in which to expand upon this parallel further, but it is illustrative to posit that “spaces for Muslims” in modern Scandinavia fulfill a roughly cognate function as “spaces for Jews” did in the Scandinavian Middle Ages.

The settings listed previously convey a Jewish presence in all the major non-Scandinavian polities with which medieval Icelanders and Norwegians engaged (plus a few more with which they did not). However, Jews in Old Norse literature are not confined to these specific localities. If Jews are concentrated in particular urban settings, they also appear to saturate all spaces in Old Norse literature outside of Scandinavia. That is to say, some works do not name cities but instead stress the globality of the Diaspora. Twice we find the description of Jews living *um allan heim* – “all over the world”. One Old Norse version of the *Origo Crucis*, also known by the vernacular name *Kross saga*, contains an episode where the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. is prefigured in the following terms:<sup>524</sup>

... enn síðan ritaði hon [Sheba] epter til hans [Solomon], at a þvi tre, er við mustarit liggr ok til bitans var ætlat, man sa maðr vera hengdr a, er allir Gyðingar munu af hans dauða hefndir taka ok at niðrfalli verða, ok allt þeira riki. Síþan lét Salomon taka þetta tre ok sokkva með blyi i eitt stórt fén, þat er hann ætlaði, at all dri skyldi upp koma síðan. Enn þat birtiz i pislartið vars drottins Jesu Kristi, ok kom upp, ok þvi toku Gyðingar þat ok gerðu þar af krossinn ok pindu þar a allzvalldanda guð. Enn eigi morgum vetrum eptir pisl drottins ok uppris, þa vann Titus Iorsalaborg, sun Vespasiani keisara, ok selldi alla Gyðinga, þa er eigi voru drepnir, i þrældom ok annauð, .xxx. firir einn penning, ok urðu síðan sundrskila ok fóru um allan heim ok fengu hvarki valld ne riki síðan, ok sannaðiz sua spasaga drottningar.<sup>525</sup>

... And then she [Sheba] wrote back to him [Solomon] that on that wood, which lay by the temple and was intended to be used for beams, a man would be hung, and for his death all Jews would have revenge taken upon them, and it would be their downfall and that of their whole kingdom. Then Solomon had that tree taken, weighted with lead, and sunk in a huge marsh. Thus he intended it should never come up again. However, it appeared at the time of the crucifixion of Our Lord

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523 Quoted in: Caroline Davies. “How true are Breivik's claims?”, *The Guardian*. 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/17/breivik-claims-basis>. Last accessed 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Luton seems to have considerably exercised Breivik's imagination, as is made even clearer from the manifesto he circulated shortly before the attack on Utøya. However, I have chosen not to cite his text directly so as not to lend it any trace of intellectual credibility. For thoughts on Breivik's use of the Middle Ages, see: Daniel Wollenberg. “Defending the West: Cultural Racism and Pan-Europeanism on the Far-Right”, *Postmedieval* 5, 3 (2014) pp. 308-319.

524 An overview of the various Old Norse *Origo Crucis* traditions is provide by: Kirsten Wolf. *The Legends of the Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Prose* (University of Toronto Press, 2013) pp. 79-75.

525 “Origo Crucis” in *HMS*. vol 1. p. 301.

Jesus Christ, and it rose up, and then the Jews took it and made the cross out of it, and there crucified upon it Almighty God. But not many years after the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord, Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, conquered Jerusalem, and sold all the Jews who had not been killed into slavery and bondage, thirty for one penny, and then they were exiled and went all over the world, and never again attained power or a kingdom, and thus the prophecy of the queen came true.

Unlike the Jews of Old English-cum-Anglo-Latin literature, the canon with which Old Norse is most frequently compared and brought into dialogue, the Old Norse *gyðingar* have a life beyond Biblical typology.<sup>526</sup> They exist also as a trope from the contemporary Middle Ages; characters who could be brought into a narrative set in the then-present without any perception of unnatural anachronism (a claim that, as has been observed, cannot be made of the neighbouring dialects, Old Danish and Old Swedish).<sup>527</sup> A basic interest in the location of contemporary medieval Jews is self-evident from their foreign urban settings which were previously enumerated. In this scene from the *Origo Crucis*, however, we can observe an extra level of detail: an attempt to explain not only *where* the Jews are, but *how* they came to be there. Jews are depicted in their state of statelessness and Diaspora. The contemporary dispersal of the Jews across the globe is also alluded to in the Old Norse *Elucidarius*. There we find the following concerning the prophesied coming of the Anti-Christ: *Anti christus man berast i babylon hinní miclu or kjni dan fra port kono ... Hann man endr nya hina fornu iorsala borg. þat er iherusalem. oc lata sic þar gofga sem guð. Við honum monu gyðingar taka fegensamlega. oc koma til hans or ollum beími.*<sup>528</sup> – “The Anti-Christ will be born in Greater Babylon to a woman of easy virtue from the tribe of Dan ... He will rebuild the ancient Jórsalaborg, that is to say, Jerusalem, and have himself worshipped there as God. The Jews will receive him eagerly, and they will come to him from all over the world.”

The claim that the Jews can be found *um allan heim* is not a straightforward one to put to an Icelandic audience. Medieval Icelanders needed only to have examined their surroundings to know that this was not entirely true. The familiar basalt outcrops dotting the Icelandic landscape which they knew as *borgir* clearly had little to do with the *-borgir* of imported miracle tales, wherein the world’s Jews appeared to reside. The obvious way to negotiate this utterance is to understand it as a figure of speech rather than a universally true pronouncement. A medieval Icelander could in one sense agree that the Jews were indeed “all over the world”, that is to say, the wider world beyond Iceland’s borders. As we have seen,

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526 There is one minor exception in Bede’s *Homiliae*, where he refers to the Jews *sicut et hodie sunt*. See: Scheil 2004. p. 32.

527 To quote: *I de danske tekster fra middelalderen er billedet af jøderne stort set fastfrosset som de onde nytestamentlige jøder, der plagede og mydede Jesus ... Det er som om samtidsjøder ikke rigtig interesserede danskerne.* – “In Danish texts from the Middle Ages the image of the Jews is largely frozen as the evil New Testament Jews who tortured and murdered Jesus ... It is as though contemporary Jews did not really interest the Danes”. Adams 2012. p. 91.

528 *Elucidarius*. p. 84.

Old Norse literature portrays Jews in Constantinople, London, Paris, Spain, Rome, Jerusalem etc. The proposition that the Jews were everywhere would have been plausible for an audience in medieval Iceland, so long as one crucial qualification was borne in mind: “everywhere *but here*”.

### **Iceland as a *judenrein* Homotopia**

The notion of *Judenreinheit* is generally approached as corrective rather than normative by its advocates. The Nazi project was more concerned with eradicating the Jews under its control than it was in keeping the Jews away from regions where their number was already very low, e.g. Thuringia.<sup>529</sup> The expulsions from England in 1290 and Spain in 1492 were similarly construed as the cleansing of landscapes that had been supposedly afflicted by Jewish contamination. *Judenreinheit* in all three cases was a near-fabled state to which administrators wished to restore their territories. The strategy of containing, limiting, or preventing Jewish presence was surely considered desirable, and often automatically a consequence of the exile or murder of Jews, but it was not the central point of the exercise nor its inspiration. Put another way, *Judenreinheit* has normally been formulated as an offensive more than a defensive strategy.

However, *Judenreinheit*, like any other discriminatory way of thinking about space, does not intrinsically prefer annihilation over exclusion, even if most of its historical materialisations have responded to their circumstances by doing so. The “White Australia” policy of the twentieth century, for example, has been succinctly characterised as a spatial manifestation of “the white man under siege” mentality.<sup>530</sup> Like *Judenreinheit*, that was a prejudiced way of thinking that had a different object, i.e. non-Whites rather than Jews, and it was normative, not corrective. Nonetheless the core ideological architecture was the same: that a given territory had to be (kept) pure/*rein* of a given undesirable group. Indeed, there is nothing in the two definitions of *Judenreinheit* cited earlier that makes it an inherently transitive travail. Its sole structural necessity is the desire for territories entirely without Jews. Whether this be achieved - if it even requires any effort to be achieved - through bloodshed, expulsion, immigration restrictions or pure accident is immaterial to the nature of the concept.

Previously a thought experiment was sketched out where an archetypal medieval Icelander was asked if their country ought to be considered *judenrein*, and it was assumed that the result of this hugely hypothetical happening was a “yes”. The next stage in this line of interrogation is to consider just what variety of *Judenreinheit* medieval Iceland would have possessed. It is clear that Iceland's *judenrein* aspect

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529 In 1932, Jews constituted just 0.2% of the population in Thuringia, although the obscurity of the Thuringian Jews did not allow them to escape the attention of local anti-Semites. By 1945 the community numbered just 227. See: Henry Wasserman & Larissa Daemmig. “Thuringia” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. vol. 19. ed. by Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007) pp. 710-712.

530 Marilyn Lake. “The White Man under Siege: New Histories of Race in the Nineteenth Century and the Advent of White Australia”, *History Workshop Journal* 58 (Autumn 2004) pp. 41-62.

would have been very different to that of contemporary England or Spain, or indeed later Nazi Germany. Neither in reality nor narrative was Iceland ever purged of Jewish presence. Was Geoffrey Chaucer's England, a country that had ejected its Jewish population over fifty years before he was born, more *judenrein* than contemporary Iceland, a country that had never had any Jews in the first place? Iceland's *Judenreinheit* was a pristine state, while in England it was a quality that had to be aggressively restored.

The bustling European cities wherein maleficent Jews resided in their shabby *herbergi* were a stark contrast to Iceland's rural – if not wild – landscape, by the thirteenth century home to an overwhelmingly ethnically and religiously homogeneous people. At other places and moments of Nordic history, there are sparse examples of medieval Scandinavians projecting virtual Jews onto domestic landscapes. As we have seen, the Norwegian author of the *Historia Norwegie* dared to imagine Jews in Orkney. Much later, in the plague-stricken summer of 1350, the Hanseatic administrators of the city of Visby fantasised over a Jewish poisoning plot by a certain Moyses and Aaron to attack both Gotland and Sweden (although the chimerical Jews themselves were supposed to be operating from abroad).<sup>531</sup> There is a strange parallelism between these two theatres, both islands separated from the Scandinavian mainland, both contested spaces against an ethnic Other for much of the Middle Ages, where Norwegian interests clashed with Scottish in Orkney and Swedish against Hanseatic German in Gotland, not to mention the role of nativist Orcadian and Gutnish parties respectively. In these distant, troubled zones on the periphery of Scandinavia proper, the medieval Scandinavian mind might have seen the value of compromising the *Judenreinheit* of the North in order to engage metaphorically with complicated notions of difference. In Icelandic sources, on the other hand, we find no such concession.

On first consideration, this may seem like something of a missed opportunity on the part of medieval Icelandic authors. For much of the Middle Ages, Iceland was certainly a “contested space”, albeit owing to rather different conditions than those in Orkney and Gotland. From the settlement period until the union with Norway in 1262, Icelanders were embroiled in vicious interfamilial feuds. In the second half of the thirteenth century, Norwegian influence in Iceland became an increasingly divisive political issue. After the union in 1262, Bishop Árni Þorláksson (d. 1298) vigorously pursued the

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531 On this bizarre case, see: Trachtenburg 1966. p. 104. Ole J. Benedictow. *The Black Death. 1346-1353. The Complete History*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004) p. 178. Hans Aili. Notes for “En giftmördares bekännelser” in *Röster från svensk medeltid*. ed. by Hans Aili et al. (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1990) esp. p. 19. Dick Harrison. *Stora döden: den värsta katastrof som drabbat Europa*. (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2000) pp. 507-508. Corinne Péneau. “Les venins imaginaires”, *Cahiers de recherches médiévales* 17 (2009) pp. 71-102. Stephen Mitchell. “The Mythologized Past: Memory in Medieval and Early Modern Gotland” in *Minni and Muninn. Memory in Medieval Nordic Culture*. ed. by Pernille Herrmann et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014) pp. 168-169.

*staðamál* “Issue of the Estates”, a period which eventually resulted in the mass appropriation by the Church of land historically belonging to the secular elite. There was no shortage of characters and issues to whom the typology of Jew-hatred could have been applied. Perhaps medieval Icelanders did sometimes in heated moments accuse their opponents of *gyðingligr* behaviour. If so this was probably a rhetorical strategy that was limited to oral malediction. There is very limited evidence of this strategy in the West Norse sphere. We have already seen the Judas motif deployed in the skaldic verse concerning Jarl Sigvaldi. A letter from Shetland in 1299 records one Ragnhildr Símunardóttir saying in anger to one Þorvaldr Þórisson, “*þu skallt ecki vera minn Iudas. þot þu ser bertogans*” - “You will not be my Judas, even though you are the duke's”.<sup>532</sup> I have been able to find only one example of anti-Jewish simile being deployed against Icelanders in Old Icelandic literature. In *Árna saga biskups* (c. 1298 – 1350) undecided laymen who have refused to support the church in the *staðamál* are described as:

... þeir sem heima sátu eðr hjá þess háttar framferðum stóðu, heldr ok þar með þeir sem sjálfir tóku fyrir grimmðar sakir kirkjurnar, ok gjarnan vildu hafa þagat ok heima setit á þá leið sem Júðum fór með fagnaðar processione á pálmadegi móti várum herra, - þorðu eigi at verja líf hans á píslardegi hans ... Ok svá sem Júðar þessir sömu fögnuðu litlu síðar Krists upprisu, fögnuðu ok margir hverir af hinum hjartarótum skamms bragðs leiðréttu lærdómsins.<sup>533</sup>

... those who sat at home or stuck with such conduct rather than taking upon themselves the unpleasant matters of the church, and who would most liked to have sat at home and kept quiet in just the same way as the Jews took part in joyful processions on Palm Sunday to meet Our Lord but they did not dare to defend his life on the day of his crucifixion ... And just as these same Jews celebrated Christ's uprising a little later, they also celebrated a little later with each of their heartstrings the righteous guidance of his Wisdom..

It is always possible that further written sources which featured Jews as ciphers for native issues have not survived, of course. On the other hand, depictions of conflict and social unrest are by no means scarce in Old Norse literature. That only one 'Jew-in-Iceland' slur is found therein is more suggestive of a lack of inclination theretoward.

When the author of the *Historia Norvegie* came up with his African Jewish *papar*, Orkney was a remote place to him. If he had ever visited the islands for himself, he certainly did not call them home. At least

532 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 1. pp. 81-82. For more on this case, and a post-medieval example from Norway in 1552, see: Berulfsen 1958. p. 127, 132.

533 *Árna saga biskups* in *Biskupa sögur*. vol. 3. ed. by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998) p. 117. Henceforth cited as *ÁBp*.

some of the Hanseatic councillors in Visby in 1350 probably *did* call their city 'home', but they did not imagine that there were actually crypto-Jews amongst them, rather that Moyses and Aaron had hired gentile agents. It is tempting to wonder whether the propensity for partakers of Jew-hatred to postulate Jewish presence in their domestic landscapes is at all affected by something analogous to the old aphorism, that one should not “shit where one eats”. Can the anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic mind ever feel content in his home if he feels that it has been contaminated by Jewish presence? After 1290, the expulsion of actual Jews from England does not seem to have led to any kind of forgetting about Jews or relinquishment of traditional attitudes towards them. Actors still dressed as Jewish caricatures, complete with fake noses and ginger wigs, for dramas such as those of *The York Cycle*.<sup>534</sup> Early fourteenth century records concerning land-holdings do not ignore but sometimes relate in quite some detail the Jews who once held properties before the expulsion.<sup>535</sup> Perhaps this is because a territory that had once held Jewish presence and from whence it had subsequently removed was thereafter eternally somehow just a little sullied. England's present *Judenrein* status still had to be defended. To quote Tomasch: “[i]n the *Prioress's Tale*, a polluted Asia, polluted through Jewish presence and actions – is implicitly contrasted with a purified England, whose sanitized state is founded on the displacement of the Jews”.<sup>536</sup> However, it was also considered appropriate to represent the now vanished Jewish presence on English soil in the aforementioned forms of bureaucracy or drama. That Jews had once been 'here' was a fact that could never be undone. Thus their ongoing “re-membering”, to borrow Krummel's term, was not taboo. Regardless of what medieval authors wrote, England after 1290 was as *Judenrein* as it was ever going to be again.

In Iceland, this was not the case. Virginity of any metaphorical strain is a state that can never be restored, and so often elicits strong feelings that it ought to be somehow defended. Icelanders who were exposed to the tales previously enumerated could have been in little doubt that the virgin *Judenreinheit* of their own country was a benefit. Many bad things could happen to a medieval Icelander at home. He might expect to be burned alive in his house by a feuding neighbour, outlawed and forced to live as a *vargr* “wolf” on the fringes of society, or to be notoriously accused of sodomy, perhaps via the medium of a publicly viewable effigy such as the famous case from *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*.<sup>537</sup> One thing that he did not ever have to worry about, at least, was running into one of the crazed, malevolent Jews of whom he would have heard at church. For all of Iceland's many perils, this was one area in which a medieval Icelander might well have felt he had it a little better than his fellow Christians abroad. It is in this sense that “here” is underwritten by a malevolent “elsewhere”. *Judenreinheit* could

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534 Cigman 1991. pp. 8-9.

535 Krummel 2011. pp. 9-12

536 Tomasch 2002. p. 73.

537 For example, see: Finlay 2001. pp. 21-44.

conveniently excuse any social failings which might undermine the glow of Iceland as a homotopia: “Well, the *stórbændr* may rule over us as an oligarchic elite, but at least there's one threat we will always be safe from, unlike our poor fellow Christians in Miklagarðr and Tolhús...”. In this regard, medieval Icelandic attitudes towards Jews call to mind the model postulated by Jean-Paul Sartre. Describing anti-Semitism as “a poor man's snobbery”, Sartre famously suggested that denigrating Jews allowed anti-Semites to (ir)rationalise whatever might displease them in their lives, and to feel more securely connected to “[their] country and [their] soil”.<sup>538</sup>

The nourishment provided to the medieval Icelandic homotopia by its *Judenreinheit* can be further illuminated by comparison with contemporaneous England, which as we have seen is the most frequently treated case-study in medieval *Judenreinheit*. A fourteenth century Englishman who imagined his homeland as a homotopia could happily take its small residual Jewishness into account. Krummel describes the case of one William Burnell, provost of Wells (d. 1307) who was granted a house in Oxford once occupied by Jews. The charter bestowing this property includes a lengthy record of its erstwhile Jewish owners: “William Burnell ... is nearly forgotten in his utter family-lessness that follows the recitation of the Jewish names, their sexed bodies ... their intricate family details ... William Burnell lives among Jewish ghosts, who perform as the wives, daughters, and sons that he is missing”.<sup>539</sup> We will never know how “at home” Burnell felt in his new abode, but the feeling of extinguished Jewish presence there would not necessarily have precluded his ability to do so. The expulsion of Jews had become a part of England's history, its new-found *Judenreinheit* a defining characteristic of what it meant to be English. If at times Burnell or anyone in his position felt their newly acquired houses to be homotopias, the memory of “Moses son of Jacob de Lond[onia]” need not have been an obstacle. Moreover, fondly remembering the extinguishing of Jewish presence may well have heightened the powerful sensation of sameness and familiarity which are so characteristic of the homotopian experience.

By the same token, a medieval Icelandic homotopia could never been viable in the face of putative Jewish presence. Jews were not a part of Icelandic history, and had never inhabited the landscape. Medieval Icelanders did have a group that corresponded to the Jews of the post-1290 English imagination, but it was the *papar*. After driving them out, the Norwegian settlers set about examining their artefacts, their “books and croziers and vestments”, and naming landscape features after them.<sup>540</sup>

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538 Jean-Paul Sartre. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. trans. by George Becker. (New York: Schocken Books, 1948) esp. pp. 24-32.

539 Krummel 2011. pp. 11-12.

540 While Icelanders soon identified *papa*- placenames with the *papar*, this may well not have been an authentic etymology. See: Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson. “Perfectly Mamillary!: On Breasts, Nipples and Teats in West Norse Toponymy” in *Norræn nöfn – Nöfn á Nordurlöndum. Hefðir og endurnýjun*. ed. by Guðrún Kvaran *et al.* (Uppsala: Norna-Förlaget, 2008) pp. 297-307. See also by the same author: “Þá váru hér menn kristnir ...” in *38 Vöplur Bakaðar og Bornar fram Guðrúnu*

If Gunnarr Hámundarson ever thought of the Irish monks who might once have traversed Hlíðarendi, they apparently did not disturb his homotopian conception of the farm as a powerfully affective idyl. Indeed, perhaps like Burnell amongst his ghostly Jews, the evicted *papar* only re-enforced the “Icelandicness” of Gunnarr’s beloved farmstead. But the Jews could never perform the same function for Icelanders as they did for Englishmen like Burnell. Imagining that there had once been Jews in Iceland could not have been preferable to the firm knowledge that there had never been Jewish footsteps on domestic soil, a fact so obvious it did not require saying (no Icelandic source ever explicitly states “there are no Jews here” but this was a fact which any Icelander remotely acquainted with his own country would clearly have known). The money-swindling, host-desecrating, Marian icon-stealing, Christ-killing anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic archetype who emerges through Marian miracles does not seem like somebody whose presence in Iceland would have been especially desired. Knowing that he was not “here” in Iceland and never had been surely encouraged warmer feelings than any literary engineering of the trope “there were once Jews in Iceland” ever could have done.

The sense of security that Jewish absence gave Icelanders may explain why there are no Jewish characters in the *Íslendingasögur* or *Fornaldarsögur*. It perhaps also explains why no imaginative saga author ever depicted Icelanders meeting Jews outside of Iceland, for example at the court in Byzantium where the tales of Varangians were set. To do so would still have been to admit a degree of contamination by the Jewish menace abroad. If Þorsteinn Drómundr in *Spésar þáttr* were to meet a Jew in Byzantium and return to the north, that meant the possibility of second-hand contact with Jews. Indeed, if Þorsteinn Drómundr could make the journey all the way from Byzantium, who was to say that the dastardly Jews couldn't either? The explanation that Icelanders simply were not particularly interested in Jews seems unlikely. The medieval mind seldom perceived the Jew as an inconsequential figure. There are at least 58 appearances of Jews in Old Norse literature, in genres as diverse as skaldic verse, miracle legends, homilies, hagiographies, annal entries, *fabulae*, and more.<sup>541</sup> This tally is not including the extensive treatment of Jewish history by Brandr Jónsson in his *Gyðinga saga*, of which we shall hear more later. Tellingly, later chivalric romances, the *Riddarasögur*, *Lygisögur*, and *Ævintýri*, did imagine Jews, but strictly in narratives which did not involve Iceland and where the prospect of Icelandic-Jewish contact was therefore impossible. E.g. one variant of *Ívens saga* (1200s, although later recensions) has a maiden say of the hero that “*Ekki þurfi þér þat at bræðast, þvíat hann [Íven] er sá hinn vaskasti at öllum blutum er kom ur*

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*Ingólfsdóttur*. ed. by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson *et al.* (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 2009) pp. 70-73. On the remembering of the *papar*, see: Cole 2016.

541 This kind of statistical summary is inherently problematic. These numbers assume that each *miraculum* and each homily would have been received as separate works, rather than as merely contingent parts of the compilations in which they are now preserved. A limited lexicographical survey is also available in: Degnbøl *et al.* 1989-. s.v. 'ebreiskr', 'gyðingr', 'júði'.

*Beniamíns att*<sup>542</sup> - “You do not need to be afraid, because he [Íven] is the manliest in all ways who ever came out of the tribe of Benjamin”. This is perhaps a garbled reference to Genesis 49:27: “Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil”. Despite its intentions, it does somewhat imply that Íven is of Jewish descent. *Mírmanns saga* (1300s) features the bizarre detail that King Clovis (r. 509 – 511) was a Jew: *Hlòduir kongr var vitr hófðingi ok agætr. Hann hafði Gyðinga tru. Elskadi Gud enn for ekci [sic] blott sem Sexar e(da) Spanveriar vestr ok giordiz nu hnignandi madr*<sup>543</sup> - “King Clovis was a wise and excellent ruler. He observed the faith of the Jews. He loved God and did not offer pagan sacrifices like the Saxons or Spaniards to the west, although now he was in his dotage”. In the *avintýri*, we have already seen the Jewish sage from *Af sjáslumanni ok fjánda* (1400s). To him can be added the Byzantine ambassadors to Charlemagne, Isaac and David, from *Frá Karlamagnúsi* (1400s).<sup>544</sup> A *ríma*, more specifically a *geipla*, from the fifteenth century features a natively composed encounter between Charlemagne and an anonymous Jew in Jerusalem. Here, the Jew is the first

Gyðingur nokkur gekk þar nær  
 og gjörði alla að líta,  
 rekkinn varð sá raunmjög ær,  
 hann réð sín klæðinn slíta<sup>545</sup>

A certain Jew came near there  
 and he made everybody stare,  
 that gentlemen became so utterly crazed  
 that all his clothes he rent.

Although the text of *Ambales saga*, alias *Amlóða saga*, is post-Reformation, it certainly contains older medieval elements, some of which may be common sources with Saxo Grammaticus's account of Hamlet.<sup>546</sup> There it is written that *30. kappá, þeirra hinn mesti hét Atrianus, hann var Gíðingakyns, og stóðst*

542 Another variant reads *at einginn slíkr var feddr fyrr úr Cáins att* - “that no such a one was before born out of the tribe of Cain”. This seems to be an Icelandic innovation. One Old French original reads: *Qui onques fust del ling Abel* - “”. A Middle English Yvain tale reads “That ever come of Adams kynde”. See: *Riddarasögur. Parcevals saga. Valvers Þátr. Ívents saga. Mírmans saga*. ed. by Eugen Kölbing (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1872) p. 96. The most recent edition disregards the manuscripts containing this tradition.

543 *Mírmanns Saga*. ed. by Desmond Slay. (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1997) p. 8.

544 “Frá Karlamagnúsi”, *Íslendzke Eventýri*. vol. 1. p. 38.

545 *Rímmasafn. Samling af de ældste islandske rimer*. vol. 2. ed. by Finnur Jónsson. (Copenhagen: S. L. Møllers & J. Jørgensens Bogtrykkeri, 1913-1922) p. 363. The adjective *ær* is feminine in the edited text, which must be an error.

546 Hilda Ellis Davidson. Commentary to *The History of the Danes*. by Saxo Grammaticus. trans. by Peter Fisher (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) p. 67. Dated but still valuable comment can also be found in: F. York Powell “Appendix II. Saxo's Hamlet” in *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*. by Saxo Grammaticus. trans. by Elton Oliver (London: David Nutt, 1894) pp. 403-405.

*eingin firir honum, og þókti hann ósigrandi*<sup>547</sup> - “of thirty champions, the greatest was called Atríanus. He was of the Jewish race, and nobody could withstand him, and he seemed invincible”. Whether the romantic Atríanus entered the orally circulating Hamlet cycle already during the Middle Ages is impossible to say, but by no means unthinkable. It is not the case that Icelanders only ever passively experienced Jewish figures in foreign translated material. They actively recreated them in indigenously imagined literature, but only in firmly exogenous contexts.

The absence of Jews from the great literary monuments of the Old Norse canon, particularly the classic *Íslendingasögur*, takes on further significance when that canon is approached holistically. That is to say, when we allow for a readership who knew *Njáls saga*, *Grettis saga* etc. and the homilies and miracle tales. As suggested earlier, the misfortunes which might befall a character in the *Íslendingasögur* are manifold. They might end up fighting King Haraldr Hárfagri's *blámaðr* or being peppered by a uniped's arrows in Vínland. Nonetheless, one thing that the saga imagination could never stretch itself to conceive is for a character to fall victim to the kind of Jewish perfidy we have previously seen from the *miracula*. Once the notion of a Jewish menace – and more importantly the idea that this very menace can be eliminated, i.e. *Judenreinheit* – has been introduced into a given discursive milieu, it is impossible to avoid engagement. A double bind arises. If an author discusses the Jews directly (i.e. he introduces Jewish characters in his work, or includes dialogue concerning Jews) he obviously engages with the question of how desirable Jewish presence/absence might be. If he does not include any reference to Jews, he contributes to a depiction of Jewish absence, or to borrow a term from Alon Confino “a world without Jews”.<sup>548</sup> The expression of anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish voices precipitates a sad permeation of the canon in which they operate. There is no escape from this immanence. Even ignoring the Jews entirely is tantamount to envisaging a *judenrein* world (of course, no author can be reproached for this; the discursive trap is unavoidable, and explicitly engaging with the Jewish topos in every literary expression would itself be a ludicrous concession to Jew-hatred).

Returning to the context to which a student of *Judenreinheit* must so often make recourse, we should note that of the 1,097 feature-length films produced in Nazi Germany, only one sixth were so-called *Tendenzfilme*, i.e. official party propaganda.<sup>549</sup> Most of the German cinema released between 1933 and

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547 *Hamlet in Iceland*. ed. by Israel Gollancz (London: David Nutt, 1891) p. 154.

548 Confino's book is closely focussed on the Nazi period, although its observations on the imagination of *Judenreinheit* may yet yield insights in other contexts. His discussion of the German *Heimat* ideal has close similarities with the notion of homotopia. See: Alon Confino. *A World without Jews. The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) esp. pp. 64 – 74.

549 Numbers here are taken from: James Chapman. *Cinemas of the World: Film and Society from 1895 to the Present*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) pp. 218-219. The original study is by: David Welch. *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933-1945*. (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1983) pp. 266-267. My survey of the Nazi-era *Unterhaltungsfilme* is not complete, but as far as I can see they are on the whole considerably less preoccupied with Jews than the *Tendenzfilme*.

1945 consisted of *Unterhaltungsfilme*. These were pieces that were intended as entertainment, or perhaps even sometimes as art. In many cases, their creators did not consciously intend them to advance particular polemic positions, although of course quite a few did so merely by engaging with popular culture.<sup>550</sup> Nonetheless, in the Third Reich, surely the most horrifyingly anti-Semitic polity to date, the majority of cinema had nothing to do with Jews at all. This does not at all diminish the regime's anti-Semitism. Audiences who went to see films such as *Die Blume von Hawaii* (1933), *Frauen sind doch bessere Diplomaten* (1941), *Die schwarze Robe* (1944) enjoyed presentations that did not feature a single anti-Semitic utterance. The absence of Jews from these ostensibly harmless *Unterhaltungsfilme* nonetheless cannot be insulated from what we know of the wider contemporary imagination. Enjoyable stories without Jews were inevitably projections of a compelling *Judenrein* reality. The fact that not a single Jewish character appears on screen during *Frauen sind doch bessere Diplomaten*, a musical about a wily dancer who successfully mediates between Hannoverian troops and the Frankfurter National Assembly, means that none of the threats of the anti-Semitic imagination can be present either, deceitful Jewish usurers, lecherous Jewish men, etc. That is to say, the most genteel *Unterhaltungsfilme* tacitly endorsed the idea that Jewish presence had negative consequences, and that Jewish absence was therefore desirable.

In the same way, the majority of sagas do not exhibit anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic sentiments. There are around 50 texts in Old Norse which do so. The *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* reckons the corpus to contain 436 individual works, although unlike the approach used here, the editors there do not consider each homily and *miraculum* separately. This means that, very roughly speaking, about an eighth of Old Norse literature (which we might compare with the aforementioned sixth of Nazi films) constitutes a Judaeophobic voice in the canon. Despite its minority, the presence of this voice is still sufficient to colour any holistic consideration of the Old Norse canon. *Njáls saga*, *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga* etc. are all beautiful works of literature. The absence of Jews from their narrated landscapes is obviously realistic, and most certainly not an anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish expression on behalf of their respective authors. However, we must remember that nowhere is Barthes's pronouncement of The Author's death more true than in the case of the Jew-hating mind.<sup>551</sup> That is to say, authorial intent becomes irrelevant in the face of Judaeophobic paranoia. It is reasonable to contend that medieval Icelanders who internalised the anti-Jewish fables about towns such as Guðstrú, Tolhús, Miklagarðr etc. responded to works such as *Njáls saga* in a way very much similar to 1940s Germans who had internalised the anti-Semitic attitudes of their own time when they consumed media such as *Frauen sind doch bessere Diplomaten*. The threat of the Jew, the desirability of his absence, the reliability of the native homotopia on a *Judenrein* landscape:

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550 See: Marlies Krebstakis. "Nationsozialistische Prinzipien in Spielfilmen der UFA – Volksgemeinschaft – Führerprinzip – Rassismus" in *Die UFA: auf den Spuren einer grossen Filmfabrik*. ed. by Marlies Krebstakis (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1987) pp. 66-85.

551 Roland Barthes. "The Death of The Author", trans. by Richard Howard, *Aspen* 5-6 (1967) n. p.

all of these features are, as we have seen, common to both minds. All of them are liable to permeate utterly the way the mind understands space.

### **A Concluding Note on the Importance of Elsewhere**

To end where we began, let us bring the various critical voices we have examined so far into a kind of symphonic epilogue. When Foucault spoke of “Other Spaces” in the title of his essay on heterotopias, when Larkin sought an emotive elsewhere, “lonely in Ireland”, they examined the sensation of heterogeneous places from the perspective of an outsider who was situated therein. Places which were defined by difference were, for Foucault and Larkin alike, places that had to be directly experienced. In this chapter, we have examined a very different kind of “Other Space”, one that can only exist precisely because it never has been visited by the mind that perceives it. While Foucault and Larkin felt the power of the exotic from the perspective of guests, we have focussed on foreign settings when experienced by somebody who is very much at home. What we have really been discussing is the power of the parochial: the homotopia as the concentration of sameness. In medieval Iceland, this mental fixture as it related to depictions of Jews exerted its influence in the creative sphere. We have seen Gunnarr Hámundarson lying in the dirt, gazing in wonder at his farmstead. We have seen Icelandic translators of Marian miracle tales giving foreign cities native names, confronting their audiences with an uncanny and uncomfortable alternate reality. We have seen how the dangers of domestic society can be juxtaposed with images of distant ethnic others abroad, and thereby ameliorated. These medieval manifestations of homotopian thought (or more properly, *feeling*) did not end in bloodshed. As we have seen, in other times and places, it has had altogether more disastrous effects.

## Chapter 6: Brandr Jónsson, a Philo-Semite between Iceland and Norway

Brandr Jónsson, who died in 1264, also used the *Antiquities of the Jews*, and probably the *War of the Jews*, for his *Gyðinga Saga*. Both of these works might be expected to interest the Icelanders in the thirteenth century. Josephus's descriptions of the ruthless ambition, cruelty and deceit which flourished in Palestine in the time of Christ are not unlike passages in *Sturlunga Saga*.<sup>552</sup>

- Gabriel Turville-Petre

“Deinem Herrn Gemahl eine gute Meinung über den unverbesserlichen Europäer und Anti-Anti-semiten, Deinen ganz unmaßgeblichen Bruder und Eckensteher Fritz beizubringen ...”<sup>553</sup>

“Teach your noble husband a good opinion of these incorrigible Europeans and anti-anti-Semites, your most humble brother and Eckensteher Fritz ...”

- Friedrich Nietzsche to his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche.

### **A definition of Philo-Semitism**

Philo-Semitism is surely less destructive than the more infamous variety of '-Semitism' with which it is naturally juxtaposed, but it is an equally intricate assemblage of intellectual and emotional mechanisms. The term originated in Germany in the late nineteenth century, where it was used by self-professed anti-Semites to denigrate those who sought to combat their doctrine.<sup>554</sup> Indeed, anti-Semites probably remain the demographic with the most primitive and most agreed-upon definition of what a philo-Semite is. Consider, for example, the number of largely synonymous epithets that emerged during the Third Reich period: *Judenfreund* “Jew-friend”, *Judengenosse* “Jew-mate”, *Judenknecht* “Jew-squire”, *Judensöldling* “Jew-sell-out”, *judenblind* “Jew-blind”.<sup>555</sup> For anti-Semites, the philo-Semite is simply anybody who is ignorant of their 'insight' over how dangerous the Jews supposedly are. Outside of anti-Semitic circles, and thus inside the realm of rational and scholarly thought, the term has been much more contested. One might define philo-Semitism simply as whatever interventions are deployed to counter anti-Semitism, though this is certainly not an irreproachable position.<sup>556</sup> If somebody protests against the inhumane treatment of Jews because he does not like to see human beings treated

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Gabriel Turville-Petre. “The Old Norse Homily on the Assumption and *Marín Saga*” in *Nine Norse Studies*. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1972) p. 115.

553 Friedrich Nietzsche. “An Elisabeth Förster in Naumburg” in *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. vol. 3, part 3. ed. by Giorgio Colli &azzino Montinari. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1982) p. 147.

554 Adam Sutcliffe & Jonathan Karp. “Introduction. A Brief History of Philosemitism” in *Philosemitism in History*. ed. by Adam Sutcliffe & Jonathan Karp. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 1.

555 Michael & Doerr 2002. pp. 223-227.

556 Sutcliffe & Karp 2011. pp. 4-5.

poorly, but otherwise has no particular interest in Jews whatsoever, it seems rather a misrepresentation to call them a philo-Semite. Defending Jews against their attackers is surely a prerequisite for philo-Semitic thought, but whether this alone constitutes a distinct way of thinking about Jews which we might call philo-Semitism seems doubtful. St. Augustine's famous arguments that Jews should not be killed because they provide a necessary service to Christianity militates strongly against violence towards Jews. It led many medieval churchmen to protect the Jews under their control, e.g. Pope Alexander II (d. 1073), Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), Engilbert of Ortenburg (d. 1101) who was bishop of Trier in 1096.<sup>557</sup> These clerics defended actual Jews – Engilbert was nearly killed by his wrathful flock for it – but they also implicitly denigrated Judaism. They believed the Jewish religion to be defective, and that its proponents had to be kept alive until the point where they admitted as much. Sutcliffe and Karp note that approaching philo-Semitism as a diametric opposite of Jew-hatred has tended to produce scholarship which is “commemorative in character, celebrating the achievements of philosemites and sometimes admonishing Jews for their failure to appreciate and remember them”.<sup>558</sup>

Alternatively, one might define philo-Semitism simply as any positive attitude towards Jews, though this too is a problematic strategy. For example, the overwhelming majority of medieval Christians would have endorsed and sympathised with the stories from Exodus, the Jewish bondage in Egypt and the heroic leadership of Moses. They would have revered Abraham, Daniel, and other Old Testament prophets. At the same time, medieval Christendom fostered a plethora of anti-Semitic fantasies and committed no little violence against European Jews. Similarly, people can have an appreciation for Jewish culture and still actively participate in anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. A tiny minority of eschatologically minded Christians seek to convert Jews to their own faith in order to bring about the End of Days. In doing so, they may appropriate the Star of David, attempt to Hebraise their own non-Hebrew language, exhibit fervent support for the state of Israel, etc.<sup>559</sup> Nonetheless, their engagement with Jews is still evangelical, that is to say, its aim is to dissolve or dilute the Jewish religion. Thus it feels somewhat jarring to designate their attitude as philo-Semitic.

There are a great many instances where gentiles have identified with Jews, particularly the aspects of the Jewish narrative focussing on resilience in the face of adversity. Yet the exhibition of such sympathies is not in itself enough to provide a plausible definition of philo-Semitism. Indeed, sympathising with and eulogising the Jewish experience has often led Christians down the path of a

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557 Robert Chazan. “Philo-Semitic Tendencies in Medieval Western Christendom” in *Philo-Semitism in History*. esp. pp. 29-37.

558 Ibid. at p. 4.

559 For some comment on this phenomenon by a medievalist, but with reference to contemporary culture, see: Anthony Bale. “At the Whipping Post, Florida”, *Remembered Places*. <https://rememberedplaces.wordpress.com/2013/05/23/at-the-whipping-post-florida/>. Last accessed 21<sup>st</sup> July 2014.

rather anti-Jewish supercessionist theology, the general implication being that “we are the New Israel, ergo the 'Old' Israel is redundant – and perhaps even fraudulent”. Any number of examples could be cited here, from the Black Hebrew Israelites in modern America to the British Israelists of the eighteenth century. Particularly germane to our medieval interests, however, are crusader histories such as the *Millstätter Exodus* (c. 1200), which situate the Christian crusaders as a New Israel, following in the steps of the ancient Israelites as they perigrinated around the Near East (the Scandinavian contribution to this genre will be discussed shortly).<sup>560</sup> The proposition that a new *populus Dei* is retracing the tracks of its predecessor marginalises contemporary Jews even as it esteems their ancestors.

As Sutcliffe and Karp note, these problems might be grounds to cry out in despair “[i]s there such a thing as philosemitism?”. Nonetheless, despite all of the difficulties in providing a universally applicable definition, there are still tangible phenomena which ought to make us think that philo-Semitism exists. Firstly, it is obvious that at least since the inception of Christianity, and most likely even beforehand in Egyptian and Greco-Roman polytheism, “the Jews” have often been more than just one of the many peoples that inhabit the earth.<sup>561</sup> They have also been a signifier that operates in the gentile imagination largely independently of the existence of the actual Jewish people. Secondly, the responses that this compelling mental fixture has elicited have not always been bent on attacking or replacing the Jews. For some, the Jewish story has been an inspiration, and its contemporary culture(s) considered attractive. A working definition of philo-Semitism for the purpose of this study, but designed with a view to be potentially applicable elsewhere, can be presented in three theses:

1. To quote Sutcliffe and Karp, “[t]he sine qua non of philosemitism is the notion of the Jews as a resolutely distinct people, with distinctively admirable characteristics.”<sup>562</sup>
2. Philo-Semitism is contrapuntal. That is to say, it necessarily enters into a combative discourse with hostile attitudes towards Jews whenever it is considered within a corpus that exhibits them. All philo-Semites are, in Nietzsche's words, “anti-anti-Semites”, but not all anti-anti-Semites are philo-Semites.
3. Philo-Semitism promotes sympathy or even identification with Jews, but it does not seek to diminish or alter contemporary Jewish identity. Just as the anti-Semite cannot believe that Jews are undesirable and then simply ignore this belief and propose indifference or

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560 D.H. Green. *The Millstätter Exodus. A Crusading Epic*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) pp. 188-227.

561 Gager 1983. pp. 39-88, 102-112. On Egypt in particular, see: Nirenberg 2014. pp. 15-35.

562 Sutcliffe & Karp 2011. p. 7.

inaction, the philo-Semite cannot believe that Jews are desirable and then propose their elimination.

By no means should philo-Semitism be regarded as entirely benign. Even though it is not slanderous, like any ethnically oriented mode of thought it is still fallacious. Obviously, ethnic background is no predictor of personal attributes, for good or ill, even if this is sometimes a convenient form of mental shorthand to entertain. Moreover, the gentile who seeks to render the Jews moral exemplars still recreates the age old impressment of the “Jew-in-service” relationship. Here, of course, the exploitation is symbolic rather than literal, though this way of thinking is still perilously close to the Anglo-Norman *Judæis Nostris Angliæ* doctrine; that the *raison d'être* of the Jew is solely what he can do for his Christian master. A third caution which ought to be mentioned (although I am not convinced by it myself) is the theory that philo-Semitism is in fact a sublimation of Judaeophobia. Hence the two old jokes: “Who is better, the anti-Semite or the philo-Semite? The anti-Semite, at least he's being honest” or “What is a philo-Semite? An anti-Semite who likes Jews”. Daniel Goldhagen has described philo-Semites as “antisemites in sheep's clothing” who would “strip themselves of their ill-fitting garb and reveal themselves to be not much different from their erstwhile opponents, the conservative, unabashed antisemites”.<sup>563</sup> It may or may not be the case that often “Philo-Semites ... just concede too much of the anti-Semites' case against the Jews”.<sup>564</sup> Nonetheless, the charge that philo-Semitism is little more than a repressed or disingenuous anti-Semitism is not sufficiently verifiable to colour this investigation. It is impossible to say whether philo-Semitic expressions stem from a subconscious (or conscious but well masked) antipathy, which is hidden because the psyche knows in some way it is distasteful. Even if the accusation is correct, and I see little evidence to suppose that it is, the philo-Semite's “true” sentiments towards Jews would normally appear to be so deeply buried that it is entirely beyond the scope of the present work to expose them.

### **Philo-Semitic currents in the wider Old Norse canon**

Beyond supercessionism and eschatology, Chazan finds “significant and influential philosemitic tendencies” in medieval Christendom, particularly in the day-to-day interactions where Jews and Christians lived alongside each other and developed a sense of social solidarity.<sup>565</sup> In contrast, no Icelander or Norwegian during the Middle Ages could have had a Jew for a neighbour (at least while they were at home, those living abroad were, as seen, a different matter). Yet Old Norse literature still

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563 Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) p. 58.

564 Anthony Julius. *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 40.

565 Chazan 2011, pp. 44-48.

exhibits a few moments where the anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism are wholly rejected, and the Jew-as-signifier is interpreted in a quite laudatory manner. Outside of Brandr Jónsson's works, which we will be treated separately as the main content of this chapter, the greatest number of philo-Semitic expressions are found in the romances. Several of these will be remembered from the previous chapter, but here we can go into a little more detail. One particularly unusual case is the Jewish King Hlǫðvir from *Mírmanns saga*: *Hlǫðvir kongr var vitr hofdingi ok ágætr. Hann hafði Gydinga tru. elskaði Gud enn for ekci* [sic] *med blott sem Saxar e(da) Spanverjar vestr ok giordiꝥ nu hnignandi madr*<sup>566</sup> - King Hlǫðvir was a wise and excellent ruler. He observed the faith of the Jews. He loved God and did not offer pagan sacrifices like the Saxons or Spaniards to the west, although now he was in his dotage". The historical King Clovis I (r. 509-511) upon whom Hlǫðvir is based, was a pagan until around 496 when at the age of around 30 he converted to Christianity.<sup>567</sup> The real Clovis "pursu[ed] a reasonably pro-Jewish policy", but it goes without saying that aside from a few Holy Grail conspiracy theorists, nobody before or since the author of *Mírmanns saga* has proposed that the king was actually Jewish himself.<sup>568</sup> The reason our Icelandic author did so is probably that he had written himself into a corner. *Mírmanns saga* is set in a strange alternate reality, where the English, the Spaniards and the Germans, in fact seemingly most of the nations of Europe, are still *heiðnir* - "pagan". The *heiðni* to which they adhere is apparently supposed to refer to Islam rather than pre-Christian paganism. While the religion depicted in the saga is apparently polytheistic – the pagans speak of *goda vorra*<sup>569</sup> "our gods" - their primary deity is one *Maúmet*, who is clearly intended to be Mohammed. In Old Norse, *heiðni* refers to both Islam and the pre-Christian religion of Scandinavia. There were other, more specific terms for each faith. For example, in *Orkneyinga saga* Muslims are referred to as *Maumets villumenn* - "Mohammed's heretics".<sup>570</sup> Norse paganism was occasionally called the *forn siðr* "old ways".<sup>571</sup> None of these more precise appellations are used in *Mírmanns saga*.

It was not uncommon for medieval Christians to perceive Islam as polytheistic. This tendency is known in Old Norse, as *Karlamagnús saga* (late 1200s) attests when one *heiðingi* invokes "*Machun ok Terrogant, Apollin ok Jupiter inn mikla*".<sup>572</sup> However, the author of *Mírmanns saga* seems to have gone a little further, comfortably eliding the two religions denoted by *heiðni* to create an *interpretatio nordica* of Islam. Note

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566 *Mírmanns saga*. p. 8.

567 E. Ewig, "Chlodwig. I. Ch. I." in *Lexikon des Mittel Alters*. vol. 2. (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1983) p. 1864.

568 Bernard S. Bachrach. *Early Medieval Jewish Policy in Western Europe*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977) pp. 44-47.

569 *Mírmanns saga*. p. 16.

570 *Orkneyinga saga*. p. 225.

571 Anders Andréen et al. "Old Norse religion. Some problems and prospects" in *Old Norse Religion in Long-term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*. ed by Anders Andréen et al. (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006). p. 12.

572 *Karlamagnus saga ok kappá hans. Fortællinger om Kejser Karl Magus og hans Jævninger*. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: H.J. Jensen, 1860) p. 336.

too that his “Muslims” carry out *blótar*, a word more commonly used to refer to the celebrations of Germanic paganism, cf. Old English *blót*, Gothic 𐌺𐌹𐌳𐌹𐌸<sup>573</sup> This Norse-flavoured Islam is mostly well suited to the imaginative fictional universe he has constructed.

There is, though, one inelegant point. Hlqðvir/Clovis is intended as a 'noble heathen' archetype, that is to say, a character who behaves according to Christian ethics before they come into contact with Christianity.<sup>574</sup> But the *heiðni* faith is generally so inimical elsewhere in the saga that to praise Hlqðvir's moral stature, while keeping him *heiðinn*, would require substantial qualification. Thus, the author opted to give him an entirely different religion. Just as King Hlqðvir is a beacon of decency in a Europe which is otherwise depicted as fallen to idolatry, his distinction is also reflected in his unique religion, not heathen but not (yet) quite Christian. If the decision to make Hlqðvir Jewish was born out of narrative expediency, it also brought with it some effective resonances with philo-Semitism. The preconception that Jews are particularly wise is arguably the philo-Semitic inverse of the prejudice that they are specially cunning. To depict Hlqðvir as an elderly, righteous gentleman is an anthropomorphism of the philo-Semite's view of Judaism as ancient and honourable.

*Mírmanns saga* posits Judaism not as a hostile to Christianity, but as mutually intelligible. Hlqðvir's *Guð* is also the Christian *Guð*, and for the author it appears that this proximity is more important than the difference regarding the acceptance of Jesus Christ. Ultimately Hlqðvir, like Clovis, does convert to Christianity. Not before he marries Princess *Katrína*, the daughter of King *Aðalráðr* (i.e. *Æðelred*), though. *Aðalráðr*'s religion, and therefore *Katrína*'s, is not provided in the saga. The English people are said to belong to the imaginary Norse-Islamic faith. The Muslim Earl *Bæringr* threatens King Clovis after his conversion that “*þa munum vax Saxar ok Spanveriar ok Einglis menn fara med her a bendr honum ok munn hann þa reyna huort sa Krístr stendr þa fyrir honum ...*”<sup>575</sup> - “then we Saxons, Spaniards and Englishmen will go to war against him and then he will see whether this Christ protects him ...”. However, whether the English rulers are intended to be of the same religion as their subjects is not clear. Such discrepancies are apparently permissible in *Mírmanns saga*, e.g. Hlqðvir is Jewish but his subjects are Muslims. King *Aðalráðr* seems to have been content to marry his daughter to a Jew, and at their wedding no mention is made of either party converting. Certainly, the other appearances of an English King named *Aðalráðr* in Old Norse literature, i.e. the historical *Æðelred II* (r. 978-1016) integrate him

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573 Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 70. Bosworth & Toller p. 112. Joseph Wright. *Grammar of the Gothic Language and the Gospel of St. Mark, Selections from the Other Gospels, and the Second Epistle to Timothy, with Notes and Glossary*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1954) p. 311.

574 See: Lars Lönnroth. “The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas”, *Scandinavian Studies* 41, 1 (1969) pp. 1-29.

575 *Mírmanns saga*. p. 18.

into his proper Christian chronology.<sup>576</sup> It is not unreasonable to infer that *Katrína* and her father are indeed Christian, and that in the fantasy world of *Mírmanns saga*, Judaism and Christianity are two religions so close that conversion is not necessary in cases of intermarriage.

An obvious qualification that has to be made in any examination of *Mírmanns saga* is that its fantastical, hyper-romantic tone clearly permits the author to make blithely pronouncements which, if they were to occur in a more polemically oriented genre, would be extremely controversial. Nonetheless, by accident or design, *Mírmanns saga* does exhibit a consistent and unusual position on Judaism. It is not wholly philo-Semitic. Judaism is still portrayed as an imperfect religion. There is still a noticeable trace of the old anti-Jewish concern that Judaism was a faith that was yet to be completed by the acceptance of Christ.<sup>577</sup> That said, Hlǫðvir's embrace of Christianity seems more like an upgrade than a conversion proper. In the following scene both Judaism and Christianity are imprecisely depicted so as to undermine tacitly the significance of Hlǫðvir's baptism:

J þenna tíma kom hinn helgi Dionisius j Frackland med vm radum Klementis papa. ok med þui at Hl(oduir) kongr var sialfr goduiliadr ok sa ok heyrði sannar jarteinir almattigs Guds ok hans heilagra manna ok þessa hins blezada biskups er þar var kominn. þa tok hann skirnn ok retta tru. ok allir adra þeir sem j voro hans landi. badi rikir ok fatekr. Enn Mir(mann) j(arls) son tok tru ok skirnn af fortaulum Hl(oduis) kongs fostra sins. Enn þeir er eigi vildo vndir ganga truna stukco [sic] or landi. sumer vestr til Spania landz ... enn sumir aa hendr Hermanni j Saxland.<sup>578</sup>

At that time St. Denis came to France on the orders of Pope Clement, and as King Hlǫðvir was himself righteous, and saw and heard of the true miracles of Almighty God and of His saints, and of the blessed bishop who had arrived there, he was then baptised and accepted the true fath, as did all the others who were in his country, both rich and poor, and Mírmann the Earl's son accepted the faith and baptism on the advice of King Hlǫðvir, his foster-father. And those who would not submit to the faith fled out of the country. Some west to Spain ... and some into the hands of Hermann in Germany.

The rambling first sentence, common in the style of the chivalric sagas, invites an ambiguous reading. Obviously, the meaning ought to be “as Hlǫðvir was *already* righteous, *when* he heard about the true miraces of Almighty God and of His saints etc. *then* he converted”. However, the sentence can also be

576 For example: Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. vol. .1. p. 274. *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*. ed. Guðni Jónsson. intr. by Peter G. Foote (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1952) pp. 33-37. *Óláfs saga hins Helga*. ed. by Anne Heinrichs *et al.* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1982) p. 44.

577 On this theme, see: Anders Kloostergaard Petersen. “At the End of the Road – Reflections on a Popular Scholarly Metaphor” in *The Formation of the Early Church*. ed. by Jostein Ådna (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) esp. pp. 51-53.

578 *Mírmanns saga*. p. 15.

interpreted: “as Hlǫðvir was *already* righteous *and* had heard about the true miracles of Almighty God and of His saints etc. *then* he converted [when St. Denis (d. mid 200s) provided the opportunity]”.<sup>579</sup> The proposition that Hlǫðvir, as a Jew, should have recognised the Christian saints is preposterous, but as we have seen *Mírmanns saga* is not overly concerned with facts. If this is a wilful distortion of Judaism in order to bring Hlǫðvir's spiritual values into closer harmony with those of a Christian, then Christianity is itself also somewhat misrepresented. Where in this section is there any mention of the most important delineator between Christianity and Judaism, Christ Himself? In fact, in the A and B recensions of *Mírmanns saga* - which probably contain the oldest textual traditions - there are just two references to *Kristr* at any point. Only one of these is actually made by a Christian. This is when Princess Cecilia enjoins an *illkvikvendi* “evil creature” to leave the trachea of Sir Justinus: *hún mællte til hanz nockur ord og særdi hann j nafne drott(inz) Jesu Christi hins krossfesta ad fara þa leinngra*<sup>580</sup> - “she said some words to it and compelled it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ the Crucified to come further [out]”. The only other mention of Christ is in the previously seen mocking threat of the Muslim Earl Bæringr. Perhaps unsurprisingly for an action packed romance, *Mírmanns saga* is much more concerned with “The Christians” as a military alignment than it is with Christ. However, if this marginalisation of the belief in Jesus Christ is merely a convention of genre, it is a rather expedient one. Minimising Christ allows Hlǫðvir a fuller access to his Judaism even as his conversion implies its unfulfillment.

Another philo-Semitic type is found in *Ambales saga*. As previously alluded, this work is post-Reformation, and so it falls outside the bounds of Old Norse literature proper.<sup>581</sup> Nonetheless, in Iceland tales concerning Hamlet/Ambales appear to have been circulating in an oral context long prior to the first manuscripts of *Ambales saga* in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. *Snorra Edda* reproduces a verse supposedly by the eleventh century skáld, Snæbjörn, that mentions Hamlet by his Icelandic moniker, *Amlóðr*:

Hvatt kveða hræra Grotta  
hergrimmastan skerja  
út fyrir jarða<r> skauti  
eylúðrs níu brúðir,  
þær er – lungs – fyrir lǫngu  
liðmeldr – skipa hlíðar  
baugskerðir rístr barði

579 On the identification of *hinn helgi Dionisius*, and his conflation with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fl. early 500s) see: Ralph O' Connor. *Notes to Icelandic Histories & Romances*. (Stroud: Tempus, 2006) p. 300.

580 *Mírmanns saga*. pp. 68-69. For the additional references in C, D, E and F see: p. 15, 46, 63, 130, 154.

581 For some early comment on the sources and dating of *Ambales saga*, see: Ferdinand Detter. “Die Hamletsage”, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 36 (1892) esp. pp. 19-25.

ból – Amlóða mólu.

Hér er kallað hafit Amlóða kvern.<sup>582</sup>

They say nine brides  
of the most vicious jagged rocks  
speedily move Grotti's island  
that grinds out over the edge of the earth.  
Those who for a long time  
made flour of fleets.  
The waster of wealth cut with a prow  
the shelter of ships, the mill of Amlóði.

Here the sea is called Amlóði's churn.

Despite its many post-Reformation touches, (not least a Protestant attack on Catholicism and the fact that one manuscript originates in an area of Iceland which was also known to contain a 16<sup>th</sup> century copy of the *Gesta Danorum*) Axel Olrik has proposed that *Ambales saga* may well also contain medieval material.<sup>583</sup>

Selve det mærkelige, at Amlodesagnet ikke sætter spor i den islandske middelalderslitteratur, skönt endnu en skjald o. år 1000 har kendtes ved det, forklares simpelt nok: Amlodesagnet er sunket ned i folkeæventyrenes klasse; måske netop de islandske forfatteres agtelse for de ægte traditioner har bragt dem til at skyde en sådan tvivlsom gæst fra sig. Dette Amlodeæventyr lever så i folkedybet, upåagtet fordi ingen drager det op. Så kommer renæssancetiden med sin kendskab til Sakse; læsningen i hans krønike vækker genklang af barndoms minder ... Det næste skridt er at øse af denne ny og rigere kilde over på den fattige hjemlige tradition: Ambalesagaen opstår.<sup>584</sup>

Even the strange fact that the Amlóði tale does not leave traces in Old Icelandic medieval literature, even though a skáld c. 1000 is known to have known it, is explained easily enough. The Amlóði tale had sunk down to the rank of popular narrative; perhaps it is precisely the Icelandic authors' esteem for the noble traditions which brought them to turn away such a dubious guest. This Amlóði narrative then lives deep in the vernacular, undetected because nobody brings it up. Then comes the Renaissance period with its knowledge of Saxo; reading his chronicles stirs

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582 Snorri Sturluson. *Skáldskaparmál*. vol. 1. p. 38.

583 On these complications, see: Detter 1892. p. 20. Axel Olrik. "Amlodesagnet på Island", *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 11 (1899) pp. 372-373

584 Olrik 1899. p. 373.

resonances of childhood memories ... The next step is to draw on this new and richer source over the top of the poor domestic tradition. *Ambales saga* is brought into being.

Olrik's hypothesis is particularly attractive in light of *Ambales saga's* solitary Jewish character, the warrior Atríanus, alias Adrián. He is first introduced when the titular Ambales is going into combat against the evil King Bastian. The king deploys thirty champions, of whom *binn mesti hét Atríanus, hann var Gidingakyns, og stódst eingin fyrir honum, og þókti hann ósigrandi*<sup>585</sup> - “the greatest was called Atríanus. He was of the Jewish race, and nobody could withstand him, and he seemed invincible”. The only other named champion in the king's service is one Benkóbar: *var hann undan ytsta Skauti Heims, hann hafði Risavóxt og burdi, afar liótur, ad sjonum, þó verri ad raun, hañ vann flest med góldrum og djófuls krapti, og Skaut ór af hvórjum fíngri, og vóru flestir bræddir vid hann* - “he was from the furthest reaches of the earth. He was the size and the strength of a giant, very ugly in appearance though even worse in reality. He mostly won by magic and the power of the devil, and he shot arrows out of each finger, and most people were afraid of him”. Benkóbar falls quickly by the wayside, undone by Ambales's dwarven magician, Tosti. Atríanus, on the other hand, is made of sterner stuff. He meets Ambales in battle thus:

Ambales hjó og lagdi til beggja handa so eingiñ stóð vid honum, mætti honum Adrián Júdi er bar merki kóngrs, reidir hann þa Sverdid ad Ambal. og kom á Hófudid svo daladist Hjálmurinn, og honum lá vid óviti, Sló Ambal. aptur til hañs, og tók sundur Skjöldin og af hægri hóndina, Ambal. reid ad hónum þreyf hann ór Sóðlinum og færði hann Tosta dverg, og bad hann græða ef vinnast mætti ...

Ambales struck out with both hands so that nobody could withstand him. He met Adrián the Jew who was carrying the banner of the king. He raises then his sword against Ambales, and brought it down on his head so that it smashed against his helmet, and he fell unconscious. Ambales struck back [!] and split his shield and cut of his right hand. Ambales rode up to him and pulled him out of the saddle and brought him to Tosti the Dwarf, and ordered him to heal him if anything could be done ...

Atríanus behaves as a quintessential chivalric sidekick. After the battle *var Bast. kóngr settur í mirkavastofu og menn hañs utan Atían [sic], hann var í góðu haldi, og sór Ambal. trínadar eid medann þeir lífdu báðir* - “King Bastian and his men were put into a dungeon, except for Atríanus. He was kept in good conditions and swore Ambales an oath of loyalty as long as they both should live”. In contrast to Benkóbar, he fights honourably, hand-to-hand and without the use of magic. When bested by Ambales, he acknowledges

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585 The following quotations are taken from: *Ambales saga* pp. 154-156.

his defeat gracefully and swears fealty to his new lord. He fights with valour in Ambales's band of misfit retainers, alongside the Cimbrian duo, Cimbál and Carvel, and the dwarf Tosti. When the *blámenn* vikings, Tarkus and Tambis, threaten Greece, Atríanus takes on Tambis *og hjó af honum höndina og fótinn*<sup>586</sup> “and chopped off his arms and a leg”, paying forward his own mutilation with interest.

The appearance of a character such as Atríanus would not at all be incongruent in one of the late medieval *hygisögur*. He could easily be imagined appearing in *Nítíða saga* or *Mírmanns saga*, for example. As far as Indeed, the strict anti-Judaism of the Reformation might militate against the idea that Atríanus was appended to the Ambales tradition during the sixteenth century or after.<sup>587</sup> It is from this later period that we find imports such as the *Straff og plágur Júða*, an Icelandic implementation of the common Early Modern idea that the Jewish tribes carry ancestral afflictions according to their supposed roles in the crucifixion, e.g. *Þeir Gyðingar af kyni Assers sem vorn herra Jesúm Christum reyrðu og börðu hans heilaga líkama og hafa það fyrir þá synd að þeirra hægri handleggur er þverhandar styttri en sá vinstri.*<sup>588</sup> - “Those Jews of the tribe of Asher who bound our Our Lord Jesus Christ and thrashed His holy body have for their sin that their right arm is two handlengths shorter than the left”. In post-Reformation Iceland, the church developed a clearer idea of secular versus religious literature, and attempted to diminish the former to the boon of the latter. Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (fl. 1570s) famously stated that he had written his *Sálmabók* (1589) in order that *af matti leggjast onýtsamlegir kevðlingar um Tröll og Fornmenni, Rímur, illir Mansöngvar, Afmors vísur ... sem her hiá Alþýðu-fólki er elskað og iðkað* “useless ditties about trolls and pagans, *rímur*, evil love songs, verses of amour might be put aside ... which are so beloved and promulgated by the ordinary people here”.<sup>589</sup> The eighteenth century saw state attacks on

586 Ibid. at p. 158.

587 Nirenberg 2014. pp. 246-268. See also: Haim Hillel Ben Sasson. “Reformation” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 17. pp. 163-165. David Charles Smith. “Protestant Anti-Judaism in the German Emancipation Era”, *Jewish Social Studies* 36, 3 (1974) pp. 203-219. As Hillel Ben Sasson notes, the Reformation was of course not universally anti-Jewish in character.

Nonetheless, with publications such as *Von den Juden und Ibrren Lügen* (1543), Luther did much to re-energise anti-Judaism.

588 “Straff og plágur Júða” in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ávintýri*. ed. by Jón Árnason. rev. by Árni Böðvarsson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. (Hólar: Bókautgáfan Þjóðsaga, 1954) pp. 52-54. The Icelandic tale is found in JS 640 4to, which dates from the mid-nineteenth century. Trachtenberg asserts that the first example of this genre was by one Franciscus of Piacenza, a *converso*, published in 1602. This appears to be a confusion for Franco da Piacenza and his 1630 work. See: Trachtenberg 1966. p. 29. Francois Soyer provides a fuller and more reliable history of the tradition, the earliest precursor of which must be by the *converso* Antonio Carrafa in 1619: Francois Soyer. *Popularizing Anti-Semitism in Early Modern Spain and its Empire: Francisco de Torrejoncillo and the Centinela contra Judios* (1674) (Leiden: Brill, 2014) p. 242, n23. See also: Léon Poliakov. *The History of Antisemitism*. vol. 1. trans. by Richard Howard. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) p. 143, n14. A related tradition may well have been known by the Danish Reformer Christiern Pedersen (d. 1554) when he asserted in a sermon that: *Jøderne robede "Hans blod skal komme offuer oss oc vaare børn!"*. *Det skæde oc saa aff gudꝝ heffn. Thi de finge oc haffue alle blodot saa lenge de leffue men verden stonder. Men de havde icke trod at der skulde kommet saadan heffn der effter. Saa gaff Pilatus blodig dom offuer hannem oc antworde iøderne hannem at de hannem kors feste skvle* - “The Jews shouted 'His blood be upon us and our children!'. So did it happen, by God's vengeance. Because they got – and all have – menstruation so long as they live while the world stands. But they hadn't thought that there should come such a vengeance thereafter. Then Pilatus gave a bloody judgement over Him and the Jews responded to him by saying that they would crucify Him”. From: Christiern Pedersen. “Vor Herris Pinelse” in *Danske Skrifter*, vol 1. ed. by C.J Brandt & R. Th. Senger (Copenhagen: Det Gylandalske Boghandling, 1850) p. 356. For comment, see: Adams 2012. pp. 88-89.

589 Quoted in: *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*. vol. .2. ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon & F. York Powell. vol. 2. (Oxford: The

popular culture, most notably by “the bigot King Christian IV”, as Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Frederick York Powell charmingly designate him.<sup>590</sup> It is somewhat harder to imagine the figure of Atríanus originating in this environment, even more so when the *Tyrkejaránið* (slave raids by Barbary pirates in 1627) began to colour the Icelandic taste for Oriental characters.<sup>591</sup> On the other hand, the image of a loyal, Jewish knight might well be expected to interest a late medieval Icelandic audience, who enjoyed romances which took place in “settings from Sweden to Syria”,<sup>592</sup> and enjoyed a literary life where there appears to have been little tension between the secular and pious modes.<sup>593</sup>

Proceeding from Atríanus's putative provenance, let us turn to the tropes which contribute to his character. The conception of the Jews as a martial people is not without precedent. Long before the Middle Ages began to imagine Jews as feminine and weak, commentators in Antiquity conceived of the Jews as singularly indomitable and warlike. According to Ammianus Marcellinus (d. c. 390) the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r. 161 - 180) supposedly compared the Jews to the fierce Germanic tribes north of the Roman border: “*o Marcomanni, o Quadi, o Sarmatae, tandem alios uobis inquietiores inueni.*”<sup>594</sup> - “Oh Marcomanni, oh Quadians, oh Sarmatians, at last I have found a people more unruly than you”. Machabees I and II, upon which Brandr's *Gyðinga saga* are substantially based, do much to depict the Jews as both willing and able warmakers. Such compliments are not without complication, of course. Just as Hlqðvir's Jewish wise man is the philo-Semitic protrusion of the anti-Semitic “cunning Jew” monolith, Atríanus and any other militarily capable Jew is the philo-Semitic counterpart to the old anti-Jewish conception of the Jews as a particularly rebellious nation.

An alternative possibility is that a blurring of Orientalist attitudes has taken place. Just as in other medieval canons, Muslims in Old Norse literature were frequently depicted as a martially gifted people.<sup>595</sup> Indeed, rarely they were depicted as being capable of chivalry despite their religious alterity. The unnamed Muslim *qðlingr* “nobleman” in *Orkneyinga saga*, when released by Earl Rognvaldr, gives him a frank but gentlemanly farewell: “*þér skuluð nú frá mér þess mest njóta, er þér gáfuð mér líf ok leituðuð mér slákerak sæmðar sem þér máttuð. En gjarna vil ek, at vér sæimsk aldri síðan, ok lífið nú heilir ok vel.*”<sup>596</sup> - “You will

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Clarendon Press, 1883) pp. 387-388.

590 Ibid. at pp. 388-389.

591 Margrét Eggertsdóttir. “From Reformation to Enlightenment” trans. by Joe Allard in *A History of Icelandic Literature*. ed. by Daisy Neijmann. (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) pp. 217-218.

592 Werronen 2013. p. 119. See also: pp. 120-125, 128-140. Werronen also explores here how such tastes subtly shifted from medieval to Early Modern reception of romance.

593 What was true of literary life was, of course, not true of political life. See: Peter Foote. “Secular attitudes in early Iceland” in *Aurvandilstá*. pp. 31-46.

594 Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*. vol. 1. ed. by Wolfgang Seyfarth *et al.* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999) p. 257.

595 Richard Cole. “One or Several Jews? The Jewish Massed Body in Old Norse Literature”, *Postmedieval* 5, 3 (2014) pp. 349-350.

596 *Orkneyinga saga*. p. 228.

now profit greatly from me because you gave me life and showed me such honour as you could. But I would really like it if we never see each other again. Live well and in health'". To the rustic *folkedybet* wherein *Ambales saga* was sustained according to Olrik, perhaps the difference between a Jew and a Muslim was a distinction without a difference. Both were distant, vaguely Eastern 'Others'. Making Atríanus a Jew in such a hypothetical cultural climate would have been nothing more controversial than an inventive narrative flourish.

Regardless of how it came to be, imbuing Atríanus with strength and knightliness is a seriously contrapuntal strategy. Of all of the things that Jews can be in Old Norse literature, "trustworthy" and "a warrior" are two of the most unlikely. The proposition that a Jew could be a good knight is thus surely philo-Semitic. It implies that Jews can be strong and loyal without the need to concede their Jewish identity by converting to Christianity. In *Ambales saga*, Atríanus can be a Jew, a knight, and a hero, where none of these qualities preclude the other. Indeed, as we have seen, he may well be a good knight *because* he is a Jew, owing either to connotations of Jewish pride or to notions that were freighted with Orientalism. Thus, Atríanus exhibits all three of our theses for the definition of philo-Semitism.

Our third example of philo-Semitism in medieval Scandinavia concerns King Sverrir Sigurðarson (r. 1177 – 1202). The arguments that will be introduced here pertain to his appearance as a literary, rather than historical character, although it may well be that what is true of one aspect will be true of the other, as many of the sources for his life are roughly contemporaneous. Raised at Kirkjubøur in the Faroe Islands, Sverrir initially undertook a clerical education, but following claims that his true father was the Norwegian monarch, Sigurðr Munnr, he joined the rebel Birkibeinar party and successfully contested the throne.<sup>597</sup> Relevant to our theme, is Sverrir's apparent predilection for allusions to the originally Jewish dimension of Christian heritage. According to the version of *Sverris saga* contained in *Flateyjarbók* (c. 1394), at the battle of Nordnes in 1181 Sverrir *geck ... fram a þiliur ok lagd iaf ser vapn sin ok fell a kne ok helld bondum til himna ok saung sequenciuna Alma chorus dei til enda ok blifdi ser ecki a medan*.<sup>598</sup> "stood ... up on the rowing benches and took off his weapons, and went down on his knees and held his hands to the heavens and sang the sequence *Alma chorus dei* all the way through, and did not shelter himself during". The author appears to be referring to *Alma chorus Domini*, or to name it by its rubric, *De nominibus Domini*.<sup>599</sup> The first two lines of this hymn are as follows: "*Alma chorus Domini nunc pangat nomina summi / Messias, soter, emanuel, sabaoth, adonai*".<sup>600</sup> Did the king indeed make a habit of singing this

597 For a brief biography, see: Ólafía Einarsdóttir. "Sverrir Sigurðarson" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. pp. 627-628.

598 *Sverris Saga Sigurðarsonar* in *Flateyjarbók. En Samling af Norske Konge-Sagaer*. vol. 2. ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: P.T.

Mallings Forlagsboghandel, 1862) pp. 583-584.

599 Peter Foote. "Nafn guðs hit hæsta" in *Aurvandilstá*. pp. 129-131. See also: Annette Lassen. *Odin på Kristen Pergament. En Teksthistorisk Studie*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Forlag, 2011) p. 298.

600 *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*. vol. 53. ed. by Clemens Blume. (Leipzig: O.R. Riesland, 1911) p. 152.

verse as protective charm? As Gjerløw noted, *episoden er i Sverres stil* - “the episode is in Sverrir's style”.<sup>601</sup> If so, we have already seen that the Hebrew invocations from the hymn were valued by Norwegian rune carvers. It would be quite reasonable to infer that Sverrir also appreciated the supposed supernatural efficacy of the Hebrew language.<sup>602</sup>

Sverrir's apparent taste for Old Covenant imagery is also attested in a much more reliable source, namely the late twelfth century *Sverris saga* which is to be found outside of *Flateyjarbók*. According to this version, 1182-1183 Sverrir erected a fortress outside Níðarós which he named *Síon* - “Zion”.<sup>603</sup> This appears to be a reference to 2 Samuel 5:7 “Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David”, and is part of a broader project by Sverrir to align himself with the Biblical King David.<sup>604</sup> For example, the saga relates how, after the battle of Fimreite in 1184, it fell to Sverrir to deliver an elegy over his defeated enemy, King Magnús Erlingsson (r. 1161-1184). The circumstances alone prompt a comparison with David. According to 2 Samuel 1:17-27 he too lamented for the death of the prior king when he succeeded him, even though their relationship was hardly cordial by that point.<sup>605</sup> After the elegy, he ushers the townsfolk out into the grounds of Christ Church *ok hafði þar þing*<sup>606</sup> - “and had an assembly there”. Here, he will perform a second, rather less generous piece of rhetoric. The saga relates that *Magnús var bæði vinsæll ok ástsæll við landsfólkið*<sup>607</sup> - “Magnús was both popular and beloved by the people”. His own men, Birkibeinar bloodied from the battle, would have been present too. Given the affection in which the general population (*landsfólkið*) beheld their recently killed king, it seems more likely that Sverrir's words are directed at these, his followers, fresh from the battle and less well-served by the previous elegy. The first half of the speech is related here:

“Til þeira orða munum vér taka er psálmaskáldit mælti: *Miserere mei deus quoniam conculcavit me homo, tota die expugnans tribulavit me*. Ok þetta segir svá: 'Miskunnaðu mér, Guð, því at maðrinn trað mik undir fótum ok barðisk allan dag í gegn mér ok kvalði mik'. Þessi spásaga er nú fram komin á várum dögum er spáð var fyrir mǫrgum ǫldum, er Magnús frændi minn barðisk í gegn ok bjósk at tapa mínu lífi, en Guð leysti mik nú sem fyrr ok skipti mér ríki hans. Guði hefir ekki jafnleitt verit allar stundir sem ofmetnaðarmenn; hefir hann ok þat harðast refsat: Fyrst er hann rak engilinn frá sér er honum vildi jafnask; var honum svá goldit at hann varð at inum versta djǫfli. Síðan er inn

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601 Lille Gjerløw. “Alma chorus Domini” in *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordiske Middelalder*. vol. 1. ed, by John Dastrup. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1956) p. 94.

602 Segev 2001. pp. 120-122. See also: Fredrik Paasche. “Sverre Prest”, *Edda* 3 (1915) p. 204.

603 *Sverris saga*. ed. by Þorleifur Hauksson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2007) p. 113, 166.

604 Paasche 1915. pp. 202-204. See also: Sverre Bagge. *From Gang Leader to the Lord's Anointed. Kingship in Sverris saga and Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1996) p. 32, 47-48, 55, 63-65, 82.

605 Ludvig Holm-Olsen. *Studier i Sverres Saga*. (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1954) pp. 54-56.

606 *Sverris saga*. p. 151.

607 Ibid.

fyrsti várr frændi Adam gerði í móti Guðs vilja; var hann þá rekinn hingat í heim, í þessa veröld ok ánauð. Ok er ríkin hófusk ok Pharao þrengði Guðs lögum ok lýð þá kómu tólf undr yfir landit, þau er aldri hafa qnnur slík orðit í veröldunni. Svá var ok þá er Saul konungr grimmdisk móti Guði þá flakkaði hann síðan með óhreina anda. Ok þó at vér telim þá hefir æ svá fram farit í heminum. Enn kann þat vera at yðr þykki upp hefjask nær borði vár ræða. Svá hefir ok fram farit hér í landinu at þeir hafa upp hafizk er ekki váru konunga ættar, svá sem var Erlingr jarl, son Kyrpinga Orms ...<sup>608</sup>

“We will turn to those words which the psalmist spoke: *Miserere mei deus quoniam conculcavit me homo, tota die expugnans tribulavit me* [Psalm 56:1]. And that means: “Be merciful to me, God, because man has trampled me under foot and fought against me all day, and tormented me”. That prophecy which was foretold many ages ago has now happened in our days, when Magnús, my kinsman, fought against me and planned to end my life, but God delivered me, now as He did then, and He allotted his kingdom to me. At all times, God has never been so wrathful to anyone as to the arrogant. He has punished it most harshly. Firstly, when He sent away the angel who wished to be equal to Him. He was repaid by being made the worst devil. Then when Adam, our first kinsman, went against God's will. He was cast out here onto the earth, to this world and servitude. And when the kingdoms rose and Pharaoh oppressed God's laws and [His] people, then twelve wonders came over the land, the likes of which have never since been in the world. Then there was also when King Saul was enraged against God then he wandered about possessed by impure spirits. And although we might consider these, such things have always happened in the world. Indeed, it may be that you see where I'm going with this. Such things have also happened here in this country, where those have raised themselves up who were not of the lineage of kings, such as Earl Erlingr, the son of Ormr of The Weaklings ...”

Scholars have often drawn attention to Sverrir's priestly credentials, hence Paasche's 1915 article, “*Sverre Prast*”. However, to make a slightly flippant point but hopefully illuminating point, Sverrir's speech here could be imagined coming out of the mouth of a rabbi just as much as a Christian preacher. He opens with the words of David, the Jewish king after whom his fortress was also named. The typologies which he invokes are purely Old Testament. The fall of Lucifer is from Isaiah 14:12-15. The fall of Adam is obviously from Genesis, God's revenge against Pharaoh from Exodus. The plaguing of Saul is from 1 Samuel 16:14. Moreover, Sverrir's typological rhetoric goes further than evoking abstract *exempla* from a distant canon. He aggressively renders the world of the Old Testament present – not diminishing its Jewishness in the process. He reminds his audience that Pharaoh persecuted both *Guðs lögum ok lýð*, that is to say, His laws *and* His people, just as the slain King Magnús has oppressed the

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608 Ibid. at pp. 152-153

Birkibeinar. It would have been easy for Sverrir to stop short at *Guðs lögum*, and in doing so to focus his metaphor more closely on how Magnús was going against the will of God. By including *Guðs lýð* - “God's people” the metaphor becomes tripartite. There are now three actors in the periphrasis:

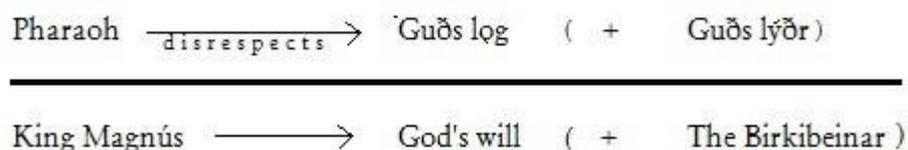


Fig. 22: Some metonymic strata in *Sverris saga*.

Not content to urge the Birkibeinar to consider themselves as analogous to the *historical* Israelites, he also prompts a sense of continuity. He hints at more than a hollow parallel. Sverrir states that “*befir æ svá fram farit í heminum*” - “such things have always happened in the world”, but more importantly “[s]vá befir ok fram farit hér í landinu” - “such things have also happened here in this country”. The message to his battle-weary audience as they stand around the grave of their enemy is emotive: “The God of the Old Testament is the God of Today. What was just then is just now. Therefore, you are not like the Israelites. You *are* the Israelites’. Such a close similitude might well have been expected to please the Birkibeinar. The name of the movement (and later the dynasty) was originally a mocking pejorative, “birch legs”, i.e. people who were so poor that they couldn't afford better shoes than birch bark bindings.<sup>609</sup> Some scholars have described the party as having a proletarian identity, authentic or affected.<sup>610</sup> Many hailed from the densely wooded regions bordering on Sweden, and in their campaign against King Magnús they traversed much of Norway south of Níðarós. The identity they constructed for themselves as underdogs, and their history of living in and passing through inhospitable regions, may well have accentuated their identification with the Israelites.

How philo-Semitic is *Sverris saga*'s alignment of Sverrir with David and the Birkibeinar with Israel? As we have seen, Israelism alone is often a precursor to anti-Jewish supercessionism. Here, the conditions of Jewish absence become pertinent. When a gentile group designates itself Israel, contemporary Jews are usually discredited. However, when that gentile group is not confronted with Jewish presence, there is far less urgency to marginalise the redundant contender. This must have been particularly true in the case of the Birkibeinar. In the midst of a violent civil war, the social fabric rending around them, it would have been an absurd digression to engage in deliberately anti-Jewish polemic in order to buttress

609 Sverre Bagge. “Birkebeiner” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. vol. 2. p. 224

610 Bagge 1996. p. 41. Egil Nygaard Brekke. “Birkebeiner” in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*. Vol. 1. pp. 600-601. Cf. the intriguing but sadly ill-informed Marxist interpretation of medieval Scandinavian social formations by: Perry Anderson. *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. (London: Verso, 1978) pp. 173-181

their claim to be *Guðs lýðr*. Sverrir is perhaps thus an early example of an orator rendered philo-Semitic by their context rather than their deepest convictions. At no point does he qualify his use of *Guðs lýðr*, as do other voices in Old Norse literature. For example, in the late medieval *Ádóníass saga* (c. 1375-139) the author writes that: [a]f Seem Nóa syne er Gydinga kyn komit. og ættar tala drottins vors. og er þat folk guðs lýðr kalladr allt til hingadburdar Kristz<sup>611</sup> - “[f]rom Shem, son of Noah, is descended the Jewish race, and the lineage of Our Lord, and that people are known as God's People [*Guðs lýðr*] all the way up until Christ was born here”. Similarly, in *Stjórn III* (c. 1300-1325) the word *Guðs lýðr* is used only to gloss where the *Historia Scholastica* (1173) sometimes in Vulgate citations, e.g. 1 Samuel 13:15, provides Latin *Israel*. In *Stjórn III*, the term is thus hermetically sealed in its ancient Israelite context, without any metaphorical allusions to, as Sverrir says, *várum dögum* - “our days”. The question of “who is the true Israel?” is accordingly left unraised. In the case of *Sverris saga*, on the other hand, the possibility is left open that *both* the Birkibeinar and the Exodus-period Jews are *Guðs lýðr*. If we could interrogate a typical Birkibeinn (or indeed the author of the post-*Grýla* section of *Sverris saga*) about their attitudes towards the Jews, the response would hardly be vociferous. The identity of the Jews as divinely favoured underdogs was clearly far more important to Sverrir than any of the anti-Semitic notions we have previously examined. The message of *Sverris saga* on this topic is basic: “we are so like the Jews that we practically are the Jews”. Any further displacement, supercessionism, qualification etc. is left absent. Read in the context of a canon which elsewhere has vocal Judaeophobic tendencies, Sverrir's apparent esteem for the tenacity of the Jews has noticeable philo-Semitic tones, as does his complacency over the possibility of being conflated with them.

A final text which ought to be briefly mentioned in this context is the *Historia de Profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam* (1192-1202). Written in Latin, it may be outside of Old Norse literature, but the man who wrote it, who names himself only *Frater X Canonicus* has commonly been reckoned to be a Norwegian, who would therefore have had West Norse as his mother tongue. “Brother X” (thought to be an abbreviation for Christianus) *har síkkert skrevet boken i Da[nmark], nær et miljø av no[rskje] emigrant-geistlige ...*<sup>612</sup> - “surely wrote the book in Denmark, close to a milieu of Norwegian *émigrés* clerics”. The *Profectione* relates the story of the wildly unsuccessful Dano-Norwegian crusade in 1191. Beset by logistical problems and shipwrecks, they did not arrive until 1192, by which point the stragglers were hardly able to act in a military capacity and instead came as civilian pilgrims. Brother X relates that: [A]llic combinati catenarum pondere captiui confessores Christi sub stimulo et uerbere, more iumentorum onusti, continua

611 *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*. vol. 3. ed. by Agnete Loth. (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963) p. 76. The dating is from: Otto J. Zitzelsberger. “Adonias saga” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia*. p. 2. Cf. Degnbol 1989-. s.v. 'guðs·lýðr'.

612 Vegard Skånland. “Profectio Danorum in Hierosolymam” in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*. vol. 13. ed. by Allan Karker. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1968) p. 476. I am grateful to Haki Antonsson for bringing the *Profectione* to my attention.

*crudelitate uexantur* ...<sup>613</sup> - “[t]here, tied up with the burden of chains, captive believers in Christ under torment and beatings die like laden mules, suffering the cruelty of persecution”. At one point, the unfortunate Scandinavians are said to be mistaken by Richard the Lionheart's men for Muslims and taken prisoner.<sup>614</sup> As might be expected from a medieval work concerning beleaguered travellers in foreign climes, Brother X deploys Old Testament typologies. Jørgen Olrik pointed out a reference to the Chaldaean invasion of Judah (2 Kings 25) and to Exodus 14 which is of particular relevance:

Vtrum magis mirari debeam, incertum habeo: mare sub undis iter siccum prebuisse, an in fluctibus absque nauis suffragio uiam patuisse. Hebreus ille quondam populus, a deo specialiter electus terram promissionis hereditaria sorte possessurus, ab Egyptia seruitute redemptus rubri maris undas miraculose diuisas arido pede transiuit; populus autem hic noster, eandem terram cooperante sibi Christi gratia a subactione Chaldaica liberaturus, super undas Oceani diebus quinque ac totidem noctibus concusso ratis solatio transeundi facultatem promeruit!

Of which I ought to be more astounded, I am not sure: that the sea has yielded a dry path beneath the waves, or that a way has opened up through the tides without the aid of a ship. The ancient Hebrew people, specially chosen by God, miraculously went with dry feet through the waves of the Red Sea, redeemed from slavery in Egypt, so that they took ownership of the promised land as their inheritance; however, our people [the Christians? Or Dano-Norwegians?], working with the grace of Christ to liberate this land from the Chaldaeans, deserved to pass over the waves of the ocean in five days and as many nights, although their ships had been lost!<sup>615</sup>

Brother X's treatment of *Hebreus ille quondam populus* is particularly interesting. There is an implication that the miracles with which God protected them in Exodus came at higher price than those which he supposedly showed to the Dano-Norwegian crusaders (much as describing the 1191 expedition as 'blessed' feels counter-intuitive to a modern reader). While the Jews had to suffer centuries of captivity in Egypt before God would intervene to help them reach The Promised Land, the crusaders needed to spend only five days adrift off the coast of Friesland before divine intervention was forthcoming. This is an overtly supercessionist strategy, clearly arguing that Old and New Israel are not on equal footing in the eyes of The Almighty.<sup>616</sup>

613 *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii aevi*. vol. 2. ed. by M. Cl. Gertz. (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, 1917) p. 489. Brother X's description of conditions for Christian pilgrims in the Holy Land is very similar to those of later accounts, e.g. Middle English “there we lay in the same grotte or caue Frydaye all day, vpon the bare, stynkyng, stable grounde, as well nyght as daye, right euyll intreated by the Maures, &c.” from: *The Pylgrymage of Sir Richard Gyllyforde*. ed. by Henry Hellis. (London: The Camden Society, 1851) p. 16.

614 *Profectione*. pp. 489-490. Olrik proposed that this case of mistaken identity might be due to Greek-speaking Varangians who wore local clothes amongst the pilgrims: *Kroniker fra Valdemarstiden*. trans. by Jørgen Olrik. (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Historiske Kildeskrifters Oversættelse, 1900-1901) p. 172, n3.

615 *Profectione*. p. 486. Olrik 1900-1901. p.167, n1-2.

616 See also: Karen Skovgaard-Petersen. *A Journey to the Promised Land. Crusading Theology in the Historia de profectione*

The provenance of the *Profectione* in a clerical, Norwegian exile setting is suggestive that it was the work of one of the many churchmen who clashed with King Sverrir Sigurðarson and therefore had to leave Norway. Sverrir was excommunicated in 1194 after years of antagonism with the Church, although he was apparently not overly disturbed by this measure.<sup>617</sup> Surprisingly, the *Profectione* treats Sverrir quite neutrally, if not positively. In chapter 14, the king greets his erstwhile enemy Sveinn Þorkelsson who has stopped in Norway en route to Jerusalem along with the rest of the crusading party. Initially afraid that Sverrir will be angered by this, Sveinn's fears prove unfounded. Sverrir welcomes Sveinn and blesses his journey. Very much in what Gjerløw called *Sverres stil*, the king can't resist the opportunity to slip in a (defective) Old Testament reference in his conciliatory oratory: *His dictis, multo sermone uirorum propositum commendabat; suadebat concordiam, horabatur ad tolerantiam: quia Moyses in lege mandauit, 'in sacrificio caudam hostie immolari', [!] id est: boni operis consummationem.*<sup>618</sup> - “After these words, there was much talk between the [two] men, and he [Sverrir] praised him [Sveinn], recommending unity and preaching patience. As Moses decreed in the laws, “in a sacrifice you should burn the tail” [!], that is to say, the completion of a task is good”. The allusion is apparently to Leviticus 3:9: “And he shall offer of the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire unto the Lord; the fat thereof, and the whole rump, it shall he take off hard by the backbone; and the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards”.

The *Profectione* then goes on to flatter Sverrir: *nihil in principe magis honestum clementia.*<sup>619</sup> - “nothing makes a leader more distinguished than mercy”. On the grounds of this rather generous treatment, it is far from fanciful to suggest that Brother X might have been seeking a degree of rapprochement with the Norwegian monarch. Nonetheless, the *Profectione* is by no means a complete ideological capitulation. We might wonder whether Brother X intended the faulty citation from Leviticus as a subtle mockery of Sverrir's Old Testament tastes, and his position at the head of a faction which was proud of its rustic roots. Indeed, the narrator does go on to supplement (or perhaps to counter) the incorrect quotation from Leviticus with his own, accurate reference to the New Testament, namely Matthew 24:13: *Qui perseuerauerit usque in finem, hic saluus erit.*<sup>620</sup> The *Profectione*'s supercessionism might similarly be a muted criticism of Sverrir and his *Birkibeinar*, suitably subtle to retain the possibility of a warming in relations while stopping short of a full concession. By identifying the Dano-Norwegian crusaders as the New Israel, and explicitly discrediting the *Hebreus quondam populus*, Brother X covertly undermines the

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Danorum in Hierosolymam (c. 1200). (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2001) pp. 60-62

617 For background, see: Erik Gunnes. *Kongens ære. Kongemakt og kirke i 'En tale mot biskopene'*. (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1971) pp. 269-317.

618 *Profectione*. p. 479. The reference to Leviticus is also pointed out by: Olrik 1900-1901. p. 156, n2.

619 Ibid.

620 Ibid.

Birkibeinar's own claim to be *Guds lýðr*, and brings their lax tendency towards philo-Semitism into sharp relief.

### Who was Brandr Jónsson?

Brandr Jónsson was born at some point circa the years 1202-1205, to Jón Sigmundarson and Halldóra Arnórsdóttir.<sup>621</sup> He was born into the Svínfelling clan, which controlled eastern Iceland, and raised at their ancestral seat, Svínafell. For the year 1232 *Konungsannáll* records the *Vítkvæma Gízzvra Þorvaldssonar ok Brandr Jónssonar*.<sup>622</sup> - “Return [to Iceland] of Gizurr Þorvaldsson and Brandr Jónsson”. As Finnur Jónsson and Tryggvi Þorhallson noted, the purpose for his sojourn abroad is very much likely to have been study.<sup>623</sup> Tryggvi further postulated that Brandr might have been educated as a young man by Hallr Gizurarson, the abbot of Munkaþverá monastery. As Hallr died in 1230, it is reasonable to conjecture that c. 1230 – 1232 were the years that Brandr spent studying abroad. Where is not known, although England, France and Norway are all strong possibilities. At some point between 1232 and 1237 he must have been consecrated into the priesthood. In 1238 he was made acting bishop of Skálholt, pending the arrival of the newly consecrated Norwegian, Bishop Sigvarðr Þéttmársson (d. 1268).<sup>624</sup> In 1247, he was made abbot of Þykkvabær, the Augustinian monastery in southern Iceland.<sup>625</sup> He fulfilled the role of a temporary *officialis* at Skálholt again from 1250-1254, when Bishop Sigvarðr was back in Norway. In 1252 he is said to have received a delegation led by Heinrekr Kársson, bishop of Hólar, the neighbouring diocese. In this context, *Svínfellinga saga* describes him as *fyrir kenni-mönnum um alla biskups-sýslu Sigvarðar biskups*<sup>626</sup> - “the foremost of all the scholars in Bishop Sigvarðr's diocese”.

Alongside ecclesiastical pursuits, Brandr also frequently acted a mediator in the increasingly destructive feuds that consumed Iceland during the *Sturlungaöld* (c. 1220-1262). Like Snorri goði (d. 1031) two centuries prior, he seems to have had an impressive ability to act as an intercessor in violent disputes, and to have brought about a number of peace agreements normally avoiding partisan politics himself. *Svínfellinga saga* describes him as: *ágætr höfðingi, klerker góðr, vitr ok vinsæll, ríkr ok góðgjarn; hann hafði mannheill mikla*.<sup>627</sup> - “an excellent chieftain, a good cleric, clever and popular, powerful and benevolent. He

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621 The estimate of Brandr's birth is provided by: Tryggvi Þorhallson. “Brandur Jónsson biskup á Hólum”, *Skírnir* 97 (1936) p. 47.

622 *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*. ed. by Gustav Storm (Christiania: Grøndahl & Søns Bogtrykkeri, 1888) p. 129.

623 Tryggvi 1936. p. 48. Finnur Jónsson. *Den Oldnorske og Oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*. vol. 2. (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1923) p. 862.

624 Jón Sigurðsson. Notes to *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. vol. 1. ed. by Jón Sigurðsson. (Copenhagen: S. L. Möllers, 1857-1876) p. 519.

625 Th. Bjarnarson. “Brandr J.” in *Kirke-Leksikon for Norden*. vol. 2. ed. by Fredrik Nielsen. (Aarhus: Forlaget for Kirke-Leksikon, 1904) p. 676.

626 *Saga Svínfellinga; or, Saga Orms Sona in Sturlunga Saga*. vol. 2. ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1878) p. 101. Henceforth cited as *Svínfellinga saga*.

627 *Svínfellinga saga*. p. 83.

was much beloved by the people”. However, like Snorri goði, his mediations were not always successful. What must have been a particularly painful failure for Brandr came in 1252, when his brother-in-law Ögmundur Helgason (d. 1255) broke a truce agreement and brutally murdered Brandr's nephews, Sæmundr and Guðmundr Ormsson. According to *Svínfellinga saga*, Ögmundur's men at Kirkjubær did not bury his nephews' bodies until Brandr arrived, presumably so he could see them for himself : *Vóru þeir bræðr þá jarðaðir, ok stóð hann yfir grepta þeirra.*<sup>628</sup> - “Then the brothers were buried, and he stood over their grave”.

When Bishop Heinrekr died in 1260, Brandr was well placed to succeed him, excelling as he did both in learning and popularity.<sup>629</sup> To this end, he departed for Norway in 1262, and was consecrated bishop of Hólar that winter. It was during his brief time abroad that he is thought to have translated Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis* to create the Old Norse *Alexanders saga*, and to have compiled *Gyðinga saga*.<sup>630</sup> If so, this would have been an extraordinarily prolific year for Brandr. Perhaps a year away from his monastic responsibilities and the incessant mediations he provided during the civil strife back in Iceland gave him a chance to exercise fully his intellect. He arrived back in Iceland in the spring of 1263, but had little time to enjoy his new position. Brandr died in the summer of 1264, probably in his late fifties or early sixties.

It is known that he had a son, named Þorsteinn. His progeny makes two appearances in the Old Norse corpus, once in *Árna saga biskups* where it is written that the young Árni Þorláksson (b. 1237, d. 1298) moved between Skál, Kirkjubær *en stundum at Kálfafelli með Þorsteini ábótasyni*<sup>631</sup> - “and sometimes at Kálfafell with Þorsteinn the Abbot's son”. The second attestation is in the fragmentary *Biskupa Ættir*, (1300s) where it is recorded simply that *Þorsteinn var son Brands biskups, er átti Jófríði Brandsdóttur Árnasonar.*<sup>632</sup> Jón Sigurðsson hypothesizes that Þorsteinn was born either when Brandr was made abbot of Þykkvabær or prior.<sup>633</sup> This is a broad timescale, and it probably errs somewhat on the side of lateness. The reference in *Árna saga biskups* puts Þorsteinn in a list of people with whom the young Árni spent time at each farmstead, beginning with Brandr Jónsson himself, then following on to then-children who seemed to be roughly the same age as Árni, namely Helgi Loftsson (b. c. 1227) and Grímr Hólmsteinsson (fl. 1255, d. 1298). Þorsteinn comes last. If Þorsteinn were a guardian to Árni, as Brandr was, then Jón's dating would be rather too late. Þorsteinn would need to have been born before

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628 Ibid. at p. 99.

629 Jón 1857-1876. p. 520.

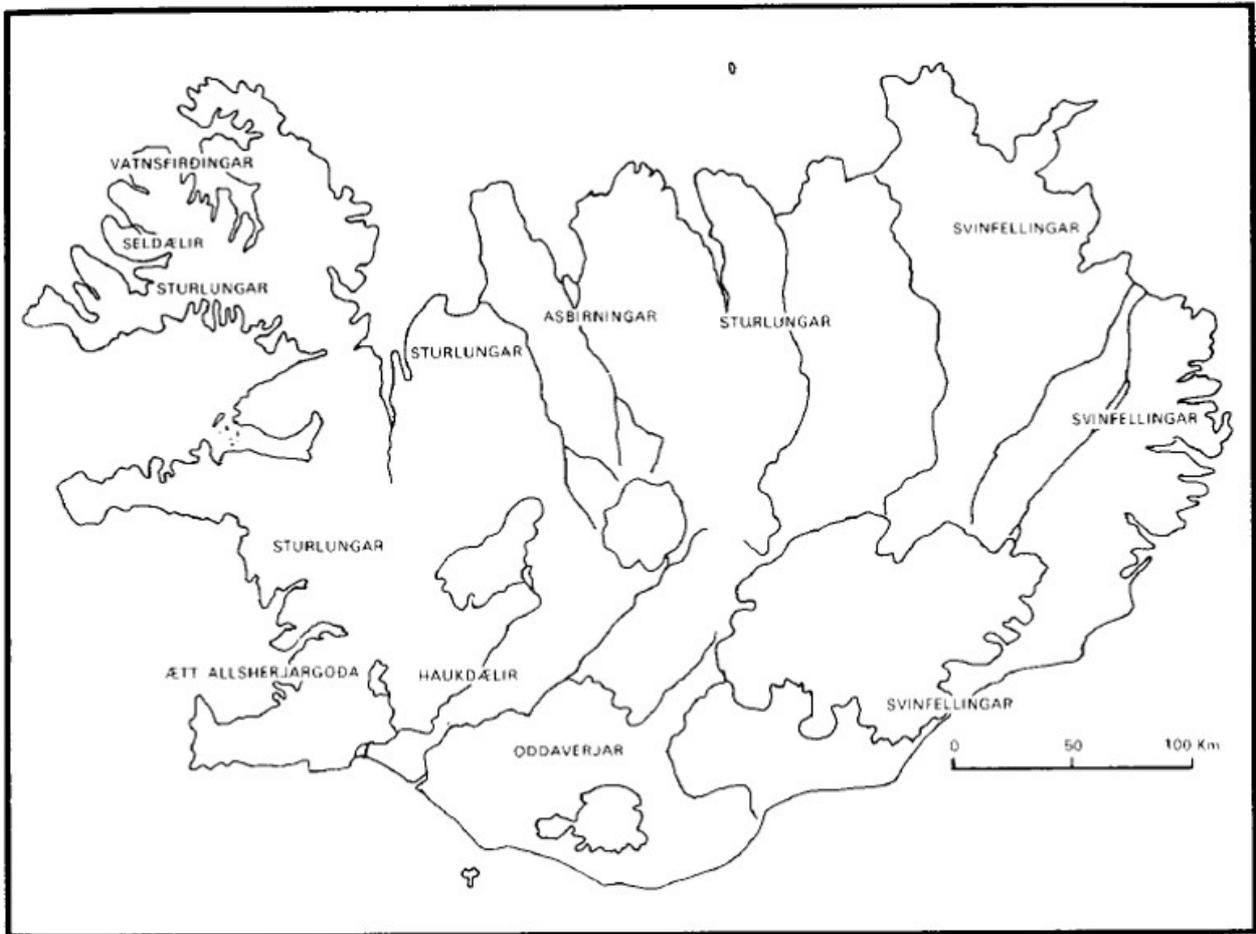
630 Kirsten Wolf. “Alexanders saga” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 8. See also by the same author: “An Old Norse Record of Jewish History”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 77, 1 (1986) p. 53.

631 *ÁBp.* p. 6.

632 *Biskupa Ættir* in *ibid.* at p. 459.

633 Jón 1857-1876. p. 520.

his father even left to study abroad. However, if Þorsteinn were instead a play-mate for Árni, as the arrangement of the list rather suggests, then we should seek a date for his birth somewhere in the late 1220s to 1230s (excepting Brandr's sojourn abroad), as in the case of Helgi and Grímr.



**Fig. 23:** Territories of the Icelandic clans in the first half of the thirteenth century. From: Gunnar Karlsson. “Frá Þjóðveldi til Konungsríkis” in *Saga Íslands*. vol. 2. ed. by Sigurður Línal (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélagið & Sögufélagið, 1975) p. 37.

This is the chronology of Brandr's life. The next order of questioning is to attempt to use this admittedly bare framework to ascertain something of his background and character. One element which is often brought to the fore in short biographies of Brandr is his aristocratic lineage. As previously noted, Brandr was a member of the Svínfelling clan. They took their name from their ancestral seat in Eastern Iceland, which Ormr Jónsson I (d. 1193), the progenitor of the clan, had inhabited in the late twelfth century. From this base, they had established control of the entire Austfirðingafjórðungr (“Quarter of the East Fjords”) by the 1220s. Thence the clan became an alliance of two sub-polities, the Svínfellingar at Skaftafellsþing, who were ruled by direct descendants of Ormr Jónsson II (d. 1241), and the Svínfellingar at Muláþing, who were ruled by descendants of Ormr's

brother, Þórarin Jónsson (d. 1239).<sup>634</sup> The east of Iceland was remote and inaccessible. These qualities made it an easily defensible – or perhaps simply rather uninviting – homeland for the Svínfellingar. Throughout the tumultuous thirteenth century, there was not a single territorial incursion.<sup>635</sup>

A common theme in scholarship concerning the Svínfellingar is to emphasise their power and prominence, e.g. Tryggvi: *Brandur Jónsson var kominn af hinum ríkustu og göfgustu ættum*.<sup>636</sup> - “Brandur Jónsson was from the most powerful and noble lineages”. Lars Lönnroth echoes this sentiment: “during the last decades of the thirteenth century, southeastern Iceland, and indeed a good deal more, was dominated by one very old and very powerful family, the Svínfellings”.<sup>637</sup> However, there is some reason to reconsider this perception. It is certainly true that the Svínfellingar produced several important historical figures. As we have seen, there was Bishop Árni Þorláksson, who resolved the *staðamál* in the late thirteenth century and so massively increased the land-holdings of the Icelandic church, was a Svínfellingr. Nonetheless, while their eastern homelands provided a secure powerbase, the power which could be projected thence was inherently limited. There was some good farmland to be had, particularly in the more southerly areas controlled by the Skaftafellsþing wing of the Svínfellingar.<sup>638</sup> However, significant amounts of land were either covered by the glacier Vatnajökull, or were incapable of yielding even grass.<sup>639</sup> Compared to the comparatively fertile gently undulating plains of south-west Iceland, controlled by the Haukdælir, Oddaverjar and Sturlungar clans, the lot of the Svínfellingar was decidedly unimpressive.

A second, perhaps graver, territorial problem which the Svínfellingar faced was sparsity of population. Precise numbers for the medieval period are hard to come by, although it is thought that the Austfirðingafjórðungur was from the Age of Settlement onwards the least populated area.<sup>640</sup> Certainly, when reliable statistics first began in 1703, the lands held by the Svínfellingar during the medieval period contained just 5,186 inhabitants – the second lowest population of all the Icelandic municipalities.<sup>641</sup> In the entirety of Iceland in 1311, there were 3,812 taxable farmers (perhaps 4,500 heads of farming households including non-taxables).<sup>642</sup> These cannot have been distributed evenly between each quarter, as the vast majority of usable land was in the south-west, but if we speculate that

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634 Gunnar Karlsson. *The History of Iceland*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) p. 73.

635 Gunnar 1974. p. 35.

636 Tryggvi 1936. p. 47.

637 Lönnroth 1976. p. 175.

638 Jesse Byock. *Medieval Iceland. Society, Sagas, and Power*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) p. 81.

639 For a concise overview concerning the issue of viable topsoil in Iceland, see: Árni Daniel Júlíusson *et al. Íslenskur Sögu Atlas*. (Reykjavík: Almenna Bókafélagið) pp. 50-51.

640 *Ibid.* at p. 44.

641 Guðmundur Jónsson & Magnús S. Magnússon. *Hagskinna. Sögulegar þagtolur um Ísland*. (Reykjavík: Hagstofa Íslands, 1997) pp. 87-88. The census was in part carried out by the famous manuscript collector, Árni Magnússon.

642 Magnús Stefánsson. “Iceland” in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopaedia*. p. 312.

as many as 12% of these farmers lived under Svínfellingar control, we can propose the extremely rough estimate that by the time of Brandr's death there were c. 500 farming households in the Austfirðingafjórðungr, give or take a few hundred. Given that the Sturlungar were able to assemble over 1,000 able bodied fighting men at relatively short notice for the battle of Örlyggistaðir in 1238, it is clear that the Svínfellingar lacked the manpower necessary to mount any kind of offensive action.<sup>643</sup>

The Svínfellingar did not survive and prosper through military force or wealth derived from agricultural production. Rather, it would appear that their remote homeland gave them an underlying security, and that their successes, quite disproportionate to their economic base, were achieved through learning and shrewd political manoeuvres. Svínfellingr clerics such as Brandr and Árni achieved prominence in ecclesiastical politics not so much because they came from “good families”, but because they were respected for their learning and/or their apparent commitment to their religious vocation. Compared to the “big three” (the Haukdælir, Oddaverjar and Sturlungar) the Svínfellingar were a marginal faction, who thrived mostly by cleverly negotiating their way through the struggles of the major players in Icelandic politics. Brandr must have been aware of this reality. Indeed, as abbot of Þykkvabær, and later briefly bishop of Hólar, he exhibited a commitment both to the spiritual life and to the struggles of inter-clan relations. That he took his clerical vocation seriously is not only attested in his excellent translations from Latin into the vernacular, but also by the fact that according to *Árna saga biskups* he ran a school at Þykkvabær where he taught Biblical exegesis.<sup>644</sup> In *Svínfellinga saga*, we can observe the other aspect of Brandr's professional profile, where he acts as a typical Commonwealth-era mediator in the feud between Qgmundr and Sæmundr.

This leads us to the question of how we might perceive Brandr's religious versus worldly identity. Ought we to imagine Brandr as a man of the cloth, a tonsured abbot who was dragged into secular politics somewhat reluctantly? Or perhaps instead he should be considered as a primarily secular actor, strategically placed in a position of pretend piety by a society that had little regard for the sanctity of religious institutions? *Sturlungaöld* chieftains had a very firm grip on the Icelandic church through their retention of clan-affiliated 'pet clerics'.<sup>645</sup> It was common for chieftains to ordain members of their retinue. These retainers did not usually take up any kind of clerical duties. Instead, their new religious title was a rather pretentious affectation of moral fibre or power, perhaps a token of the esteem in which they were held by their patron. For example, *Árna saga biskups* relates the case of one Oddi, a Haukdælir henchman of Gizurr Þorvaldsson, who had been made a deacon but apparently had no

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643 Árni Daniél 1997. pp. 98-99.

644 *ÁBp.* p. 7.

645 Byock 1990. p. 158.

pastoral role, and indeed cohabited with his wife expressly against the ruling by Brandr and Heinrekr that no deacons should take wives.<sup>646</sup> Brandr was clearly no religious fanatic. Despite being an abbot of an Augustinian house, he apparently felt no obligation to observe the Rule's obligation to celibacy himself. Nonetheless, he was also no Oddi. As previously mentioned, he taught the interpretation of the Bible. As we shall see, his works exhibit an exceptional sensitivity to religious problems.

It is sensible to picture Brandr as marginally closer to the secular than to the spiritual world. The existence of Þorsteinn Ábótason would surely have rather damaged his credibility for counselling any of his monks who were suffering sexual doubts, and yet Þorsteinn's paternity was hardly kept secret. We might note in passing that Þorsteinn's mother was almost certainly not of particularly high-birth. Had she been of any social consequence, the sources would surely have furnished us with her name. So too would Þorsteinn have probably gone on to leave more of a mark on history. As it is, he marries Jófríðr, herself otherwise obscure, and then disappears into the mists of time. Wherever Brandr met the mother of his child, it was probably not the sort of context in which a promising young cleric ought to have been circulating. However he met her, what transpired between them was certainly not the actions of a conventionally pious medieval man. The Svínfellingar may well have intended Brandr to attain a position of power in the Icelandic church (after all, they had no capacity for their young men to become great military strategists or farming magnates). Sending him to study abroad would have been a sound preparation for parachuting him into a position of ecclesiastical authority. The image that emerges of Brandr once all these factors are taken into account is that of a man destined for the priesthood, where neither those who intended it nor Brandr himself were overly concerned with how closely he adhered to the model abbot. In the process of being educated for this role, a formidable intellect, capable and curious, was woken. Brandr's school and his mastery of the Maccabean era illustrates his deep commitment to Christian learning, but he never entirely transitioned into the life of a churchman. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir sums up the various dimensions of Brandr's personality as so: *Brandur ábóti var af ætt Svínfellinga, lærður á kirkjunnar lög, sáttleitinn tignarmaður, gjörkunnugur valdaprætum Sturlungaaldar og mikilmennum veraldarsögunnar.*<sup>647</sup> - "Abbot Brandr was of the lineage of the Svínfellingar, learned in the laws of the church, a true man of distinction, thoroughly familiar with the power struggles of the *Sturlungaöld* and of the great figures of the history of the world". We might condense these words of praise into an even more concise evaluation of his character: Brandr had the title and occupation of the church, but the life and learning of the world.

### Establishing and contesting Brandr's works

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646 *ÁBp*, pp. 9-11.

647 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. Formáli to *Biskupa sögur*: vol. 3. p. xiii.

Named authors in Old Norse literature are treasured phenomena. They tend to attract scholarly conflict accordingly. Once a name, perhaps even with an outline of a personality attached, has been securely identified, works tend to gravitate towards them. It is then left to scholars to detach or re-append these attributions. This is quite true in Brandr's case, and such a sizeable sum of scholarship has been supplied on this subject that sadly space does not allow for a full investigation of each candidate in his potential *oeuvre*. Indeed, doing so would warrant a separate and substantial study. Nonetheless, for our purposes a delimitation of 'the Brandrian corpus' is obviously necessary, and so key tendencies in this scholarly line of investigation are sketched out here. Over time, the following works have been attributed to Brandr:

- 1) *Alexanders saga*. A prose translation of Walter de Châtillon's *Alexandreis* (1100s).
  
- 2) *Gyðinga saga*. A compilation of translations from 1 & 2 Maccabees, the *Historia Scholastica* (c. 1173) by Peter Comestor, and apocryphal legends. There is also influence from Josephus's *De Bello Judaico* (c. 75) and *Antiquitates Judaicae* (c. 93). Original additions are also interspersed.<sup>648</sup>
  
- 3) *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*. A short but well-structured *Íslendingasaga* telling the tale of Hrafnkell Hallfreðarson, a proud and cantankerous chieftain. Hrafnkell murders the shepherd Einarr Þorbjarnarson for riding his sacred horse, Freyfaxi. Þorbjörn, Einarr's father, enlists the support of his nephew Sámr Bjarnason to seek vengeance against Hrafnkell. With help from outsiders, Sámr captures Hrafnkell, confiscates his land, and exiles him to the east of Iceland. After six years, Hrafnkell has recovered enough power to get revenge on Sámr. Returning west, Hrafnkell kills Sámr's brother, Eyvindr, and captures Sámr himself. Sámr spends the rest of his days living as Frankel's disgruntled minion.
  
- 4) *Stjórn II-III*. Translations from the Vulgate Pentateuch and the *Historia Scholastica*.
  
- 5) *Konungs skuggsjá*. An Old Norse contribution to the *specula principum* tradition, composed during the reign of King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217-1263), probably for one of his sons, perhaps Magnús (later King Magnús Lagabætir r. 1263-1280).<sup>649</sup> The text contains treatments of matters as diverse as laws, manners, geography, weaponry, Old Testament

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648 Kirsten Wolf. "The Sources of *Gyðinga saga*", *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 105 (1990) pp. 140-155.

649 Ludvig Holm-Olsen. "Konungs skuggsjá" in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*. p. 366.

*exempla* and woodwoses. Amongst many other sources, the author draws on Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hibernica* (c. 1188).

Of all these, *Alexanders saga* and *Gyðinga saga* are the two attributions that have retained widespread support. They both derive from the same source. The closing words of *Gyðinga saga* read:

Þessa bok færði hinn heilagi Jeronimus prestr or ebresku máli ok í latínu. Enn or latínu ok í norrænu sneri brandr prestr ions son. er sidan var byskup at holum. ok sua alexandro magno. eptir bodi virduligs herra. herra magnusar kongs. Sonar hakonar kongs gamla<.> Nu lykr þar þessi sögu. Ok hafi þeir þock er hlyddu. Enn sa gialldi æigi sem las edr skrifadi<.><sup>650</sup>

This book was translated by the priest St. Jerome out of the Hebrew language and into Latin. Then it was translated from Latin and into Norse by the priest Brandr Jónsson, who later was bishop of Hólar, and also [translated] *Alexander Magnus* at the behest of that noble lord, Lord Magnús the King, the son of King Hákon the Old. Now this saga ends, and thanks be to those who listened, and let there be no blame on those who read or wrote it.

There is no corresponding explication in the oldest manuscript traditions of *Alexanders saga*, which closes anonymously: *Nu gengr sol íegi segir meistare Galterus við orðen þess[e tìðende]. lycr hann þar at segia fra Alexandro magno. Oc sva er snuet hefìr ísina tungu.*<sup>651</sup> - “Now the sun sets, says Master Walter, and with these words he draws the telling of *Alexander Magnus* to an end, as does the one who translated this saga into his own language”. A later manuscript, AM 226 fol. (1350-1360) names Brandr: ... *er snuet hefìr Brandr byskup Ionsson er snòri þessi sögu or latínu ok inorrænu.*<sup>652</sup> - “... as Bishop Brandr Jónsson translated, he who translated this saga from Latin and into Norse”. These are the only medieval traditions which explicitly attach Brandr, although some scholars have not accepted the attributions at face value. For example, David Ashurst refers to the mind behind *Alexanders saga* as “the Old Norse translator”, as strictly speaking “it is not certain that the saga is the work of Brandr Jónsson”.<sup>653</sup> Such caution is far from paranoid. After all, medieval authorship preserves far less incidental evidence than later modes of literary production. That said, an exhaustive stylistic analysis by Wolf concludes that “stylistic criteria are not adequate to say that [Alexanders saga] and [Gyðinga saga] are by two translators”.<sup>654</sup> As shall be

650 Brandr Jónsson. *Gyðinga saga*. ed. by Kirsten Wolf. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1995) pp. 219-220. Henceforth cited as *Gyð*.

651 Brandr Jónsson. *Alexanders saga. Islandske Oversættelse ved Brandr Jónsson (Biskop til Holar [sic] 1263-64)*. ed. by Finnur Jónsson. (Copenhagen: Gylendalske Boghandel, 1925) p. 155. Henceforth cited as *Alex*.

652 Ibid.

653 David Ashurst. *The Ethics of Empire in the Saga of Alexander the Great. A study based on MS AM 519a 4to*. (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2009) p. 26. A thorough overview of positions on the authorship of *Alexanders saga* also provided at: pp. 31-37.

654 Kirsten Wolf. “Gyðinga saga, Alexanders saga, and Bishop Brandr Jónsson”, *Scandinavian Studies* 60, 3 (1988) p. 396.

seen, there are also thematic connections between the two texts which support the proposition that they were the work of one mind, and indeed that *Alexanders saga* probably preceded *Gyðinga saga*.<sup>655</sup>

The theory that Brandr wrote *Hrafnkels saga* (henceforth called by its Icelandic sobriquet *Hrafnkatla*) was advanced by Hermann Pálsson.<sup>656</sup> One aspect of his argument which has not stood the test of time were the supposed stylistic similarities he observed between *Hrafnkatla*, *Alexanders saga* and *Gyðinga saga*. A quantitative study by Wolf has largely dismantled these parallelisms.<sup>657</sup> The central plank of Hermann's theory has fared a little better. This is the similarity between the events Brandr witnessed in *Svínfellinga saga* on the one hand and the events of *Hrafnkatla* on the other. According to Hermann, the saga could be read as a *roman à clef* or *dæmisaga*, where Ogmundr equals Hrafnkell, and the murdered brothers Sæmundr and Guðmundr are represented by Sámr and Eyvindr. There are obvious holes in the *dæmisaga* theory, not least of them that Sámr survives to live a life of shame, while Sæmundr was beheaded. Henry Kratz argued that “the events described ...which Pálsson cites as parallels to events in the *Hrafnkels saga* are really no parallels at all except in Pálsson's overly active imagination”, although Kratz's claim to sturdy realism is perhaps undermined by his counterproposal that *Hrafnkatla* is inspired by a now lost canon of Eddic poetry on medieval Icelandic themes.<sup>658</sup> How historical is *Svínfellinga saga* in any case? In the interests of balance, let us quote Hermann's parallelist approach at its strongest:

In *Hrafnkel's Saga*, Eyvind and his men wear coloured clothing; from [*Svínfellinga saga*] we know precisely how Sæmund and his brother Gudmund were attired: Sæmund was wearing a red and green tunic, and Gudmund a blue one, and each of them had a cloak of different colour. This detail is worth noticing since we know that Abbot Brand saw his nephews' bodies the day they were killed, and their elegant clothing is not likely to have slipped his memory easily.<sup>659</sup>

Wolf's demolition of any kind of stylistic similarity between *Hrafnkatla* and Brandr's accepted works is unanswerable. At the same time, Hermann's observation that *Hrafnkatla* resonates in some ways with Brandr's own experience is also impossible to discredit unequivocally. This scholarly stasis is in some ways evocative of the debate over whether Snorri Sturluson wrote *Egils saga*, where the biographical argument is compelling but a lack of plausible medieval attribution makes it utterly impossible to

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655 On this chronology, see *ibid.* at pp. 371-373.

656 First proposed in: Hermann Pálsson. *Hrafnkels saga og Freysgyðingar*. (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1962) esp. pp. 41-54.

Subsequently, by the same author: *Síðfræði Hrafnkels sögu*. (Reykjavík: Heimskringla, 1966) pp. 20-21, 31-32, 44, 72, 94, 102, 123-126. Further: *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga*. (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1971) esp. pp. 10-15

657 Kirsten Wolf. “On the Authorship of *Hrafnkels saga*”, *Arkiv för Nordiske Filologi* 106 (1991) pp. 104-122

658 Henry Kratz. “Poetry and Truth: The Poetic Source of *Hrafnkels saga*” in *Weg der Worte. Festschrift für Wolfgang Fleischbauer*. ed. by Donald C. Riechel. (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1978) p. 208.

659 Hermann Pálsson. Introduction to *Hrafnkel's Saga and other Icelandic stories*. trans. by Hermann Pálsson. (London: Penguin Books, 1971) p. 30.

substantiate.<sup>660</sup> For the foreseeable future, it will remain hazardous to include *Hrafnkatla* in any survey of Brandr's work, and it will not be considered as such here. For our purposes the only contribution that could perhaps be made to this debate is to enhance Hermann's perception of references to the Old Testament in *Hrafnkatla*, e.g. when Hrafnkell forbids Einarr to ride the horse Freyfaxi:

“En þó vil ek skilja á við þik einn hlut sem aðra smalamenn mína. Freyfaxi gengr í dalnum fram með liði sinu. Honum skaltu umsjá veita vetr ok sumar. En varnað býð ek þér á einum hlut: Ek vil, at þú komir aldri á bak honum, hversu mikil nauðsyn sem þér er á, því at ek hefi hér allmikil um mælt at þeim manni skylda ek at bana verða, sem honum ríði. Honum flygja tólf hross. Hvert, sem þú vilt af þeim hafa á nótt eða deg, skulu þér til reiði.”<sup>661</sup>

“And I want to make one thing clear to you as I do to my other shepherds. Freyfaxi goes around the dale together with the others. You should tend to him both winter and summer. And I offer you a warning on this one point: I wish that you should never ride him, no matter how much need you might be in, because I have sworn a great oath that I will be the death of the man who rides him. Twelve horses follow him. Whether it be night or day, you may ride one of these”

while Genesis reads:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:16-17)

Hermann also drew attention to a possible Biblical allusion via the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*.<sup>662</sup> There Job says “*getec aþat hegómi mikill es þar hefer á trúal*”<sup>663</sup> - “I consider that a great a vanity to belief in such a thing”. This is a modified reference to Job 15:31: “Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompence”. Moreover, it chimes with Hrafnkell's pronouncement that “*Ek bygg þat hegóma at trúá á goð*”<sup>664</sup> - “I think it a vanity to believe in the gods”. If these, and others like them, are indeed deliberate allusions to the Old Testament, it would be highly expedient for Hermann's hypothesis to connect them to Brandr. He is, after all, the only proposed saga-author who we know taught Biblical exegesis. His treatment of the Maccabees also suggests no little esteem for the literature and history of

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660 A stimulating but hardly non-partisan overview of this debate is provided by: Torfi. H. Tulinius. *Skáldið í skrifinni. Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga*. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2004) pp. 167-177.

661 *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* in *Austfirðinga sǫgur*. ed. by Jón Jóhannesson (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1950) pp. 101-102. Henceforth cited as *Hrafnkatla*. This parallel is proposed in: Hermann 1971. pp. 47-48.

662 Hermann Pálsson. “Átrúnaður Hrafnkels Freysgoða”, *Skírnir* 142 (1968) pp. 68-72.

663 “De sancto Michaele et omniun angelorum” in *Homilíubók*. p. 98.

664 *Hrafnkatla*. p. 124.

the Jewish people. If he were to write *Íslendingasaga*, there is no reason to suppose that he should have kept these interests compartmentalised. Ultimately of course this remains pure speculation. The proposition that Brandr wrote *Hrafnkatla* has not been entirely disproved, and retains a great degree of poetic attractiveness, but it will not be accepted here.

While *Hrafnkatla* has always been something of an outlier, *Stjórn II & III* were once quite widely attributed to Brandr.<sup>665</sup> There were not insubstantial grounds for a preliminary assumption of his involvement in Old Testament medleys. His familiarity with the *Historia Scholastica* is evident from *Gyðinga saga*. So too is an apparent interest in the tribulations of ancient Israel. Furthermore, *Stjórn* appears to have originated in Norway before being transmitted to Norway. Brandr, of course, is one of the named personalities who we know operated in both spheres. There are three “*Stjórnir*”, anatomised by Wolf following Unger as follows:

StjI: Genesis-Exodus 18 with additions drawn from Comestor's [*Historia Scholastica*], Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, and from other sources; StjII: Exodus 19-Deuteronomy; StjIII: Joshua-2 Kings, augmented with matter drawn from the *Imago Mundi* and *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Honorius Augustodunensis, the *Liber Exceptionum* of Richard of St. Victor, and possibly Comestor's [*Historia Scholastica*]<sup>666</sup>

The prologue to *Stjórn I* contains a dedication to King Hákon Magnússon (r. 1299-1319): *þessa bok let snara hakon konungr hinn koronoda or latinu er heiter heilagra manna blomstr*<sup>667</sup> - “King Hákon the Coronated had this book translated from Latin, which is called The Flowers of Saints”. Obviously, this makes it impossible that Brandr might have had a hand therein. *Stjórn II* is a close translation of the Pentateuch with no use of external sources, making it rather inscrutable to date *ipso facto*. However, its function as a “bridge”, joining Exodus 19 to Deuteronomy, and therefore *Stjórn I* to *Stjórn III*, means it is necessarily dependant on the dating of *Stjórn III*. Obviously, a junction between the two works becomes necessary only once both exist. Fortunately, *Stjórn III*, being longer and containing more variegated sources, was more open to comparison with other works attributed to the abbot. Having accepted *Gyðinga saga* as an authentic Brandr production, Wolf brought her formidable skills in statistical stylistic studies to bear once again:

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665 For a historical overview beginning with Guðbrandur Vigfússon, see: Reidar Astås. *Et Bibelverk fra Middelalderen. Studier i Stjórn I*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tønsberg: Nettutgave ved Reidar Astås, 2000) pp. 24-34. See also: Kirsten Wolf. “Brandr Jónsson and *Stjórn*”, *Scandinavian Studies* 62, 2 (1990) pp. 166-168.

666 Wolf 1990. p. 164. See also: Reidar Astås. Innledning to *Stjórn*. vol. 1. ed. by Reidar Astås. (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 2009) pp. xviii-xxxi.

667 *Stjórn*. vol. 1. p. 3.

The differences between StjIII and [*Gyðinga saga*] clearly outweigh the similarities, and it seems reasonable to assume – with Hallberg – that they cannot be ascribed to the same translator. The suggestion ... [that Brandr Jónsson] was revising an already existing Norse translation and not translating from the Latin could explain the stylistic differences (and similarities) between StjIII and GS. Nonetheless, with no medieval statements to that effect and with no evidence other than style, one must “remove” from Brandr Jónsson the postulated responsibility for, or involvement in, StjIII and limit his literary activities to GS and AS.<sup>668</sup>

It is certainly true that there is not much reason to impute a connection with *Stjórn* to Brandr once the question of style has been negatively resolved. Brandr was, after all, just one of many authors who worked in a Norwegian-Icelandic milieu, cf. Snorri Sturluson. Indeed, Brandr was only in Norway for a very short period, making attribution on these grounds alone a substantially less attractive prospect. The prologue to *Stjórn I* also suggests a much later date, and once one section has been ruled out, pushing *Stjórn II & III* further back in time in order to postulate an association with Brandr requires evidence which is simply not available. Indeed, there is at least one more plausible candidate than Brandr. Didrik Arup Seip and later Reidar Astås suggested the Dominican Jón Halldórsson (d. 1339), raised in Norway and later made bishop of Skálholt in 1322.<sup>669</sup> He had studied abroad and had a keen interest in *exempla*.<sup>670</sup> For all the reasons hitherto outlined, to permit *Stjórn* its later, post-Brandr date seems sensible. Thus, none of the *Stjórnir* will be attributed to the abbot for the purposes of this examination.

The final text to be considered here is *Konungs Skuggsjá*. An attribution to Brandr was proposed by Ian Kirby on grounds of circumstance (i.e. being written in Norway in the middle of the thirteenth century) and of certain similarities with *Stjórn III*, which as we have seen has often been connected with the abbot. Kirby sums up his reasoning as so:

Who, at the court of Hákon Hákonsson round about 1260, is likely to have produced a revision of an ur-[*Konungs Skuggsjá*] ... what sort of man was he? ... The [*Konungs Skuggsjá*] reviser must certainly have been 'a learned man, a clerk'; a man with an exceptionally thorough knowledge of *Stjórn III*, to quote from it as he appears to do; very much a 'king's man', and in particular in no doubt as to the right relationship

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668 Wolf 1990. p. 185. The reference to Hallberg is: Peter Hallberg. “Några språkdrag i Alexanders saga och Gyðinga saga – med en utblick på *Stjórn*” in *Sjöúin Ráttgerðir. Helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*. vol. 1. ed. by Einar G. Petursson & Jónas Kristjánsson. (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977) pp. 234-250.

669 Didrik Arup Seip. Introduction to *Stjórn. AM 227 fol. A Norwegian version of the Old Testament transcribed in Iceland*. (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1856) p. 8. Astås 2000. esp. pp. 56-57

670 See: Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson. “The Life and Literary Legacy of Jón Halldórsson, Bishop of Skálholt: A Profile of a Preacher in Fourteenth Century Iceland”, unpublished MPhil thesis, University of St. Andrews (1996) pp. 126-131

between king and bishop, demonstrated in particular by the very last response in [*Konungs Skuggsjá*] as we have it, which cites the example of Abiathar to demonstrate that in certain circumstances the king had the right to punish a bishop (the view, perhaps, of a man who had not yet become one); a man so capable that generations of scholars could accept his revision as an original, unified work. *Who else indeed, but Brandr Jónsson himself!*<sup>671</sup>

Although for our purposes *Stjórn III* is considered to postdate Brandr, the hypothesis that *Konungs Skuggsjá* might be his work remains tenable, albeit still unprovable. There is a profusion of Old Testament *exempla* in *Konungs Skuggsjá*: over 40 personalities from the Hebrew Bible are discussed. Whoever the author was, he was well acquainted with the Israelite subnarrative within Christianity. He saw it as a desirable source of inspiration for a young king. Moreover, there are in the work some remarkable pronouncements on Judaism. Consider for example the following explication on the separation of royal and episcopal power:

... er Guð hafði skipað millum þeira Moyses oc aarons at hann þilldi þpi æigi brigða at hann felli æigi isakir þið guð. Þpi at Guð hafði sþa skipað millim þeira at Moyses skyllde þarðpæita ræglu heilagra doma en aaron skyllði þarðpæita þær fornor er kæmi til heilax alltaris oc þat skallt þu til þiss þita at þat a ænn idag at stanða mæð retto oc man þer þat þa þærða liosari firi augum æf ec birti þat firi þer æð noccorum orðum. En þæssor er su skyring at guð skipaðe ser þau tþau hus a iorðu er hann kaus til sins æmbættis oc er annat kirkia oc sþa ma kalla hvartþæggia æf þill. firi þpi at sþa þyðizt nafn kirkiu sæm þinghus firi sacar samkþamo folksins er þar kæmr En þæssor tþau hus ero haller Guðs oc hæþir hann skipað tþa mænn til at geta þessarra husa ... er annarr konongr en annarr byskup.<sup>672</sup>

... for God had allotted matters between them [Aaron and Moses] so that Moses would preserve the rule of holy law and Aaron would preserve the sacrifices which were brought to the holy altar, and you should know that even today it rightfully remains so, and it will be clearer before your eyes if I illuminate it for you with a few words. This is the explanation of why God allotted those two houses on earth which He chose for His service, and one is the church, and you can call each by either's name if you wish, because the name "church" is translated as "synagogue" [*þinghús*] for the reason that there the people congregate. And these two houses are the halls of God and He has allotted two men to run these houses ... one is the king and one is the bishop.

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671 Ian J. Kirby. *Bible Translation in Old Norse*. (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1986) p. 180. Emphasis by Kirby.

672 *Konungs skuggsjá*. ed. by Ludvig Holm-Olsen. (Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institut, 1983) p. 123.

At first glances this is a simple alignment of bishops with Aaron and kings with Moses, a neat but inconspicuous exegetical point. On closer inspection, however, the author's choice of lexicon becomes quite controversial. His contention that *þýðizt nafn kirkju sam þingbus* is an intriguing etymology. Old Norse *Kirkja* is ultimately from Greek *κυριακον* “of the Lord”, as are its Germanic cognates.<sup>673</sup> If *Konungs skuggsjá* were written in Latin, the sentence would make much more sense, where the Latin word for church, *Ecclesia*, is indeed a contraction for *domus ecclesiae* - “house of assembly”, i.e. precisely the same as *þinghús*. This was the translation preferred by Laurence Marcellus Larson, where he opted for “judgement hall”.<sup>674</sup> However, as we have seen in the context of the *Toledo Miracle*, Old Norse *þinghús* explicitly referred to a synagogue, not the *domus ecclesiae*. The word is only used once elsewhere in Old Norse literature to refer simply to a building used to host a *þing*, and there it is an unreliable variant for *húsping*, a cognate to modern English 'husting'.<sup>675</sup> Whatever his etymological intentions, as it stands the author of *Konungs skuggsjá* asserts that the word for “church” derives from “synagogue”. His meaning may be debated, but these are his actual words *in pagina*.

On its own, this may be a morphologically unlikely derivation but it at least makes sense according to the doctrine of supercessionism, i.e. that the church should have evolved out of the now supplanted synagogue. However, the author follows this pronouncement with a rather indistinct use of demonstrative pronouns: *En þæssor þrau hus ero haller Guðs* - “and these two houses are the halls of God”. Obviously, the audience is intended to infer that these two “halls of God” are the king's courts and the bishop's churches. Nonetheless, for a moment at least, the *þrau hallir Guðs* can be interpreted as *kirkja* and *þinghús* - Church and synagogue, co-existing as God's houses on earth. The reader will soon see that the author is talking in a broader metaphor, where the heads of each house are not Jew and Christian but king and bishop. Even then, the idea that the *þinghús* might still be a legitimate expression of the Divine Plan is left open. It still holds that God is well-pleased with the *þinghús*. After all, how often did the medieval Christian God disapprove of something literally but approve of it as a metaphor? By accident or design, such an ambiguity might well be expected to please Brandr, a man who immersed himself in a period of history where the Jews were indeed the sole representatives of the Lord on earth.

The author's comfort with affording some degree of legitimacy to Judaism is also evident in his treatment of St. Helena (d. c. 330). The empress would have been well known to medieval audiences for her appearance in cross legends, where she is depicted recovering the cross from a decidedly

673 De Vries 1962. p. 310.

674 *The King's Mirror (Speculum Regale – Konungs Skuggsjá)* trans. by Lawrence Marcellus Lawson (New York: The American Scandinavian Foundation, 1917) p. 359.

675 Degnbol 1989-. s.v. 'þinghús'. Cleasby & Vigfússon 1874. p. 295.

recalcitrant Jewish population in Jerusalem. As might be expected, these legends tend not to paint a particularly warm picture of St. Helena's attitudes towards Jews. In one Old Norse version, when the Jews refuse to cooperate she threatens that she would *þeim skyllði ðllum kesta i elld brennanda*<sup>676</sup> - “throw them all into a burning fire”. A senior Jew, by the name of Judas, holds the secret of the cross's location, passed down father-to-son since the Crucifixion. St. Helena's approach to loosening his tongue is far from compassionate: *Síðan let hon setia hann i gróf diuþa oc þurra, oc var hann þar matlauss .vii. daga. Eptir þat callaði Judas oc mællti: ‘Lati mic a brot or gróþfínni, en ek man segja, hvar cross Cristz er folginn.’*<sup>677</sup> - “Then she had him put into a deep and dusty hole, and there he went without food for seven days. After that Judas called out and said 'Let me out of this hole, and I will tell you where Christ's cross is hidden’”. It is reasonable to adduce from these highly popular legends that St. Helena was not commonly seen as being overly benevolent to Jews.<sup>678</sup> Lest this perception needed any re-enforcement, we may quote St. Helena in one of her Old Norse appearances one more time:

“Þat hefi ec lesit af bokom spamanna, at hinir fyrri ættmenn yðrir voru astvinir guðs. Enn þer hafit alla specð latið at baki yðr, oc þann sem yðr vildi firra bólvat af guði, oc syndi yðr margar iartegnir af guði, at þeim hæddut þer oc þann pindoð þer sarliga til bana. Nu hafit þer lios fyrir myrkr oc satt fyrir lygi, oc er komin yfir yðr bólván, su sem rituð er i lógom yðrum.”<sup>679</sup>

“I have read in the books of the prophets, that those ancient ancestors of yours were the beloved friends of God. But you have left all wisdom behind you, and now you are accursed by god, and you saw many miracles by God, and you mocked Him and then crucified to death grievously. Now you have the light before the dark and the truth before lies, and that accursedness has come over you as it is written in your laws.”

The above is not the legend of St. Helena which is quoted in *Konungs Skuggsjá*. There no mention is made of the discovery of the cross and St. Helena's associated interrogations of the Jews. Instead, there is an image of a much more cordial relationship:

Nu ero æin þau dæmi er longu urðu síðan um dagha Constantinus keisara ... Hann hafðe gefit Eleno drotning mæðr sinni riki firi austan haf igyðinga þællde. En mæðr þpi at hon hafði stiorn oc forsio þar. þa skilðez hænni þat at ængi munde annur þæra tru rett til guðs nema su er gyðingar hofðu. En þa er bref foro þeira amillim keisarans sunar hænnu oc drotningarinnar þa

676 *Inventio Crucis*. p. 306.

677 Ibid.

678 For recent comment on the *Inventio Crucis* tradition, and its ubiquity, see: Jan Willem Drijvers. “Helena Augusta: Cross and Myth. Some new Reflections”, *Millenium* 8 (2011) pp. 125-174.

679 *Inventio Crucis*. pp. 303-304.

toc þeim þat kunnict at gerazt at grein þar atru þeiri er hvart þeira hafði til guðs. Ða bauð keisarinn spa at drotningin skyllði koma austan um haf mæðr sinum lærðum monnum oc spekingom oc marghum aðrum hofðingium oc skyllði fuñdr þeira þæra irumaborgh oc lata þar rannzaka sannændi hæilagrar truar. En þa er drotningin kom þar mæðr þpi liði þa hafðe konongrinn saman samnat marghum byskupum mæðr Siluestro paua oc marghum spækingum hvartþeggia kristnum oc heiðnum. En at sættru stæfnu oc skipaðu þingi millim keisarans oc drotningarinnar þa þottuz þau bæði þat finna. at þar muñdi þærða kapsamlegh þræta milli cristinna byskupa oc lærðra manna gyðinga oc annarra spækinga þeira sëm drotninginni fylgðe austan mæðr þpiat þparirtþeggia munndu fram dragha at huga sanlegh dæmi af sinum bokum moti aðrum til sannænda oc staðfæsto sins froðleiks oc heilagrar truar. þa sa þau þat til þist at þærs matti æigi missa aþeiri stæfnu at retlater domarar þæri skipaðer ifir þeir er mæðr hofi oc sannsyni dæmde oll þau mal er þar yrðe fram borin af hvarrratþeggio [sic] hænde. En firi þvi at keisarinn þar gezlumaðr heilagrar kristni mæðr þapanum oc kristnum byskopum. En drotningiñ lipiskiollr gyðinga truar. þa syndez þeim baðum at þat þæri æigi fallit at leiða þau i þa freistni at þau þæri domarar yfir þæssarri þræto ...<sup>680</sup>

Now here is an example which happened long ago in the days of Emperor Constantine ... He had given Queen Elena, his mother, a kingdom over the eastern sea in the domain of the Jews. And because she had power and authority there, she began to understand that there was no other correct faith in God except for that which the Jews had. And as letters went between the emperor, her son, and the queen, they began to realise that a divide was occurring between each of their faiths in God. Then the emperor invited the queen to come over the eastern sea with her learned men and philosophers and many other chieftains, and that they should have a meeting in Rome, and there they would examine the truth of the holy faith. And when the queen arrived with her retinue then the king had many bishops assembled with Pope Silvester and many philosophers, both Christian and pagan. When the meeting had been arranged and an assembly called together between the emperor and the queen, it then seemed to both of them that there would be a vociferous struggle between the Christian bishops and the learned men of the Jews, together with the other philosophers who had accompanied the queen from the east, because both would bring forth to their minds true examples from their holy books as examples of truth towards the other, as support for their knowledge and their holy faith. Thus they thought it was obvious that the assembly would have to appoint righteous judges to preside over them who with courtesy and level-headedness would pass judgement over all the matters raised by both sides. But because the emperor was the guardian of holy Christianity, together with the pope and the bishops, and the queen was the protecting shield of the faith of the Jews, both of them thought

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680 *Konungs Skuggsjá*. pp. 70-71.

it would not be right for them to be lead into temptation by serving as judges in the case ...

The author of *Konungs Skuggsjá* did not invent this legend. In Old Norse, a version can also be found in *Silvesters saga*, possibly as early as the twelfth century.<sup>681</sup> Indeed, Larson proposed that this vernacular rendering was in fact the version upon which the *Konungs Skuggsjá* author drew.<sup>682</sup> Nonetheless, this vignette is deployed to unique effect. The discovery of the cross is nowhere mentioned in *Konungs Skuggsjá*, giving the unique impression (intratextually at least) that St. Helena was in fact not an enemy to the Jews, but so influenced by Jewish thought that she erred on the side of Judaising. This is certainly a dramatic and contrapuntal inversion of the norm. Secondly, it is worth noting the fashion in which the *gyðinga trú* is depicted. There are perhaps some slightly orientalist undertones in the assumption that the “learned men of the Jews” would automatically be in agreement with the “philosophers who had accompanied the queen from the east”. However, on the whole the tone is remarkably neutral. The Jews have not deliberately conspired to influence the empress, nor even is their religion at any point stated to be defective. The original legend as preserved in *Silvesters saga*, on the other hand, features a number of anti-Jewish stereotypes, themselves ultimately derived from the *Acta Silvestri* (late 400s). Most notably, there is the magician Jambri:

En sidan þa reiddiz Jambri enn af þeim .xii. koppum Helene drottningar, ok mællti hann æ þersa lund: “Wndumzt ek þat, er spakir menn ok domendr vilia trua þvi, at i ordaprætum megi reynaz matttr guds. En nu skulu þer lofa mer þat, er ek hefi enn ecki um mællt, at ek syna krapt n óckurn i nafni guds vors ... ok syniz þat med vitni ok iarteinum helldr en med ordum einum, hver enn sannni gud er ... Leidi hingat nu hinn sterkazta ok enn grimmazta gridung, ok mun ek nefna nafn guds i eyra honum, ok munu þer þa sia krapt þess nafns sva mikinn, at steinar munu eigi standazt mega”. En fyrr en hann hafdi mali sinu lokit, þa var þangat leiddr enn sterkazti gridungr, ok helldu menn æ festum ðllum mein. En sidan þa nefndi Jambri nóckud illzskunafn i eyra gripunginum; en gridungrinn beliadi vid um sinn hatt, sidan fell hann dauðr nidr, sva at hann hrærdi ecki æ ser. En þa hræddizt allr kristinn lydr, ok mællto þat margir menn, at þetta væri guddoms nafn, er eingi skepna matti standazt.<sup>683</sup>

Then Jambri, the twelfth of Queen Helena's champions, became enraged, and spoke the following words: “I am amazed that wise men and judges could believe that God's power could be tested in a war of words. And you will permit me that which I have not yet mentioned, that I will show the

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681 Margaret Cormack. *The Saints in Iceland. Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1994) p. 152.

682 Lawson (trans.). 1917. p. 243.

683 *Silvesters saga* in *HMS*. vol. 2. p. 270. cf. pp. 280-286. See also: Arthur Lukyn Williams. *Adversus Judaeos. A Bird's-eye View of Christian Apologiae until The Renaissance*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) pp. 339-346.

power of the name of our God ... and it will be shown with witness and miracles rather than single words who the true God is ... Now, bring here the strongest and fiercest bull, and I will say the name of God in his ear, and then you will see the power of this name so great that stoness themselves cannot withstand it". And before he had finished his speech, the strongest bull was led out, and men held him by chains with all their strength. And then Jambri said some evil name in the ear of the bull, and the bull bellowed loudly then fell down dead, so that he was not moving. Then all the Christians were terrified, and many people said that it must have been the name of the Godhead, which no creature can withstand.

Thus, the central purpose of the legend as it appears in *Silvesters saga* is to prove the deficiency of the Jewish religion, and to assassinate the Jewish character via the trope of the malicious sorcerer besides. Indeed, it does so in language with which a saga audience would have been familiar. The Jewish faith has a *blfiskskjöldr* in St. Helena, where the *-skjöldr* "shield" element evokes the semantic field of the martial. In the same vein, the Jews are defended by twelve *kappar* "champions". The showdown between the solitary Pope Silvester and these Jewish *kappar* thus echoes the warriors of the *Fornaldarsögur* and chivalric sagas, where heroes such as Qrvar-Oddr or Bøðvarr Bjarki must defeat the *kappar* of foreign kings. A particularly striking nativising touch comes when the Jews deploy their *Logsgumaðr* "law speaker", Jubal.<sup>684</sup> Silvester dismisses each of their arguments in turn, and besting Jambri proves to be the *coup de grâce*. Turning to the terrified crowd, the pope commandingly says: "*Lydi þer Romaborgar spekingar, ok skili þer krapt Krist; en ek mun syna ydr þat, at þetta er eigi guds nafn, er nefnt er i eyra gridunga þersum, heldr ens versta diöfuls*"<sup>685</sup> - "Listen, you philosophers of Rome, and understand the power of Christ, and I will show you that is not the name of God which has said in the ear of this bull, but rather the worst [name] of the Devil's". Accordingly, Silvester whispers his own theonym to the bull, and it returns to life. The true God, as Silvester argues, is surely one who gives life, not death. Thus, Judaism is accused of not only misunderstanding the scripture, but of making the gravest possible error: mistaking Satan for God.

However, the *Konungs Skuggsjá* author puts a radically different spin on the tale. Jambri, Jubal and the other *lærðir menn* are nowhere to be seen in his retelling. Indeed, he does not even relate the outcome of the disputation:

En þa er allr fioldi þar rannzakaðr þa funnuz æigi flæiri þeir mænn en tþæir er mænn þorðo ser til domara at kiosa ipir þæssom stormælum. en þeir mænn þaro baðer heiðnir oc þaro hvarki bunnir

684 *Silvesters saga*. p. 268.

685 Ibid. at p. 270.

ikristinna manna loĝh ne í gyðinga tru. annarr þeira het Craton hann þar spækingr mikill oc þæl lærðr til allz manþitz ... En annarr sa er til domara þar kosinn þar kallaðr zenophilus at nafni hann þar einn rikr hærtogi oc agetr en þar sëm hann hafðe rikis gezlo. þa þissi ængi maðr dæmi til at hann hæfðe hallat rettum domi hann þar mykill snilldar maðr at mælsko oc þæl lærðr til allz munþitz ... En ec sagða þer firi þþi þæssor dæmi at þu skilðer hvartþæggia litillæti keisarans oc retlæti oc þpa drotningarinnar þar sëm þau þaro hofðingiar yfir allum heiminum ennda leto ser þo sama at sitia unnder lyðni kosinna domara þeira er myklu þaro mínni firi ser bæði at þalldo oc at riki oc at allum aðrum lutum en þau þaro siolf. Spa skalltu oc þat skilia hværsu mykla sëmð þæsser mænn lutu af munþiti sino oc retlæti þar sëm þeir þaro baðer hæiðnir oc þaro þo ipir allum heími um skilning heilagrar truar oc nauðsyniar oc matt þu nu þækkia sëm fyrr sagða ec þer í occarri ræðu at þat skiptir myclu mali hvat hværr maðr leipir til dæmi æptir sec.<sup>686</sup>

And then when the whole crowd was searched no more than two men were found who dared to be the judges who would decide over this weighty matter, and both those men were pagans and were neither bound to the laws of the Christians nor to the Jewish faith. One of them was called Craton. He was a great philosopher and well learned in all knowledge ... and the other who was chosen as a judge was called Zenophilus by name. He was a wealthy duke and excellent wherever he had dominion. Nobody knew of any example where he had failed to find the correct judgement. He was a very eloquent man in speech, and well learned in all knowledge ... And I told you of this example so that you should understand the humility and righteousness of both the Emperor and also the Queen, because even though they were rulers over the whole world they chose judges who were lesser than themselves both in power and wealth and in all other regards. You should also understand how much honour these men derived from their knowlegde and righteousness, even though they were both pagan, and nonetheless they were superior to everyone in the world in their understanding of the holy faith and the gravity of the situation. And now you must consider as I told you earlier in our discussion, that it matters a great deal what sort of example every person leaves behind.

While *Silvesters saga* prompts the most obvious reading of the dispute, i.e. the inadequacy of Judaism and the wisdom of Pope Silvester, *Konungs Skuggsjá* draws out an entirely different moral message. If *Silvesters saga* presents the interfaith face-off as a foregone conclusion, the author here takes the scene as an opportunity to expound the importance of a level playing field. The Jews, whom the author must have known were accidental devil worshippers in the source text, and St. Helena, a Judaiser, were to be afforded a fair hearing: here we may wonder how a mind which agreed with *Silvesters saga* and so

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686 *Konungs skuggsjá*. p. 71.

believed Christianity to be the only legitimate expression of faith could possibly believe that any ensuing debate could possibly be balanced. Nonetheless, the lesson of an even-handed approach was more important to the author than any vindication of the one true faith. We may note that the proposition that spiritual insight is not the exclusive preserve of Christians is explicit in this episode: Craton and Zenophilus “even though they were both pagan ... were superior to everyone in the world in their understanding of the holy faith”. This kind of creative, almost humanist approach to Christian literature is certainly characteristic of Brandr's work in *Gyðinga saga*, as is the obviously sympathetic treatment of Jews.

One final point of similarity between *Konungs Skuggsjá* and *Gyðinga saga* which might lend credence to Kirby's hypothesis has nothing to do with Judaism *per se*. Namely, it is the interest common to both texts in siege warfare. During the thirteenth century there is no evidence of siege machines being deployed in the West Norse-speaking world.<sup>687</sup> Well-stocked, heavy fortifications which would necessitate prolonged sieges and attack with specialised machinery were few in Norway, and entirely unknown in Iceland. Accordingly, there are very few depictions of siege warfare in Old Norse literature before the later Middle Ages.<sup>688</sup> *Króka-Refs saga* (1300s) provides a rather fantastic account of siege defences in Greenland, where the hero ends up sallying forth in a ship on wheels.<sup>689</sup> Naturally, the tone there is humorous and not intended to convey any serious or scholarly information concerning the finer points of military strategy. *Gyðinga saga*, on the other hand, contains multiple scenes where Jerusalem and its environs are subjected to often brutal siege warfare. For example, we might cite the following depiction of the siege of Agon:

Johannes sneri eptir tholomeo. er thimotheus het rettu nafni. hann hafði stockit vndan i kastala einn er agon het. Johannes setz vm kasatalann. ok er hann egiar fastaz sína menn til at gǫngu. þa lætr tholomeus leida framm a veGinn modur hans ok brædr. ok af klæda. ok hud strykia sua fast. at allr þeirra likamr flaut i blodi. vid þessi tiltekt sigrar milldín Johannem. ok snyr fra. ok vill æigi sea harm kualar modur sinnar. ok brædra. modir hans kallar. ok bidr hann æigi fra huerfa. ne lata vhefndan glæp tholomei. ok dæmir sítt lif dauda verra. hann huerfr þo fra ...<sup>690</sup>

Johannes pursues Tholomeus, who was called Thimotheus by his proper name. He had fled to a certain castle which was called Agon. Johannes surrounds the castle, and when he urges his men

687 Ada Bruhn Hoffmeyer. “Belejringsmaskiner” in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*. vol. 1. p. 434.

688 Degnbol 1989-. s.v. 'vígvef'.

689 *Króka-Refs saga* in *Kjalnesinga saga*. pp. 146-148. For comment on this scene, see: Kendra J. Willson. “*Króka-Refs saga* as science fiction: Technology, magic and the materialist hero” in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of The Thirteenth International Saga Conference*. vol. 2. ed. by John McKinnell *et al.* (Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006) pp. 1064-1070.

690 *Gyðinga saga*. p. 109.

onwards steadfastly, then Tholomeus has brought out atop the walls his [Johannes's] mother and brothers, and he has them stripped, and their skin flogged so harshly that their entire bodies flow with blood. At the sight, mercy defeats Johannes and he turns away, and he does not want to see the torture of his mother and brothers. His mother cries out and asks him not to retreat, nor to let the crimes of Tholomeus go unavenged, and she considers her life to be worse than death. However, he retreats ...

There are also numerous mentions of various types of *vígvélar* lit. “war machines” but more properly “siege engines”.<sup>691</sup> Only one is specifically named, that being a *valslongva* “trebuchet”.<sup>692</sup> *Konungs Skuggsjá* is often regarded as the single most important source for medieval Scandinavian knowledge of siege tactics.<sup>693</sup> There we find the *valslongva* mentioned three times, along with such devious devices as the *ígulkeǫttr* “hedgehog”, a spiked weight to be dropped on attackers from above.<sup>694</sup> It is not unthinkable that Brandr might have developed an interest in the subject while compiling *Gyðinga saga*, and then pursued it more fully in his didactic manual for the young prince. Whoever the author of *Konungs Skuggsjá* was, he probably had not derived his military knowledge from actual battlefield observations. Consider his recommendation to adopt the *skjaldjötunn* “shield giant”, apparently an anthropoid siege engine capable of spewing fire: *En allra þeira lista er nu hófum þer um rætt þa er þo hófuð þápn þingr skjalldiatunn ryptanðe mæðr alligum loga.*<sup>695</sup> - “But of all the arts which we have now discussed the best weapon is the stooped shield-giant, belching with storming fire”. Brandr is the only named Old Norse author from the central thirteenth century who stood so well placed to develop such a bookish perspective on siege warfare, while simultaneously being able to provide such learned and thoughtful comment on Old Testament *exempla*. Pending further stylistic analysis such as that by Wolf, the plausibility of attributing *Konungs Skuggsjá* to Brandr will advance little either way. Thus, for the purposes of this study, we will limit Brandr's body of work to *Alexanders saga* and *Gyðinga saga*, but the possibility that he might also have written *Konungs skuggsjá* will be retained where it re-enforces a particular reading, even if no arguments can be securely based on that contention alone.

### ***Alexanders saga***

As previously outlined, *Alexanders saga* was apparently translated under the sponsorship of King Magnús, quite probably around 1262 during Brandr's sojourn in Norway. A more or less close

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691 For example: Ibid. at pp. 46-49, 69, 82.

692 Ibid. at p. 46.

693 For example, see: Hjalmar Falk. *Altnordische Waffenkunde*. (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914) esp. pp. 192-201. A more cautious view is put forward by: Rudolf Simek. “Zum waffenkundlichen Abschnitt des Königsspiegels” in *Speculum regale. Der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs Skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*. ed. by Jens Elke Schnall & Rudolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2000) pp. 103-125.

694 *Konungs Skuggsjá*. pp. 61-62.

695 Ibid. at p. 63.

translation of the Latin *Alexandreis*, it is obviously exhibits far less engagement with the Jewish topos than *Gyðinga saga*. Nonetheless, the Jews were not unimportant to the historical Alexander, as is attested in both ancient Latin, Greek and Hebrew sources.<sup>696</sup> Accordingly, as the Alexander legend traversed the Middle Ages, Jews retained a certain prominence in the narrative – a retention that was surely stimulated by the sense of continuity they provided *vis-à-vis* the Christian present. Brandr preserved and occasionally expanded upon the scenes featuring Jews in Walter's original text. One philo-Semitic trope which can be treated quickly at the outset is the smith Appelles, who constructs a tomb for Darius's wife: *Ebrescr maðr gørðe steinem aðr en vpp vere reistr sa er Apelles hét. hann var mioc ágætr af sinom hagleic*.<sup>697</sup> “A Jew who was named Apelles made the stones before they were mounted [on the tomb's wall]. He was very excellent at his craft”. The reason that Apelles needed to be a Jew in Walter's original was because the scenes he engraves into the tomb wall include key moments from the Old Testament. As Alexander's era was obviously before Christ, only Jewish characters could provide continuity with Biblical history. By accident or design, however, Apelles also resonates with the image of Jews as being particularly cunning, magically or technologically adept. Trachtenberg called this preconception a supposed “Jewish addiction to magic”.<sup>698</sup> The idea that a Jew might be capable of craftsmanship of which no other could be an equal is the philo-Semitic aspect of the same chimerical prejudice. If Apelles is an *ebrescr maðr* out of narrative expediency, it is conceivable that he is *mjök ágætr af sínum hagleik* out of his Jewishness.

Appelles is, of course, only a very minor character in *Alexanders saga*. The first interaction with the Jews in any number comes when Alexander crosses into the Near East, and it is a much more significant moment than the introduction of Appelles. Alexander begins his Palestinian campaign. There, the king relates the following dream:

Oc eins hveria nott at aullom auðrom sofandom iminu svefninne þa er ec vacða vm slict hugse. kom mikit oc biart lios yfir mec. þvi liose fylgðe einn gaufeglegr maðr er lofat scal mann at kalla. hann var harðla vel klædd oc þvi licast sem byscopar þa er þeir ero scrydder byscops scrude. Tolf enir dyrsto steinar voro settir iklæði hans framan abriosteð. Ienne þessa mannz var ritað scilicet tetragramaton. þat feck ec eigi scilet segir konungr þviat þat var a þessconar tungu ritað er mer var vkunnict. Siðklædr var hann sva at fyr kleðonom matta ec eigi sia fætr hans. Mikil ogn stoð mer af þessom manne. Hafðe ec tom til at spyria en þoran eigi hver hann vere eða hvaðan. oc at hvi hann føre. hann mat ecki kveðior við mec oc mællti sva til min. Farðu abraut af fostr lande þino Alexander. þviat ec man allt folk undir þic leggja. oc ef þu ser mic nockot sinn þvilikan sem nu

696 See: Peter Schäfer. *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World*. (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 1-7.

697 *Alex*. p. 62.

698 Trachtenburg 1966. p. 57.

synomz ec þer. þa scalltu þyrma minom maunnum fyrir minnar sakir. oc eptir þat hvarf hann vpp ilopteð fra mer segir konungr. oc þa fylde hann herbergeð ibrautfor sinne enom dyrlegsta ilm.<sup>699</sup>

“And one night, when everyone was sleeping in my dreams I awoke to notice that a great and shining light came over me. That light was followed by a magnificent man, if one should call him a man. He was very well dressed, and most like a bishop when clothed in a bishop's cassock. Twelve of the most precious stones were on his clothing, prominent on his chest. On this man's forehead was written the tetragrammaton of course. I couldn't understand”, the king says, “because it was written in a kind of language which I did not know. His manner of dressing was such that under his clothes I could not see his feet. I felt such terror at this man. I felt a desire to ask who he might be or where he might have come from, but dared not. He offered me no greeting and then said to me: 'Leave your native country, Alexander, because I will subdue all people before you, and if you see anyone who resembles how I now appear to you, then you must show respect to my people on my behalf' and after that he disappeared up into the sky”, says the king, “and then at his departure he filled the room with the most glorious scent”.

The breastplate studded with gems is, of course, a reference to the *יָשָׁן* *kebošen* or “breastplate of judgement” worn by Aaron the High Priest in Exodus 28: 15-19:

And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgement with cunning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it. Foursquare it shall be being doubled; a span shall be the length thereof, and a span shall be the breadth thereof. And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, even four rows of stones: the first row shall be a sardius, a topaz, and a carbuncle: this shall be the first row. And the second row shall be an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond. And the third row a ligure, an agate, and an amethyst.

The tetragrammaton on the figure's forehead is intended to be the *πεταλον* *petalon* as depicted in Exodus 28:36: “And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, Holiness to The Lord”. Interestingly, this latter adornment seems to have been known for its occult implications in medieval Scandinavia. References to Aaron's forehead plate have been found in the Norwegian runic inscriptions N 248 and N A362, both dated to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.<sup>700</sup> Thus, it is not unreasonable to infer that for Brandr's audience these allusions would have imbued the scene with a very particular atmosphere, coloured by the perception of Jews as

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<sup>699</sup> *Alex.* p. 17.

<sup>700</sup> For more, see: Appendix II.

an ancient, mysterious, supernaturally-affiliated people.<sup>701</sup> The identity of the figure remains unclear however. Is it Aaron, serving as a messenger for God? An angel? Or perhaps the Lord Himself? This questions is clearly just as opaque to Alexander as it would have been to the audience: “a magnificent man, *if* one should call him a man”. However, the narrative voice's ambiguity is given purpose as Alexander proceeds to assault Jerusalem:

... þa stefndi hann til Iorsalaborgar með miklo liðe oc ætlaðe hann at briota borgena. en niðra Gyðenga tign oc svivirða templum domini sem aðrer heiðner konungar havfðo gort fyrir honom. oc er borgar menn spyria þessa fyrirætlan konungs. þa taka þeir þat rað. at byscop sa er þa var at staðnom gengr ut með aullom haufðingion borgarinnar oc gerir virðuliga processionem amot konunge. oc ætlar sva at svefia hans reiði. oc þegar er konungr ser byscop. þa kemr honom ihug at sa maðr var iafnt þannug buinn er honom vitraðiz fyrr meir. oc hann stigr þegar af hesti sinom oc fellr akne fyr byscope. þetta undruðuz konungs menn mioc er konungr litelætti sec sva mioc at hann laut þessum manne. þar sem þeir vissv aðr at hann villde alla lata til sin luta. oc þeir haufðo hann aungom fyr set sitt haufð hnegia. Þa stauðvar konungr sitt lið oc kallar storgettinga sina með ser. riðr siðan iborgina friðsamliga, offrar til templum domini margar storar gersimar þær sem þeir kaulloðo þægiligstar gvðe er varðveittv musterið. hann heitr oc því Gyðingom sem hann efnde. at þeir scylldo é ifriðe vera oc goð yfirleti meðan hans riki stöðe.<sup>702</sup>

... then he headed for Jerusalem with a great army and intended to destroy the city and mock the high-born of the Jews and desecrate the Temple of the Lord as other pagan kings had done before him. And when the citizens discover the king's intention they come to the decision that the bishop who was in the city should go out with all the chieftains of the town and make a noble procession towards the king, and so hope to assuage his anger, and when the king sees the bishop then he remembers that man who was appeared before him dressed in just the same way, and he promptly climbs down off his horse and goes down on his knees before the bishop. This amazed the king's men greatly, that the king should humble himself so much when he receives this man, especially as they knew that he always wanted things his way otherwise, and they had never before seen him bow his head. Then the king calls his army to a halt and calls his generals to accompany him. Then he rides into the town peacefully, and makes an offering to the Temple of the Lord of many huge gemstones, which those who attended the temple on behalf of God said to be most agreeable. He also promises the Jews something he made so: that they should forever be in peace and good standing as long as his kingdom lasted.

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701 Ashurst suggests that *scilicet tetragramaton* is an interpolation on Brandr's part: Ashurst 2009. p. 158. However, at least one version of the *Alexandreis* is not far removed from Brandr on this point: *Signabat mediam tetragrammata linea frontem, / Sed quoniam michi barbaries incognita linguae / Huius erat, legere hanc me non ualuisse fatebor* - “The tetragrammaton was stamped in a line on his forehead / but as it was to me a strange unknown language / I could not succeed in reading it”. Walter of Châtillon. *Galteri de Castellione Alexandreis*. ed. by M. L. Colker (Padua: In aedibus Antenoreis, 1978) p. 34.

702 *Alex*. pp. 17-18.

In this context Ashurst has noted that “[a]lthough Alexander does not understand the Judeo-Christian implications of his own story, they would have been very apparent to the audience of the narrative because the terms of the promise require reverence for the people of God and their High Priest ...”.<sup>703</sup> The Jews of Jerusalem stand as proxy-Christians. Amity with the Jews is the closest the great king can come to Christianity without ludicrous anachronism. However, any metaphorical reading necessarily preserves its surface-level signifier. We can also read the *gyðingar* in this scene as they appear *prima facie*. That is to say, as Jews. There is a potent counterpoint in the image of the world's mightiest ruler kneeling before a *byskup gyðinga*. As we saw in the case of the king in the Old Norse *Erubescat* miracle, Emperor Constantine in *Silvesters saga*, or even Earl Rognvaldr in the *Historia Norvegie*, a more usual paradigm in Old Norse literature is for rulers to police or chastise Jews. They are elsewhere depicted as a troublesome tribe (although not for Rognvaldr, his African-Orcadian Jews seem fairly passive) who need to be put in their place. Ashurst is correct, of course: many amongst Brandr's audience would have instantly understood the symbolism of the scene. Nonetheless, when considered against a background of hostile attitudes towards Jews, the imagery here has noticeable philo-Semitic undertones. The greatest king who ever lived promises that the Jews “should forever be in peace and good standing as long as his kingdom lasted”. How many monarchs contemporary to King Hákon Hákonarson could make the same claim?

At the risk of overloading the metaphor, let us raise the possibility that in addition to their identities as Jews and surrogate-Christians, the Jerusalemites may yet have a tertiary significance as metaphorical Icelanders (it is, of course, a classic philo-Semitic strategy to see oneself in the Jew). Ashurst notes that the later capitulation of the nations at Babylon might well have had particularly Icelandic resonances: “[t]his would be all the more relevant if *Alexanders saga* was composed, as has often been suggested, by Brandr Jónsson while he was in Norway in 1262-3, when Icelanders were beginning to swear allegiance to the Norwegian king in such numbers that by 1264 the Icelandic commonwealth ceased to exist.”<sup>704</sup> As we have seen, Gabriel Turville-Petre was inclined to think that the Icelanders of Brandr's days could have recognised similarities between their own situation and that of the historical Jews. The suggestion is echoed by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir:

... Gyðinga saga segir af herförum og svikum Gyðinga og heiðingja hvorum gegn öðrum á víxl með líku orðfæri og er á Sturlungu sögu. Valdastríð á Íslandi á Sturlungaöld jafnast hvergi á við stríðssögur sem Brandur ábóti snaraði úr forntíð Austurlanda, en vera má að þær hafi eflt kjark ok

703 Ashurst 2009. p. 167.

704 Ibid. at pp. 44-45.

sögustyrk íslenskra manna sem börðust hver gegn öðrum til valda, oftast með grjóti eða deigum vopnum, sem frá segir í *Sturlunga sögum*.<sup>705</sup>

... *Gyðinga saga* relates the alternate campaigns and betrayals of the Jews and the pagans against one another in the same style as *Sturlunga saga*. The power struggles of Iceland in the *Sturlungaöld* are nowhere compared with the warstories from the ancient East which Abbot Brandr translated, but they must have strengthened the courage and resilience of the Icelanders who fought against one another for power, most often with stones or weapons of soft metal, as is related in *Sturlunga saga*.

Might an Icelandic audience thus also have been able to perceive the similarities between their own relationship with King Hákon on the one hand, and that of the Jerusalemite Jews to Alexander on the other? The possibility that Norway might project its military power to Iceland was in reality a remote one. As R. George Thomas poetically put it: “this was a citadel that could only be captured from within”.<sup>706</sup> Nonetheless, the idea was advocated during Hákon's reign. *Íslendinga saga* by Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) records that in around the year 1202: [e]n þá voru Noregs-menn miklir óvinir Íslendinga, ok mestir Oddaverja ... Kom þar svá, at þat var ráðit at herja skyldi til Íslandz um sumarit; voru ráðin til skip ok menn er fyrir skyldi vera.<sup>707</sup> - “The Norwegians were then great enemies of the Icelanders, and the Oddaverjar most of all ... And so it came to pass that it was decided to raid Iceland during the summer. Men and ships were chosen for this”. The Norwegians did not actually need to send their own armed men to Iceland in order to cause destruction. For example, when Brandr was in his late thirties or early forties he would have observed for himself the chaos brought about by the assassination of Snorri Sturluson by Gizurr Þorvaldsson's men, who were operating under Norwegian patronage. The Jews of Jerusalem decide collectively on the best way to avoid conflict in a manner which Brandr might well have wished his own countrymen could in the face of Norwegian interference. Moreover, there are more typological affinities between the Jews and the Icelanders than their histories of internal conflict as pointed out by Guðrún and Turville-Petre. Both the Icelanders and the Jerusalemites were kingless peoples, standing in the path of rulers whose military powers far excelled their own. In fact, neither the Icelanders of Brandr's age nor the Jews of *Alexanders saga* have anything approaching an army at all. The place of the Jews in Alexander's empire perhaps echoes that which Brandr might have imagined for the Icelanders in Hákon's kingdom. Both are spiritual peoples, cherished by a benevolent ruler for their symbolic value rather than their wealth or manpower. This would certainly chime with Ashurst's reading of the

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705 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. Formáli to *Biskupa sögur*. vol. 3. p. xiv.

706 R. George Thomas. Introduction to *Sturlunga Saga*. vol. 1. trans. by Julia H. McGrew (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1970) p. 27.

707 Sturla Þórðarson. *Íslendinga saga* in *Sturlunga saga*. vol. 2. ed. by Guðbrandur Vigfússon. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1878) p. 243.

“Speech of the Scythian”, an episode in *Alexanders saga* which commonly taken to be an example of an Icelandic voice breaking out of the translation in order to address allegorically the relationship between Iceland and Norway. According to Ashurst, the Scythian messenger presents typically Icelandic arguments against royal dominion, but his basic premise is deliberately faulty: that Alexander is motivated purely by material greed.<sup>708</sup> In fact, Ashurst convincingly argues, Alexander is “motivated by a love of fame rather than wealth” and so in fact the Scythian/Icelander's protestations are misplaced.<sup>709</sup> If the Scythians represent the foolish Icelandic chieftains who reject Hákon's rule, it is quite conceivable that the Jews embody the paradigm of how life under Hákon would really be in Brandr's eyes.

The abbot also expresses his interest in Jewish antiquity through two interlocutions he adds to his translation. The first is a pleasingly snarky moment where he reveals his familiarity with the Book(s) of Maccabees. The context is his description of the uncountable hordes in the army of Darius, here not just an emperor of the Persian but a king of the *Serkeir* - “Saracens”. Brandr addresses himself to any potential sceptics as so:

En hvern er þetta kallar lygelega sagt. eða telr slikt með ykiom. þa lese fyr en føle librum Machabeorum. þa boc er enn helge Ieronimus prestr hefir ført af ebrescu ilatino oc ventir mek at hann mone finna þar sagt at Antiochus Serkia konungr hafðe með ser til Iorsalalanz .c. þusunda fotgongo liðs. oc .xx. þusunder riddera þa er hann etlaðiz at sigra Iudam Machabeum er þa var með brøðrom sinom haufðinge yfir Gyðenga folke.<sup>710</sup>

And whoever claims that this was falsely said, or reckons it to be exagurrated, read then attempt to mock the Book of Maccabees, that book which St. Jerome the priest has translated from Hebrew into Latin, and I expect that there he will find it said that Antiochus, King of the Saracens, took with him to Palestine 100,000 infantry men and 20,000 knights when he intended to defeat Judas Maccabeus who together with his brothers was chieftain over the Jewish people.

The second demonstration of Brandr's taste for Jewish-themed trivia is found in his description of Alexander's sacking of Tyre:

... oc þar kemr at su en ageta borg Tirus. er Agénor konungr hafðe reisa latet í fyrsto brennr vpp oll. oc verðr at øsco or miklo manvirke. Í þesse borg hefir fyrst funniz oc kent veret stafrof

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708 Ashurst 2009. pp. 202-223.

709 Ibid. at p. 223.

710 *Alex.* p. 23.

áebrescu ef þvi ma trua er fornscaaldin hava sagt. eða frettir hafa fra faret.<sup>711</sup>

... and there he [Alexander] arrives at that excellent city, Tyre, which King Agenor had founded, and he had it entirely burnt down, and a great fortification was turned to ash. In this city the Hebrew alphabet was first invented and taught, if one can believe what the ancient poets have said, or what reports have circulated.

McDougall has pointed out that a preceding story in *Alexanders saga* that the Greek alphabet was invented by Agenor's father, Cadmus, is from one of the *scholia* to the *Alexandreis*. However, Brandr's claim regarding the Hebrew alphabet is unparalleled in any medieval source.<sup>712</sup> The unadorned body of the *Alexandreis* reads simply: *Vatum dicta fidem, famae si credere dignum est, / Vocum sola notas et rerum sola figuras / Aut didicit prior aut docuit.* ...<sup>713</sup> - "If the words of poets are trusted with truth / signs for speech and figures for things / [Tyre] learned before it taught ...". For Brandr to add remarks of obscure provenance to episodes in Jewish history is not unknown. For example, in the siege of Agon from *Gyðinga saga* cited earlier, the detail that Tholomeus's real name was Thimotheus has no identified source. Neither do his claims in the same work that Simon Maccabeus had five sons, of whom two were infants, nor that Imalkue the Arab (Old Norse *Emaluke*) was Alexander's foster son.<sup>714</sup> Regardless of where Brandr derived these asides, they are illustrative of a mind whose interest in Jewish history lacked any anti-Jewish undertones. His embellishments of the *Alexandreis* cannot be twisted to advance any particular doctrinal arguments or anti-Semitic stereotypes. Rather, the impression is of a man inspired and excited by his subject, eager to provide as much detail as he could within the parameters of a scholarly translation. As Thomas DuBois notes, against a backdrop of increasing "anti-Semitic lore" and violence against Jews elsewhere in mid-thirteenth century Europe, Brandr's work stands out as "a strange expression of Nordic curiosity".<sup>715</sup>

### ***Gyðinga saga***

It should be noted at the outset that a full examination of *Gyðinga saga* would warrant a monograph-length study all of its own. For reasons of space, then, it is necessary to limit our reading somewhat. Reluctantly, we will be foregoing many noteworthy passages in the saga in order to sketch out the broader picture of Brandr's philo-Semitic tendencies. We should further note that the title of this saga which seems so germane to our study appears to have been attached in the nineteenth century. The

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711 Ibid. at p. 48.

712 McDougall 1986-1989. pp. 196-197.

713 Walter of Châtillon. *Alexandreis*. p. 80.

714 Annabelle Fersch. "Gythinga Saga: A Translation and Source Study", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tulane (1982) p. 96, 116, 121.

715 Thomas A. DuBois. *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) p. 38.

manuscript collector Árne Magnússon (d. 1730) refers to it as the *Historia Judaica* or *Historia Macchabæorum*.<sup>716</sup> Indeed, just as contemporaries of what we call *Alexanders saga* seem to have called it simply *Alexander Magnus*, it is quite conceivable that what we now know as *Gyðinga saga* might originally have been known more for its connection to the Maccabees specifically. Many medieval Icelanders may have synecdochally regarded it as a straight translation of the *Liber Macchabæorum*. Nonetheless, the Maccabees were naturally a crucial moment in Jewish history, and the saga remains highly relevant to our theme.

### “Saga Jews”: Seriousness, sympathy, and self-identification

As we have seen, Guðrún and Turville-Petre both stressed the similarities between *Gyðinga saga* and the saga-style. This view has much to commend it. The Jews of *Gyðinga saga* frequently act and speak with a laconic, tenacious defiance which brings to mind the prose style of the native Icelandic sagas. Indeed, the situations in which the Jews often find themselves certainly resonate with those of Brandr's age, and sometimes in certain places with his own experience. There is no lack of characters in difficult situations responding with bravery-bordering-on-temerity in *Gyðinga saga*, so we might choose from any number of examples. One that is particularly striking case is the rise of King Alexander Jannaeus. The Jews of *Gyðinga saga*, as we shall see, seem to have a troubled relationship with any one of their number who calls himself a king, and the deeply unpopular Jannaeus is no exception: *Þat var eitt sinn at kongr spyrr juda huat hann skyldi vinna til sætta með þa. Ecki nema deyja sogdu þeir. Fyrir þessi suor lætr hann hengia dccc. kuantra manna. ok drepa konur þeirra ok börn.*<sup>717</sup> - “One time the king asks the Jews what he could do to be at peace with them. 'Nothing except die', they said. For this answer he has 900 married man hanged, and kills their wives and children”. A more heroic example of the grave resolve of the Maccabees comes from the death of Judas Maccabeus himself. The image of the hero bravely meeting his death against overwhelming odds brings to mind the downfall of characters such as Gunnarr Hámundarson from *Njáls saga*.

Judas for i moti þeim með þij manna. hit bezta lid sitt. Enn er þeir sa lid heidíngia. flyia allir. sua at æigi vard meir eptir enn dccc. ok nu uard Judas miok hugsíukr. enn vill með ongu moti flyia. ok segir sua. Ef þessi skal uera dauda dagr vár. þa stodar ecki vndan at flyia<.> Deyium helldr með reysti. ok godum ordztir. ok briotum æigi skard á varí virdíngu.<sup>718</sup>

Judas went against them [the Seleucids] with 3,000 of his men, the best of his troops. But when

716 Wolf 1986. p. 46.

717 *Gyðinga saga*. p. 114.

718 Ibid at. pp. 63-64.

they saw the troops of the pagans they all flee, so that not more than 800 remained, and now Judas becomes very displeased, but by no means does he wish to flee, and he says this: “If this is to be the day of our deaths, than it will not help to take flight. Rather, we will die with boldness and good fame, and we wil not smash our honour to pieces.”

Moreover, his grim resignation on the inevitability of fate chimes with pronouncements on destiny elsewhere in Old Norse literature, particularly in Eddic verse, e.g. *Gripisspá* stz 53 “*Munat scopom vinna*”<sup>719</sup> - “You cannot overcome destiny” or *Átlamál* stz 48 “*scopom viðr mangi*”<sup>720</sup> - “No one can defeat destiny”. Indeed, Judas's plea or his men to bear in mind their *orðstír* - “good fame” brings to mind the oft-cited 76<sup>th</sup> stanza of *Hávamál*: “*Deyr fé, deya frændr / deyr sjálfir it sama; / enn orðstírr deyr aldregi / hveim er sér góðan getr*”<sup>721</sup> - “Wealth dies, kinsmen die / the self dies just the same / but good fame never dies / of he who well deserves it”. Brandr's source for this pronouncement was not Eddic, of course. Rather, it was 1 Maccabees 9:10: “Then Judas said, God forbid that I should do this thing, and flee away from them: if our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour”. Nonetheless, the resonance with tendencies elsewhere in Old Norse literature would surely have been as accessible to the medieval audience as to the modern researcher, if not more so.

As though in order to further integrate *Gyðinga saga* into the Old Norse canon, Brandr adds a number of nativising touches to his translation. Indeed, one of the features of his source material, preserved in his translation, was posited by Jón Helgason as a barrier to the saga's medieval popularity, but surely augmented its familiarity: *man næppe har fundet det særlig underholdende at læse dens noget summariske beretninger om idelige kampe og voldshandlinger, hvor det somme tider kan være besværligt holde forskellige personer af samme navn ude fra hinanden.*<sup>722</sup> - “one can hardly have found it especially entertaining to read its somewhat summary reports of relentless struggle and violent deeds, where sometimes it can be difficult to tell the difference between the characters of the same name”. Perhaps Jón intended his statement ironically? *Gyðinga saga* is quite at home amongst *Njáls saga* or *Grettis saga* in this regard. Brandr also actively amplified his translation's intrinsic relevance to a saga audience For example, the temple of Diana in the city of Dimad at which the Seleucids worship becomes *hóf eitt var iborginni stor audigt er Gefjun var helgad.*<sup>723</sup> - “a certain temple which was in the city, most wealthy, in which Gefjun was worshipped”. When the Greek commander Apollonius writes a letter to Jonathan Apphus demanding that he come down from his mountain position to fight “fairly” on open ground, the Vulgate 1 Maccabees 10:73 supplies “*et nunc quomodo poteris sustinere equitatum exercitum tantum in campo ubi non est lapis neque saxum*

719 *Poetic Edda* p. 172.

720 *Ibid.* at p. 254.

721 *Ibid.* at p. 29.

722 Jón Helgason. “Gyðinga saga i Trondheim”, *Opuscula* 5 (1975) p. 333.

723 *Gyðinga saga*.p. 41. For comment, see: Fersch 1982. p. 48.

*neque locus fugiendi?* - “Wherefore now thou shalt not be able to abide the horsemen and so great a power in the plain, where is neither stone nor flint, nor place to flee unto”. As Fersch pointed out, Brandr (mis)translates *neque saxum neque locus* as an alliterative pair, *holtt ne breysi*.<sup>724</sup> - “neither hill nor heap of stones”. Subtle alliteration, a technique described by Margaret Cormack as “a native form of adornment”<sup>725</sup> domesticises the Latin narrative voice upon which Brandr based his work. Indeed, techniques such as these lacquer over the fact that *Gyðinga saga* is in reality describing a very distant time and place. That said, the claim remains fundamentally sound that there is intrinsically little dissonance between the ages of the Sturlungs and the Maccabees. A final historical resonance can be found in the depiction of the death of John Gaddi (called *Jón* in Old Norse), brother to Jonathan Apphus. In this scene, the Maccabees have fled to Jordan through the desert, retreating from the Seleucid general Bacchides

Ok er hann ferr til iordanar. sendi hann ion brodur sinn. til uína sina. nabuzeí. ok bad þa lía ser vapna ok herskapar. er þeir attu iafnan meiri gnott en adrir menn. A þessum ueg mæti þeir miklum flockí. ok varo formenn synir ambi or madabas. miklir uinir bachidis. Þeir gera Johannem handtekinn. ok hóǫgua hófud af honum. ok færa bachidi. ok taka þar fyrir þóck ok ómbun.<sup>726</sup>

And when he [Apphus] goes to Jordan he sends his brother, Jón, to his allies, the Nabataeans, and asked them to loan him weapons and armour, as they always had more of abundance of these than others did. On this same journey they meet a large party whose leaders were the sons of Jambri of Medeba, great allies of Bacchides. They tie up Jón and decapitate him, and bring [the head] to Bacchides, and for that they receive gratitude and reward.

As Fersch noted, the beheading of John/Jón Gaddi is not mentioned in any known source.<sup>727</sup> However, the image of a man waylaid on the road in a remote area being bound and decapitated has parallels in a piece of literature which must have been very “close to home” for Brandr, namely *Svínfellinga saga*. Here, Sæmundr and Guðmundr have been captured in a surprise ambush by Ögmundr and his men, while out riding from Hörgsland to Kirkjubær in southern Iceland.

Sæmundr Ormsson bað Ögmund at senda skyldi eptir Brandi ábóta, ok kvazt vilja finna hann.  
Ögmundr kvað þess öngva ván. Ok er engi kostr var griða, skriptaðiz Sæmundr við Þormóð prest,

724 *Gyðinga saga*. p. 78. Fersch 1982. p. 88. Another interesting nativisation concerning the use of the word *óðal* is pointed out by: David Ashurst. “Kings, Bishops, and Laws: The Old Norse-Icelandic Version of 1 Maccabees” in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*. ed. by Daniel Anlezark. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) pp. 139-140.

725 Margaret Cormack. “Christian Biography” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*. p. 34.

726 *Gyðinga saga*. p. 66.

727 Fersch 1982. p. 74.

enn Guðmundr við Hjallta prest; ok tóku báðir þjónustu, holld ok blóð Jesu Christi, í sinn líkama. Eptir þat lásu þeir *Letaniam*. Síðan varp Sæmundr af sér yfirhöfninni, ok féll á kné, ok laut í gaupnir sér, ok bað Guð almátkan sér miskunnar. Hann varð bæði við dauðanum harðliga ok hjálprænliga. Ögmundr mælti til Árna gullskeggs: 'Tak hér eyxi, ok högg í höfuð Sæmundi, ef hann leggz eigi niðr.' Sæmundr féll þá til jarðar, ok hafðe hendr fyrir augum sér. Arni hjó þá á hálsinn, svá at eyxin stóð í sandinum, en höfuðit hné af hónum. Enn þat undruðuz menn, er ekki blæddi líkamanum.<sup>728</sup>

Sæmundr Ormsson told Qgmundr that he should send for Abbot Brandr, and said he wanted to find him. Qgmundr said there was no hope of this. And when there was no chance of quarter, Sæmundr was given confession by the priest Þormóðr, and Guðmundr by the priest Hjalti. And they both received the communion, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in His body. After that they recited a litany. Then Sæmundr took off his hood and fell down on his knees, and covered his face with his hands, and prayed to Almighty God for mercy. He prepared for death bravely and prayerfully. Qgmundr said to Árne Golden-beard: 'Here, take this axe and cut off Sæmundr's head, if he's not going to lay down'. Then Sæmundr fell to the ground and had his hands over his eyes. Árne then struck at the neck so that the axe went down into the dust and off fell the head. And people were amazed that the body did not bleed.

It seems unlikely that Brandr could have intended a precise *roman à clef à la* Hermann Pálsson here. The analogue is not a precise one. Bacchides is a powerful magnate like Qgmundr, but otherwise there is insufficient detail to posit any further similarities. Two brothers are decapitated in *Svínfellinga saga* instead of one in *Gyðinga saga*. Rather, it might be contended that we are seeing for a brief moment some of Brandr's own grief spilling out into his scholarship. The image of a young man captured by his enemies on the road is a potent one, all the more so when the author himself could have prevented one such death if only he had been there – if only word had gotten through. Perhaps this is an overly romantic reading, but in the absence of any other known source for the episode in *Gyðinga saga* personal experience remains a strong hypothesis.

### **The Jews and the Icelanders: Two kingless peoples**

Ashurst has noted that “[r]espect for kings is one of the crucial matters to be found in the fine detail of the saga”.<sup>729</sup> This is true, and in fact we can add some some qualifying subtleties to his point. In *Gyðinga saga* the Jews function best in union under the kingship of *other* peoples. When the Jews have kings from amongst their own ranks, these rulers tend to lack moral fibre and the narrator treats them with

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728 *Svínfellinga saga*. pp. 96-97.

729 Ashurst 2011. p. 136.

very little esteem accordingly. King Aristobulus I is the first Maccabee descendant (more properly Hasmonean) to crown himself:

Aristobolus þickiz vera af suiptr arfi. ok þolir æigi modurliga drottnan yfir ser. ok lætr hand taka modur sina. ok hina vngu brædr sína. ok setia i iarn ... ok bar engín kongs nafn fyrr enn þessi aristobolus. Gud þoldi æigi lengr enn eitt ár hans riki. þui at hann suelli modur sína ok brædr til bana. Hann var lostinn illri sott.<sup>730</sup>

Aristobulus thinks he has been swindled out of his inheritance and cannot tolerate a maternal ruler over him. So he has his mother and his younger brothers arrested and put in chains ... and nobody bore the name of king before this Aristobulus. God did not tolerate his rule for more than a year because he starved his mother and brothers to death. He was struck with an evil sickness.

Aristobulus's ancestors chose the more expedient strategy of adopting all of the accoutrements of kingship without the actual title (and indeed *at bera konungs nafn* does seem to be the principal concern from the narrative voice here – starving his mother and brothers is almost an afterthought). For example, here we see the non-coronation of Jonathan Apphus:

... en hann klæddi hann purpura. ok setr hann i hasæti hia ser. sidan lætr hann leida jonathan vm alla borgína ok skal engín þora neitt í moti honum at mæla. ok skammaz nv miok hans æfundarmenn. er þeira sa hann sua hátt tignadan af konginum. ok eptir ferr jonathas heim i ierusalem med miklum pris. Enni æigi bar hann þo kongsnafn at hann bær purpuram ok korunu. Anulum ok gull dalk.<sup>731</sup>

and he [King Alexander Balas] clad him in purple and had him put on a throne beside him. Then he has Jonathan brought all around the city and nobody dares say anything to him, and those who envied him are now much ashamed when they saw how highly he was prized by the king, and then Jonathan returns home to Jerusalem with great honour. But he did not take the title of king even though he wore purple and a crown, a signet ring and a golden brooch.

In the case of his successor, Simon, the line between ruler and king is even slighter, but just as crucial. Here, the Romans actually send him a crown in addition to the other paraphernalia of kingship. However, in title he remains the *yfirkennimaðr*, “high priest”:

Ok er þetta snyrz til roma borgar. at Jonathas er drepinn. enn símon brodir hans komín i stadinn.

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<sup>730</sup> *Gyðinga saga*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.* at pp. 76-77.

þa senda þeir nu ord til hans. ok vilia binda med hann sinn felag skap. Simon tok þi val. ok sendir romuierium einn skiolld af gulli geruan. Enn þeir gefa honum frealst rikit. allt af ællu Judea. æuinliga. ok senda honum koronu ok purpura. anulum ok gull dalk. ok allan kongs bunað. ok setia hann yfir kenni man. ok hertoga allz folksíns. Ok var þetta allt skrifat gull stófum. ok vpp fest í salomons musteri ollum til æ syndar.<sup>732</sup>

And when it circulates to Rome that Jonathan has been killed and that his brother Simon has taken his place they then send word to him that they wish to cement their alliance. Simon receives this graciously, and sends the Romans a shield made of gold. And they gave him total freedom to rule all of Judea for ever, and they send him a crown and purple robes, a signet ring and a golden brooch and all the attire of a king, and they make him the high priest and duke of all the people. And all this was written in golden letters and put up in the Temple of Solomon for all to see.

The Jews of *Gyðinga saga* are by no means lost without foreign rulership. After the death of Jonathan Apphus, the narrator warns that: *Heidnar þiodir umbuerfis vilia fyrirkoma þeim vid yfir gydinga. ok segia sua. Nu hafa þeir óngan forstiora. ne bodfingia yfir ser. fyrir komum þeim nu. ok þeirra uirding og Rindum af oss þeirra ofsa.*<sup>733</sup> - Pagan peoples all around wish to destroy them, together with the Pharisees, and they say: 'Now they have no leader nor chieftain over them. We will destroy them now and their honour, and rid ourselves of their arrogance'. This concern is unfounded. The Jews fight on quite admirably, and the number of attacks against them seems no worse at this juncture in the saga than at any other point. Nonetheless, some of their most impressive moments occur when client dominion with a foreign crown allows them to act on the 'global stage', e.g. when the deceitful King Demetrius calls on the Jews to save him from a rebel uprising: *þeir veria Róskliga konginn. ok komu landz monnum á flotta. ok drepa af þeim þann dag c. manna. ok frelsa kong undan dauda. ok fengu of fiar. ok verda ebrei storum agietir af þessu.*<sup>734</sup> - "They defend the king valiantly and the peasants come in droves, and that day they kill 100,000 of them and save the king from death and got much wealth, and the Jews become very famous because of this". It is tempting to posit that just as in *Alexanders saga*, the Jews for Brandr also function as models for how the Icelanders could relate to royal power. Literary allegory would allow for subtler political positions to be articulated than the blood-drenched world of Norwegian-Icelandic politics in the 1250s-1260s otherwise could. When the Jews are led by generous leaders such as Judas Maccabeus, things go well for them. When they engage in the wider world by pledging fealty to foreign kings, they have the potential to excel in ways they otherwise could not. When hegemonic rulers emerge from their own ranks, the situation

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732 Ibid. at pp. 100-102

733 *Gyðinga saga*. p. 91. Fersch points out that *yfirgyðinga* "Pharisees" is an original addition here. Brandr seems to be somewhat confused over the role of the Pharisees in his saga, and how he perceives their relationship to the Jewish people more generally in the saga is not clear. See: Fersch 1982. p. 105.

734 *Gyðinga saga*. pp. 84-85.

tends to deteriorate fairly dramatically, as we have seen in the case of King Aristobulus and as is also true in the case of King Herod of Ascalon. (Amongst his many other barbarities, he goes to his death saying “*villda ek ... at gydingar atti nockut at harma. sua at æigi gleddiz þeir med minn dauda*”<sup>735</sup> - “I would like ... for the Jews to have something to grieve for, so that they cannot rejoice at my death”, and thus he has the leading men of the Jews murdered). In this constellation, if one interprets the Jews as the Icelanders and the Norwegian kings as the Hellenistic dynasties, the message is perfectly consistent with that we saw articulated in *Alexanders saga*.

### **The limits of Brandr's apologetic**

The extent of the self-identification with the Jews to which Brandr leaves his audience open is quite considerable. At times, his text even puts his Christian readership in an uncomfortable position:

J þenna tíma lét alkínus briota nídr ueði isalomons musteri. er skildi stóðu kenni manna ok leik manna. Ok lét hann ganga til alltaris heidna menn sem kristna kenni menn. ok er hann hóf þetta illzku verk. at briota nídr verk spá manna sealfra. varð hann mallaus. ok leystiz í sundr ilidum. ok do imíkilli kuðl.<sup>736</sup>

At that time Alcimus broke down the wall in the temple of Solomon which stood to separate the priests from the laymen. And he had pagans go up to the altar [like/together with?] Christian priests. And when he began this evil deed, to break down the work of prophets themselves he became mute and lost control of his limbs and died in great agony.

The meaning here is not entirely clear. The conjunction *sem* could denote “[just] as” Christian priests were doing, or just “as” Christian priests do now. Fersch takes the former option in her translation of the saga: “he had both heathen men and Christian priests go up to the altar”.<sup>737</sup> Either way, the implication for a medieval Christian audience is a difficult one. Either contemporary, thirteenth century Christian priests are being compared to blasphemers, or impossibly ahistorical Maccabee-era Christian priests actually *were* blasphemers. The presence of actual Christians would be ludicrously anachronistic, of course, so the remark may well be intended to illustrate how in Christianity, as opposed to Maccabee-era Judaism, the priest is visible to the congregation throughout the service. There may too be an inference intended to illustrate just how offensive the mockery suffered by the Jews was. Throughout the Middle Ages the Eucharistic administration of bread together with wine become

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735 Ibid. at p. 158.

736 Ibid. at p. 68.

737 Fersch 1982. p. 71.

increasingly socially stratified. The chalice became the preserve of clerics rather than laity.<sup>738</sup> The thirteenth century audience of *Gyðinga saga* would thus most likely have understood that the *heiðnir menn* were not just desecrating the customs of the Israelites in general, but of the priestly class specifically. It ought to be noted that the phrase *sem kristna kennimenn* is clearly Brandr's addition. 1 Maccabees 9:54 reads: "... Alcimus commanded that the wall of the inner court of the sanctuary should be pulled down; he pulled down also the works of the prophets" without any mention of the altar being otherwise profaned.

The Judas tradition as it appears in *Gyðinga saga* is of obscure origins. It first appears in Latin in the twelfth century, but is surely considerably older and was formerly known in diverse languages.<sup>739</sup> Its inclusion in *Gyðinga saga* is relevant here because of how it apportioned blame for the subsequent "downfall" of the Jews:

A Dogum herodis kongs var sa madr i iudea af ætt. [0000]. er ruben het. enn kona hans het ciborea þat var éina natt er hon hafdi sofnad. eptir samlag átt med bonda sinn. Ok er hon vaknar gret hon sært. Ruben spurdi hui sættí. Hon svarar. Ek þottumz uíta at skipti ockr hofdu uerít. Sidan þottumz ek sea barnít ikuidi mer. Ok vissa ek at þat barn mvndi verða tion ok tapan allz gyðinga lyds ... enn folk vart fyrir hann sumt drepit enn allt hertekit.<sup>740</sup>

In the days of King Herod there was a man in Judea of the tribe of [Judah]. And his wife was called Ciborea. One night while she was sleeping after intercourse with her husband. And when she woke she wept grievously. Ruben asked why this might be. She replies: "It seemed to me that I saw that a change has happened to us. It seemed to me that I had a child in my womb. And I knew that this child would be the loss and the destruction of the entire Jewish people ... and because of him some of our people will be killed and all of them made prisoners".

The audience is encouraged to sympathise with Ruben and Ciborea, and indeed *alls gyðinga lýðs*. A great many of the people for whom the reader has rooted throughout the saga are about to be "killed and all of them made prisoners". The massacre, enslavement and exile of the Jews by Vespasian was righteous retaliation in the Old Norse *Origo Crucis*. In this episode, it is an impending tragedy. The scene also stands contrary to any claim of collective responsibility for Christ's death. Here the "blame" for the suffering of the Jews, and therefore presumably the death of Christ (a curious concept given the theological necessity of the Passion) lies solely with Judas. This rather stands in opposition to Cohen's

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738 M. Gerwing. "Kelchkommunion" in *Lexikon des Mittel Alters*. vol. 5. pp. 1096-1097. I am grateful to Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson for pointing out this resonance.

739 Kirsten Wolf. "The Judas Legend in Scandinavia", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88, 4 (1989) pp. 463-476.

740 *Gyðinga saga*. pp. 181-182.

almost universally true reading, that “Judas Iscariot epitomizes the Jewish Christ killer, illuminating the monstrosity of the crime against Jesus on the one hand, and the guilt of the Jews on the other hand”.<sup>741</sup> As Ruben and Ciborea wake, afearred for the fate of people with whom the reader has been emotively encouraged to identify for the preceding thirty two chapters, Judas cannot symbolise the supposed universal Jewish guilt. He deflects it.

Strangely, the attitude to Vespasian's vengeance here is not consistent with those in the later chapters further towards the close of *Gyðinga saga*. There Vespasian says, without a hint of any authorial criticism: “*Óruðr em ek í þui. at sa er Guds son er mik græddi. ok þegar ek fær leyfi af keisaranum. skal ek fyrir koma þeim nidingum er þetta overkan hafa vnnit*”<sup>742</sup> - “I am sure of this; that it was the Son of God who healed me, and as soon as I get permission from the emperor I will destroy those malefactors who perpetrated this misdeed”. An even more damning pronouncement comes in the antepenultimate chapter concerning the rebellion against Pilate: *Nu geck illt. ok illu verra yfir gyðinga. fyrir sinn glæp. sua at all dri geck af þeim suerd ok sut. vfridr ok illzka. þar til er at enda lyket gaf þeim yfir breizl allra sinna harma. ok kula. þa er ierusalem var upp tekín af Romuerium.*<sup>743</sup> - “Now things went badly and worse than badly for the Jews, because of their crime, so that sword and sorrow, strife and evil never left them, until in the end they were given the culmination of all their sorrows and agonies when Jerusalem was captured by the Romans”. It seems that for all the self-identification and sympathy which Brandr attempted to instil for the Jews in his Icelandic audience, the basic limits of medieval theology created one impermeable divide. Despite what he may have hinted at in *Konungs skuggsjá*, Brandr's age had not yet begun to consider the possibility of two covenants. The thirteenth century philo-Semite may have been learned, tolerant, and compassionate, but he remained a Christian who knew only one path to salvation.

### What inspired Brandr?

Precisely why Brandr saw Jews as aspirational models rather than theological problems is impossible to say with any certainty. Perhaps his background as a Svínfellingr played a role. The typologies of Jews as ancient and gifted people, who were sadly left powerless, may have chimed with his own experience. The Svínfellingar too were a very old faction compared to some of their competitors. By the mid-thirteenth century they lacked a strong sword arm, and instead maintained influence by securing positions through learning and guile. Like the Jews of *Gyðinga saga*, they stood to lose most of all from

741 Jeremy Cohen. *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 257. Sympathy for Judas in medieval literature is not entirely unknown. See: “Judas” in *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*. ed. by Kenneth Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) pp. 168-169. Donald G. Schuele. “The Middle English Judas: An Interpretation”, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 91 (1976) pp. 840-845. The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (750-800) provides a particularly striking example. See: J.S. Mackley. *The Legend of St. Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions*. (Leiden: Brill, 2008) pp. 198-199.

742 *Gyðinga saga*. pp. 191-192.

743 *Ibid.* at pp. 208-209.

the prospective rise of an introspectively-minded domestic sovereign power. Union with a foreign crown meant that Svínfellingar could proffer their talents to a distant ruler who needed reliable representatives to administer their new dominion. Iceland unified under one clan-powerbase ought to have been a less appealing prospect: how long then until such a hypothetical hegemony turned its attention to the Austfirðingafjórðungr, the untouched homeland of the Svínfellingar? Brandr may also have been inspired by sympathies broader than clan-loyalty alone. Turville-Petre's alignment of the Sturlung Age with the struggles of the Maccabees and later the Hasmoneans remains attractive. Perhaps he related to the Jews on three levels: as a Svínfellingr, as an Icelander, and as a human being.

If the question of why Brandr's philo-Semitic proclivities emerged remains obscure, the question of *how they could* is hopefully clearer. Here, it becomes pertinent again to consider the condition of Jewish absence. It is hard to imagine a mind like Brandr coming into existence in a country that did possess a Jewish population. Brandr accessed his episodes of Jewish history in a quite homogeneously Christian intellectual milieu. As we have seen, some Jewish learning did make its way into Scandinavia, but this was a very marginal trend – and one that often left the information it conveyed severely corrupted. By using the apocryphal books of the Vulgate, the *Historia Scholastica*, and even the *Alexandreis*, he recovered a history of the Jews (if not quite a Jewish history) where many contemporaries would only have seen Christian instruction, or in the case of the *Alexandreis*, rather fantastic entertainment. A cleric with philo-Semitic leanings in continental Europe might well have had the opportunity to consult a rabbi, to study a little Hebrew. A very few philo-Semites in such environments even converted to Judaism, e.g. the Norman Italian Johannes of Oppido, later Obadiah the Proselyte (fl. 1102).<sup>744</sup> Naturally, none of these options were open to Brandr. Had they been, his work would most likely have taken on a radically different character. Strangely, while the absence of Jews in Norway and Iceland limited the scope of Brandr's investigations, it also provided the liberty necessary for its creation. In areas where the presence of Jews was met with religious, cultural or racial animosity, room for sympathetic attitudes towards Jews and Judaism was severely diminished. Some of the pronouncements made by Brandr would probably have been quite controversial in circumstances where Christian-Jewish disputations were a reality, e.g. his introduction of Christian priests into Solomon's temple in *Gyðinga saga*, or his retelling of the St. Helena legend in *Konungs skuggsjá*. While we ought to be cautious of affording too much similarity between anti-Semites and philo-Semites, it is true that both tendencies rely on an image of the Jew that thrives better the deeper it can dwell in the imagination, uninhibited by the endlessly problematising intrusion of reality. Pure absence is the greatest license such an

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744 Norman Golb. "The Music of Obadiah the Proselyte and his Conversion", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 18 (1967) pp. 1-19.

See also by the same author: "Notes on the Conversion of Prominent European Christians to Judaism During the Eleventh Century", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 16 (1965) pp. 69-74.

imagination can be granted.

## Conclusion: On “Thinking with Jews”, or “-Semitisms”

If *Jóns saga Hólabyskups* is to be believed, one night Bishop Jón Ögmundarson slept uneasily in his bed at Hólar:

Eitt hvertt sinn þá er heilagur J(ón) byskvp hafði til svefnns lagz einhveria nött þá bar fyrir hann syn hann þottizt staddr vera abæn sinni fyrir einvm micklvm roðv krossi ok því næst þotti honvm likneskit akrossinvm hneigiaz at ser ok mæla nockvr orð ieýra ser. ok vitvm ver eigi hver þav vorv. þessa syn sagði hann Rikinna prest<i> ok var engi sa er raða kynni. En hinn næsta dag eptir þá komv afvnd. heilags J(ons) byskvps þeir menn er þá vorv nykomnir af hafi ok færðv honvm bok eina. æ þeiri bok var sa atbvrðr ritaðr er æ þessv landi var þá miok okvnnr. sagt fra því er Gyðingar pindv likneskiv vars hera Iesv Christi eptir þeim hætti sem þeir havfðv fyr pindan drottin varnn Iesvm Christvm þeir bavrðv likneskit með svipvm ok spyttv æ þat. ok gafv því hals havgg. eptir þat krossfestv þeir þat ok gengv síðan firir krossinn ok skelktv at likeskinv eptir dæmvn hinna fyri Gyðinga. eptir þat tokv þeir spiot ok lavgðv grimliga isiðv likneskinv. þá varð dasamligr atbvrðr ok fæ heyrðr vatnn með bloði liop or siðv likneskinv. ok af því bloði ok vatni fengv margir sivkir menn heilsv. Ok er Gyðingar sæ þenna atbvrð. allan iamnn saman. þá giorðv þeir iðran / af avllv hiarta ok snorz til gvðs. Ok er h(eilagur) J(ón) byskvp ok Rikini prestr havfðv lesit þenna atbvrð þá mællti prestrinn við byskvp brosandí. Se her nv faðir dravm þann er drottinn syndi þer i nött. Síðan lofvðv þeir baðir drottin Iesvm Christvm.<sup>745</sup>

Once, when holy Bishop Jón had lain down to sleep one night, then a vision appeared before him. He seemed to be standing at prayer before a great crucifix, and the next thing that happened, the figure on the cross bent down and spoke some words in his ear, and we do not know what they were. He told the Priest Rikini about this vision, and there was nobody who could interpret it. But the next day, some men who had just arrived from sea came to meet holy Bishop Jón, and they brought him a book. In that book this event was written which in this country [Iceland] was then very much unknown. It was told how Jews crucified the statue of Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the way that they had previously crucified Our Lord Jesus Christ. They assaulted the statue with blows and spat upon it, and decapitated it. After that they crucified it and then went before the cross and mocked the statue following the example of the previous Jews. After that they took a spear and fiercely stuck it into the side of the statue. Then a glorious and little heard of event happened. Water and blood ran out the side of the statue, and from this water and blood many sick men were healed. And when the Jews saw this event, they all repented together, then they made amends with all their hearts and were turned to God. And when holy Bishop Jón and Rikini the

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<sup>745</sup> *Jóns Saga Hólabyskups*. pp. 26-27. The cited text is from the S recension (before c. 1270), although the episode is also found in the L recension (c. 1320-1340), and the H recension (c. 1500 or later). The L recension is particularly vivid and grotesque, but I have cited the S recension for its antiquity and its concision. See: pp. 93-94, 129-130.

ngpriest had read this event, then the priest spoke to the bishop, smiling: “See here now, father, your dream which the Lord showed you last night!”. Then they both praised Lord Jesus Christ.

There was nothing nightmarish in Jón's vision that night. Whatever grim anti-Jewish language he might have heard during his clerical training, he was not troubled by images of frenzied, repellant Jews, such as those we saw from Ál stave church or the *Teiknibók* etc. On the contrary, his dream was rather serene: a quiet moment of intimacy with Christ. But it was also puzzling to him. We do not know what the crucifix said to the bishop any more than the saga author did. However, whatever His words, Christ's meaning was not abundantly clear. Jón needed somebody to *ráða* “interpret” for him. Jón had an international cohort at Hólar in which to find a man to solve the mystery. The Rhenish priest Rikini, who had come a long way to end up in northern Iceland, could not help.<sup>746</sup> Jón's prodigious Swedish Latinist, Gísli Finnason, whom we introduced earlier, is not named in this particular passage but presumably had no solutions either. The Icelanders of Jón's ecclesiastical community were apparently stumped too.

The answer would come from across the seas - in more than one sense. The recently arrived sailors who sought out the bishop (in the L recension they are more specifically *af Noregi* - “from Norway”) were the instruments who would deliver the telling manuscript (again, in the L recension it is a *bæklingr* “bookling, little book” - which suggests something about how *miracula* were circulating in medieval Iceland). Yet it was the distant, foreign Jews of whom the book told who gave meaning to the previously meaningless dream. When Jón and Rikini sat down and read about the miracle, and so heard about the malice and then remorse of the Jews, riddle became revelation. There is a fundamental anti-Judaism in the episode: the Jewish religion is “disproved” by the miracle, and the once villainous, reflexively hostile Jews accept as much apologetically. However, the timbre attempted by the saga author is largely one not of hatred, but of joy (of course, the modern reader will generally not be receptive to it, and understandably so). The message which Jón and Rikini apparently derive from the dream and the book is not to recoil from the evil of Jews, nor even to celebrate their conversion to Christianity. Rikini turns to Jón, *brosandi* “smiling”, for in attacking the statue and witnessing its miraculous bleeding, the Jews have rendered the unknown-to-us words of Christ to Jón comprehensible. They thus played their part in proving the reality of the divine twice: Firstly far away (according to the H recension *[j] borg þeiri er Bericho heiter* “in the city which is called Beirut”, a tradition which will be recognised from the *Flagellatio Crucis* and *De Corona Spinea*) when they made the statue bleed. For a second time in Iceland, when their arrival on the pages of a new book was heralded by a heavenly dream – a dream that, without their appearance, would have remained frustratingly obscure.

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746 On Rikini's background, see: Peter Foote. “Aachen, Lund, Hólar” in *Aurvandilstá.* pp. 111-112.

I introduce this vignette for a number of reasons: 1) It depicts a late eleventh century or early twelfth century engagement with the Jewish topos in medieval Iceland, and as such, if it is not entirely a thirteenth century fiction, is amongst our earliest example of that species of interaction, 2) more importantly for my conclusion, it demonstrates the importance of what David Nirenberg and others have called “thinking with Jews” - a process which he identifies in Christian and Islamic thought as being independent of “struggles with 'real' Jews”.<sup>747</sup> It is obvious that when medieval Christians (or indeed people from other times and places) discuss Jews and Judaism, they may intend relatively simple notions: praise, slander, fear etc. We have seen cases of all of these in the present study. However, sometimes by design and sometimes by accident, the gentile discussion of Jews is also often affixed with other, more complex sentiments. Amongst other examples, Nirenberg identifies concern over Church sovereignty in the “thinking with Jews” of St. Ambrose (d. 397), and over Protestant fractiousness in that of Luther.<sup>748</sup> The occasional complexity of the Jewish topos is well surmised by Nirenberg in his discussion of some Patristic positions: “hypocrisy, carnality, literalism and enmity were strategically distilled into the figure of the Jew. Like all distillation, this one was a risky business”.<sup>749</sup>

The “thinking with Jews” which I would contend underlies Bishop Jón's dream is very simplistic. The anti-Jewish tropes are undeveloped and not dwelt upon by the saga author (at least in the S recension, the later L recension is a different matter). What is it that the episode communicates other than the apparent mistaken nastiness of the Jews? Nothing besides the assurance that there is a God, that He is the Christian God, and that He was well-disposed towards the saintly Bishop Jón. For a pre-Humanist culture, nobody would claim that these were surprising or controversial sentiments. Before abandoning the episode as entirely obvious and shallow, however, I would label the aforementioned sentiments as essentially *existential concerns*. Note, though, that if the identity of Existentialism as a modern rather than medieval approach offends the reader, what I am really talking about is the creation and maintenance of world-views which make it psychologically easier to be a human being.<sup>750</sup>

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747 Nirenberg 2014. pp. 176-177. Cf. pp. 1-12. See also: Chazan 2010. p. 87. At the time of writing, a book project on the concept of “thinking with Jews” is under preparation by Jonathan Elukin.

748 Nirenberg 2014. pp. 117-119, 263-268.

749 Ibid. at p. 119

750 On what to some extent ought to be considered 'existentialism before existentialism' in the Middle Ages, see: John F. Wippel. “Thomas Aquinas on the Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather than Nothing Whatsoever” in *The Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather than Nothing Whatsoever?* ed. by John F. Wippel (The Catholic University of America Press, 2011) pp. 84 – 108. For a study which problematises the modern existentialist lens on medieval thought, but still reveals the sensible reasons for coupling the two traditions, see: Daniel O. Dahlstrom. “Temptation, Self-possession, and Resoluteness: Heidegger's reading of *Confessions* X and What Is the Good of *Being and Time*?”, *Research in Phenomenology* 39 (2009) pp. 248-265. See also: Burcht Pranger. “Augustine and the Silence of the Sirens”, *The Journal of Religion* 91, 1 (2011) esp. pp. 74-77.

The bishop's dream and the arrival of the book substantiate a particular cosmology, and with it a moral system, i.e. that of medieval Christianity. Thus, in their own rather humble way, they help to impose order on the world, so that the often frightening and bewildering experience of consciousness – of being human – might be made more amenable and comprehensible. Indeed, as an aside, we might note that medieval Iceland, particularly during the Commonwealth period, was probably fairly frightening and bewildering as experiences of being human go.

The frequent association between “thinking with Jews” and existential concerns is not my own invention, nor is it particularly novel. As we saw briefly in an earlier chapter, Sartre had proposed the connection as far back as 1944. Interested as he was in France – and particularly France since the Industrial Revolution – he devoted particular attention to a much more precise subset of existential questioning than what we have seen in Jón Qgmundarson's dream. In Sartre's eyes, the anti-Semite was “thinking with Jews” to anaesthetise two proximal anxieties. Firstly, there was the connection to his country. In the wake of Capitalism and Industrialisation, Sartre asserted, the modern Frenchman has found his station and value to France left open to question. Execrating the Jews is palliative thus:

It is in opposing themselves to the Jew that they suddenly become conscious of being proprietors: in representing the Jew as a robber they put themselves in the enviable position of people who could be robbed. Since the Jew wishes to take France from them, it follows that France must belong to them. Thus they have chosen anti-Semitism as a means of establishing their status as possessors.<sup>751</sup>

Secondly, anti-Semitism could be used to explain and excuse personal failings and regrettable personal circumstances. Sartre elucidated this dynamic with the following anecdote:

A classmate of mine at the lycée told me that Jews “annoy” him because of the thousands of injustices that “Jew-ridden” social organizations commit in their favor. “A Jew passed in *agrégation* the year I was failed, and you can't make me believe that that fellow, whose father came from Cracow or Lemberg, understood a poem by Ronsard or an eclogue by Virgil better than I.” But he admitted that he disdained the *agrégation* as a mere academic exercise, and that he didn't study for it. Thus, to explain his failure, he made use of two systems of interpretation, like those madmen who, when they are far gone in their madness, pretend to be the King of Hungary, but, if questioned sharply, admit to being shoemakers. His thoughts moved on two planes without his being in the least embarrassed by it.<sup>752</sup>

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751 Sartre 1948. p. 25.

752 Ibid. at p. 12.

Just as Sartre drew on a particular time and place, so must we – in our case, medieval Iceland and Norway. Now that some precedent for the *human-beingness* of “thinking with Jews” has been sketched out, the next order of questioning must be to explain how far such an interpretation extends to the matter hitherto presented in the previous chapters. Before proceeding, I hope I will be permitted one last terminological clarification: that the business of “thinking with Jews” is really the same as what in the introduction to this thesis was introduced as “-Semitism”. There it was written that “[t]he hyphen serves to remind us that whether anti-, philo-, allo- or any other prefix, we are dealing with the fundamental problem of what happens when Jews are experienced through gentile eyes”. As I see it, anti-Judaism therefore has the dubious accolade of being an honorary -Semitism, alongside philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism. It will be concluded that all -Semitisms are predisposed towards servicing questions pertaining to the difficult business of the human experience: of what makes us individuals, of what happens to us where we die, and more. I will not seek to excuse or apologise for the gentile fixation on Jews, which has so often had destructive effects, but I will propose my own account of its complexity and tenacity. In order to do so, certain reflections on the subject matter of various chapters in this thesis will be put forth. I hope that if the reader remains unconvinced by these concluding ruminations, that he/she will not become overly prejudiced against the preceding chapters as a result.

### **An Epistemological Shortcut?**

In discussion with Adam Mowl on the psychology underlying conspiracy theories, he once described them to me as “a shortcut to knowledge”. The pursuit of *real* knowledge – a knowledge based on countless hours of thoughtful reflection and the diligent accrual of information – is a time-consuming endeavour. It is also frequently unrewarding: what we think we know can be precariously grounded and liable to being proven incorrect. Moreover, we are regularly required to accept that there are a great many places where our knowledge cannot reach. As Søren Kierkegaard put it: *Det er nemlig en Opgave for den menneskelige Erkjendende at forstaae at der er, og hvilket det er, den ikke kan forstaae*<sup>753</sup> - “It is indeed a task for human knowledge to understand that things exist, and what those things are, that it cannot understand”. When one subscribes to a conspiracy theory, the elusiveness and precarity of knowledge are circumvented. Anything can be explained, and when the grounds for the ill-gotten knowledge are shaken, the kaleidoscope simply revolves and produces a new constellation, e.g. any unfortunate evidence can be discredited as simply another manifestation of the conspiracy.<sup>754</sup>

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753 Søren Kierkegaard. *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*. vol. 20. ed. by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn *et al.* (Copenhagen: Søren Kierkegaard Forskningscenteret, 2003) p. 89. Abbreviations expanded.

754 cf. Sartre 1948. p. 18. “How can one choose to reason falsely? It is because of a longing for impenetrability. The rational man groans as he gropes for the truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it ... But there are people who are attracted by the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable ...”

I would contend that what is true of conspiracy theories in this regard is equally true of the kind of esoteric knowledge concerning medieval Hebraism presented in the second chapter of this thesis. When certain Christians esteemed Hebrew as “the highest language”, to use the words of the *Messuskýringar*, they made a claim with profound implications: that some languages were holier than others, more godly and more potent. A command of Hebrew was therefore tantamount to having a “step-up” towards the divine. This is surely part of the reason why St. Augustine was emphatic in his repeated assertions that God did not speak Hebrew, nor any other human language, and that all mortal languages were therefore equal: *sed apud deum purus intellectus est, sine strepitu et diuersitate linguarum*<sup>755</sup> - “for with God there is pure intellect, without the din and diversity of languages”.

To believe in the special efficacy of one language over another is a self-soothing epistemological shortcut so long as one knows a few words in said language. The speaker perceives that somehow, the language has peculiar purchase on the fabric of reality. One can thus enjoy an *ersatz* insight into the profound workings of the universe, reaching places with ones magic Hebrew words that ordinary knowledge cannot. The great philosophers of the Middle Ages pondered, reasoned and, in the case of St. Thomas Aquinas, still ended up summarising their life's work as “*omnia que scripsi videntur mihi palee*[.]”<sup>756</sup> - “everything I have written seems to me to be chaff!”. The contented owner of a shortcut to knowledge can congratulate themselves for their esoteric accomplishment; knowing which Hebrew words can govern the world. In certain circumstances, knowing Hebrew words was not just a “shortcut to knowledge” but also a “shortcut to power”. Thus as we saw earlier, when the Old Norse *Læknisbók* prescribed that “for sore eyes [one should] write on a page *vau, nau, dele, neamon, ai-leph, gimel* and *anne*” it also revealed (and for some would have confirmed) a belief that the cod-Hebrew-speaking magician could exercise a special control over reality.

There is nothing controversial here from the perspective of “the magical world view”.<sup>757</sup> What is noteworthy for our purposes are the consequences of the implication of Hebrew. Foregoing lengthy engagement with the thriving field of medieval and wider anthropological magic studies, I am of the opinion well expressed by Richard Kieckhefer that magic was generally seen by its medieval

755 St. Augustine. *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* in *Opera Omnia*. vol. 3. ed. by J. P. Migne. (Petit-Montrouge: L. Migne, 1841) p. 180. The pronouncement was rendered into Old Norse in the fourteenth century: *Stjórn*. vol. 1. p. 9. See also: Douglas Robinson. *Translation & Taboo* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996) pp. 110-111.

756 *Processus canonizationis s. Thoma, Neapoli* 79. [*Fontes vitae s. Thomae Aquinatis*, fasc. 4] ed. by M. H. Laurent. (Saint-Maximilla-Sainte-Baume: Revue Thomiste, n. d.) p. 377. As has been pointed out, the “quote” dates from 1319 and is most likely apocryphal. It has indeed taken on a life of its own, in popular literature often being phrased erroneously or misattributed. See: Marjorie O' Rourke Boyle. “Chaff: Thomas Aquinas's Repudiation of His *Opera omnia*”, *New Literary History* 28, 2 (1997) pp. 383-399.

757 A term introduced originally by: Rosalie & Murray Wax. “The Magical World View”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1, 2 (1962) pp. 179-188. For comment in a medieval Scandinavian setting, see: Mitchell 2011. pp. 12-17

practitioners as a kind of input/output system.<sup>758</sup> Magic wands, amulets, concoctions of crushed vultures kidneys etc are all implements for formulating the 'inputs'. Revitalised sexual potency, good weather, romantic success etc are 'outputs'. However, unlike magic wands and the like, the Hebrew language had a degree of immanence in medieval Christendom. As the *Messuskeýringar* point out, it provided basic words in liturgy. As we have seen, medieval Scandinavian sources such as *Veraldar saga* or AM 194 8vo demonstrate a (not altogether accurate) awareness that Hebrew was continuing to be the native, spoken language of contemporary Jews. The rarity – indeed the artificiality – of magic wands, potions etc mean that in subscribing to their efficacy, the world remains a place in which most power exercised is natural rather than supernatural. One can admit that there are sorcerers in the world and that they possess various devices for manipulating the fabric of reality, but be comforted in knowing that they are few and far between. One might never or only seldom meet a sorcerer and encounter the tools of their trade. When the Hebrew language is given the same status, either as words to which God is more likely to listen or as a more straightforward magical device, the global ratio of natural to supernatural phenomena must be adjusted. The rules have changed at the game of being human. The clique who enjoy supernatural favour has been dramatically enlarged, now to include the entire Jewish people, who according to certain aforementioned Old Norse sources obviously know Hebrew better than the vast majority of Christians. The sorcerers' arcane implements are no longer hidden away but pass the lips of every one of the faithful when they say the words “amen” or “Hallelujah”.

Following the example of the *Læknisbók*, or (as I read it previously) AM 732b 4to, or certain runic inscriptions, one can attempt to join the elect who know reality's Semitic “secret passwords”.<sup>759</sup> Alternatively, following *Dínus saga drambláta* with its kinky Hebrew-inscribed tablet, or the magician and his oxen's kidney stones from the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*, or the necromancer of the *Theophilus* legend, one can scorn the magically privileged group to which one does not belong (and of course, that group and its powers were the invention of ones own mind in the first place). This latter strategy brings to mind Sartre's theory that anti-Semites long to position themselves as “mediocre”. They consider Jews to have superior powers, e.g. intelligence, wealth, or in this case magic. Crucially, they then denigrate these superior abilities as somehow “Jewish”, and congratulate themselves for their role as humble underdogs. To quote Sartre:

The anti-Semite readily admits that the Jew is intelligent and hard-working; he will even confess himself inferior in these respects. This concession costs him nothing, for he has, as it were, put those qualities in parentheses ... the more virtues the Jew has the more dangerous he will be. The

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758 Richard Kieckhefer. “The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic”, *The American Historical Review* 99, 3 (1994) esp. pp. 813-814, 828-836.

759 See Appendix II. Also: Cole 2016.

anti-Semite has no illusions about what he is. He considers himself an average man, modestly average, basically mediocre ... But you must not think that he is ashamed of his mediocrity; he takes pleasure in it. I will even assert that he has chosen it ... They Jew has more money than they? So much the better: money is Jewish, and they can despise it as they despise intelligence.<sup>760</sup>

I would contend that this is the same psychological dynamic at work in a mind which accepts that Jews have supernatural powers through their language, and which also refuses to adopt those powers itself. One acknowledges the “secret” of Hebrew's unique potency, and so chooses the shortcut to knowledge of the universe's mysterious workings. However, one also chooses to despise the Jews and their language for their supposed advantage. In rejecting the shortcut to power, one chooses “mediocrity”, precisely according to Sartre's model. It is no random detail that in the anti-Semitic hysteria which seized Visby in 1350, previously discussed in chapter 5, the poisoners were said to belong to a secret society of which the members were all *signo greco vel hebrayco sunt signati*<sup>761</sup> - “marked [i.e. tattooed?] with a letter written in Greek or Hebrew”. Perhaps when this fantasy was attached to the accused men, their persecutors inadvertently exposed the close kinship between the magical view of Hebrew and conspiracy-theory-thinking. I cannot help but wonder whether the Visbyers imagined the burnings as a triumph against the oriental Other, who had been vanquished despite their empowering Hebrew tattoos.<sup>762</sup>

### Race and The Individual

In the third chapter of this thesis, I outlined the manner in which the not precisely but roughly equivalent concepts of *fólk*, *keyn*, *ætt* and *þjóð* were applied to Jews in Old Norse literature. It was argued that the cases provided constituted a mode of thought which was very much like what modern minds will recognise racial thinking. I would further contend that the essence of “race” is a predication of two mental fixtures: firstly, it is *predictive*; a kind of secular typology where behaviours and character traits are attributed to certain formulaic types, e.g. The untrustworthy Jew, the Jew who lusts after gentile women etc. Secondly, it perceives the inclinations of these types as *nativus*, or what Sir John Dodderidge (d. 1628) might have thought of as being “annexed to the posterity, and fixed in the blood”.<sup>763</sup>

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760 Sartre 1948. p. 22, 25-26.

761 *Codex diplomaticus Lubecensis, Lübeckisches Urkundenbuch 1. Abt. Urkundenbuch der Stadt Lübeck*. vol. 3. ed. by F. Asschenfeldt et al. (Lübeck: F. Asschenfeldt, 1871) pp. 103-106.

762 On tattooing in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, see: Virginia Burrus. “Macrina's Tattoo”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33, 3 (2003) esp. pp. 404-408. See also: Mordechai Lewy. “Jerusalem unter der Haut. Zur Geschichte der Jerusalemer Pilgertätowierung”, *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 55 (2003) esp. pp. 4-9. The Bible theoretically prohibits tattooing: “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:28)

763 *Indexes to Reports of the House of Commons, 1801-1834*. (London: The House of Commons, 1837) p. 96. Dodderidge was thinking of class (peerages) rather than race, although as Bartlett showed earlier the two concepts had much in common during the Middle Ages.

I suggest that a remarkable characteristic of medieval “proto-racial” thought was its propensity to question the category of being human altogether. Modern racism, influenced by post-Linnéan notions of cladistics, largely attempted to organise peoples *within* some sort of notion corresponding to mankind or *homo sapiens*.<sup>764</sup> The Inuits, the African-Americans or the Jews were considered less intelligent, more sexual, over- or under-developed in his musculature etc than the white man. These qualities were “rationalised” via their allotted place in a hierarchy of types of humans, as in **fig. 24**. Biologically-minded racism was often keen to claim that some races lower down their rankings were closer to apes than other humans. It occasionally employed the theory of “polygenesis” to explain that mankind's diversity could be attributed to convergence between multiple species who had all emerged independently. Nonetheless, for all its dehumanising language and frequent disregard for human rights, modern racism is characterised by a desire to organise human beings into favoured and unfavoured categories. Its (pseudo-)scientific qualities mean that it often struggles to rule certain groups out of the human “continuum” (as racists would tend to see it) altogether.

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<sup>764</sup> See also the article which was largely intended as a companion to the third chapter of this thesis: Richard Cole. “Racial Thinking in Old Norse Literature: The Case of the *Blámaðr*”, *Saga-Book* 39 (2015b, forthcoming). The classic study of anthropometry and pseudobiology is: Stephen Jay Gould. *The Mismeasure of Man*. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

TABLE I. — Showing the Size of the Brain in cubic inches, as obtained from the internal measurement of 663 Crania of various Races and Families of Man.

RACES AND FAMILIES.	NO. OF SKULLS.	LARGEST I. C.	SMALLEST I. C.	MEAN.	MEAN.
<b>MODERN CAUCASIAN GROUP.</b>					
<i>Teutonic Family.</i>					
Swedes .....	11	108.25	65	93	} 93.5
Germans } .....	15	114	70	95	
Prussians } .....					
English .....	5	105	91	96	
Anglo-Americans .....	7	97	82	90	
<i>Teutonic Family.</i>					
True Finns .....	9	112.5	81.5	94.3	
<i>Celtic Family.</i>					
Native Irish .....	6	97	78	87	
<i>Pelagic Family.</i>					
Peralians .....	10	94	75	84	
Armenians .....					
Circassians .....					
<i>Semitic Family.</i>					
Arabs .....	3	98	84	89	
<i>Nilotic Family.</i>					
Fellahs .....	18	96	66	79	
<i>Indo-teutonic Family.</i>					
Ayras .....	8	91	79	86	} 81.7
Bengalies .....	25	99	67	78	
<b>ANCIENT CAUCASIAN GROUP.</b>					
<i>Pre-egyptian Family.</i>					
From the Caucasus { Greece-Egyptians .....	18	97	78	87	
Nilotic Family.					
Egyptians .....	55	96	68	80	
<b>MONGOLIAN GROUP.</b>					
Chinese Family .....	10	98	70	85	} 87
Hyperborean Family .....	8	102	78.75	89	
<b>MALAY GROUP.</b>					
Malayan Family .....	20	97	68	80	} 85
Polyacian Family .....	5	90.5	82	84.3	
<b>AMERICAN GROUP.</b>					
<i>Teutonic Family.</i>					
Peruvians .....	152	101	58	75.3	} 81.7
Mexicans .....	25	92	67	81.7	
<i>Barbarous Tribes.</i>					
Iroquois .....	184	104	69	84	} 80.3
Lenape .....					
Cherokee .....					
Shoshone, &c. ....					
<b>NEGRO GROUP.</b>					
American-born Negroes .....	12	86	73	80.8	} 82.25
Native African Family .....	64	99	65	82.7	
Hottentot Family .....	3	83	68	75.3	
<i>African Family</i>					
Australians .....	8	83	63	75	} 76.5
Oceanic Negroes .....	2	77	76	76.5	

Fig. 24: A Victorian-era (though by American authors) table schematising the various races of mankind, to use the creators' own parlance, according to skull size and therefore assumed intelligence. Unsurprisingly for this rather predictable genre, Swedes come out on top, Native Americans, Sub-Saharan Africans and Australian Aborigines at the bottom. From: J. C. Nott & George R. Gliddon. *Indigenous Races of the Earth*. (London: Trübner & Co., 1868) p. 257.

The medieval tendency was uninhibited in this regard. Admittedly, the major anti-Jewish attitude was

quite committed to the humanity of the Jews: they had to have souls, and they had to have a faculty of reason, even if from the perspective of medieval Christianity it had gone seriously haywire, because it had to be possible for them to convert, not least at the end of days. However, other positions are attested too. As Langmuir has pointed out in the case of Peter the Venerable's *Tractatus adversus Judaeorum inveteratam duritiem* (c. 1130s): “he [Peter] recognized that his novel argument would not change the minds of the Jews. And that so angered him that he proclaimed that Jews were not rational human beings but animals who had lost the power of reasoning”.<sup>765</sup> This kind of thinking, which has despaired of the Jews to such an extent that it wishes to exclude them from mankind outright, must have seemed particularly suspect in regions of Europe where people lived alongside Jews. Those who encountered Jews in every day life obviously did not automatically respect them, but the notion that the Jew down the street or at the university was some kind of animal must have been quite a “hard sell”. It would often take the remarkable event of a crusade or a public hysteria in order to convince people otherwise.

Under conditions of Jewish absence, I suspect that the “non-human” perception of Jews was liable to gain more traction. The verbal and visual languages of medieval Christian anti-Judaism were always prone to dehumanising pronouncements. In Old Norse, following common European Christian traditions (e.g. Matthew 7:15, 10:16, Luke 10:3, John 10:12, Acts 20:26 etc) we have seen Jews being described as *hundar* “dogs”, or *vargar* “wolves”.<sup>766</sup> We might also recall the distorted, canid faces of the Jews on the wall paintings at Ål stave church, presented in the third chapter of this thesis. Doubtless, tropes like these emerged as periphrasis. The language was not supposed to claim that Jews *really* were in some way canid, but that *like* dogs and wolves they were ferocious, uncouth, dangerous or unclean. I do not suppose that every single eye which beheld the scenes at Ål stave church thought that all Jews always wore pointy hats and had snouts rather than mouths. Did every single Christian who beheld the hideous *Judensau* at Uppsala Cathedral (c. 1350) in **fig. 25** really believe that Jews performed anilingus on swine? Surely not anymore than they believed that St. James always wore a hat festooned with shells, or that St. Óláfr had always walked around holding an axe. More refined minds must have understood that what they were seeing was a visual language – that snouts and pointy hats were the equivalent of manicules pointing out to the viewer that the figures were intended to be understood as Jews, *not* that they were physiologically accurate renderings thereof.

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<sup>765</sup> Langmuir 1990. p. 132. See also: Lukyn Williams 1935. pp. 386-387.

<sup>766</sup> Cole 2014. p. 354.



**Fig. 25:** *Judensau* from Uppsala Cathedral, c. 1350. Note the feeble, emaciated condition of the Jewish figure apparently performing anilingus or cunnilingus on the sow (bottom R), chiming with anti-Semitic notions of Jewish physical decrepitude. The Jew tugging on the sow's tail (top R) is more ornately dressed than the others, perhaps intended to be a rabbi? In his frenzied delight, his *pillens cornutus* has fallen off. Photograph courtesy of: Stephen Mitchell.

However, it seems to me hopelessly optimistic to assume that all viewers (or 'hearers' in the case of sermons and *miracula*) possessed such lucidity, especially when they had never seen real Jews for themselves. In a recent anthology edited by Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Heß concerning Jews and Muslims in medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic, Yvonne Friedman concludes her study of Peter the Venerable with the following anecdote:

In 1967, before antisemitism in the North was influenced by Middle Eastern politics, my brother was stranded in a cabin (*hytte*) in Jotunheimen, during a snowstorm. Among the people with whom he shared his room was another hiker, who upon hearing that my brother came from Israel, stared at him and explained: “Jeg har aldri sett en jøde før [I've never seen a Jew before]”. This was not a symptom of hatred, but rather curiosity regarding an alien, unknown Other; apparently he expected him to have a distinctive look based on stories he knew.<sup>767</sup>

If in 1967, an age of photography and cinema rather than church art, there were people to be found in Norway who were surprised that Jews did not appear exactly as they do in the anti-Semitic imagination, then we will struggle to suppose that people were better informed in 1367. Jews in Old Norse-speaking

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<sup>767</sup> Yvonne Friedman. “Christian Hatred of the Other: Theological Rhetoric vs Political Reality” in Heß & Adams 2015. p. 198.

culture did not have a solely 'hermeneutical' identity. They were also depicted as a “real” people living in real but distant places such as Beirut, Güstrow or Constantinople. When the mind's eye needed to conjure how the Jewish characters looked in the stories they heard, it would not have dismissed images like those at Ál. In the reductive process from periphrasis to literal truth, the idea of Jews as fellow human beings is compromised. For the medieval mind, it must have seemed hard to believe that creatures who looked more like demons than men could be considered as belonging to the divinely created race of men. By considering this process, we might gain some insight into how narratives such as *The Toledo Miracle* presented the slaying of Jews as apparently preferable to their conversion: there is little in such episodes to suggest a belief that Jews had souls – at least, not ones that could be saved.

What are the implications for the human experience under such circumstances? That is to say, what is attractive about this way of thinking, especially when the objects of the anti-humanising invective are not physically present, and therefore the discourse cannot be used to justify actual mistreatment? Perhaps, in Sartrean terms, it facilitates the reification of the anti-Semitic mind's own sense of human identity. We ought to consider not only how it felt for the congregation of Ál stave church to look at those particular murals, but also how it felt to look at themselves and each other directly afterwards. There could be no doubt that their own features were far more like those of Christ and His apostles than those of the snouted, bestial Jews. There is an affirmation, in that moment of recognition, of the sentiment well expressed in Ezekiel 34:31: “And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God”. Humanity, like any other quality, is brought into sharpest relief when presented alongside its supposed opposite. In the face of that illusory contrast, I would contend that people found a simple reassurance: that despite whatever horrors the world of men created for itself, its (Christian) denizens were still *men*, the most loved creation of a boundlessly loving God.

### **A Philo-Semite *contra* anti-Judaism: -Semitisms and Salvation**

Æðra mæli: Deyia skaltv!

Hvgrecki svarar: Heimska er at ottaz þat, er maðr ma eigi forðaz, hversv lengi sem fyrirfest.

Æðra mæli: Deyia skaltv!

Hvgrecki svarar: Eigi em ek sa enn fy[r]sti ne enn siðasti, margir hafa fyrir mer farið, ok margir mvin eftir.

Æðra mæli: Deyia skaltv!<sup>768</sup>

Fear says: You're going to die!

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<sup>768</sup> *Víðráði líkams ok salar* in *HMS*. vol. 1. p. 448. On the tradition more generally, see: Svanhildur 2007. pp. 350-351.

Courage replies: It's stupid to be afraid of that, when one cannot avoid it, however long until he perishes.

Fear says: You're going to die!

Courage replies: I am neither the first nor the last. Many have gone before me, and many after.

Fear says: You're going to die!

- *The Old Norse Un samedi par nuit* (1200s)

In his theory of late twelfth century saga-writing, built largely on a close reading of *Yngvars saga víðförla* (1190s), Haki Antonsson draws our attention to a certain preoccupation which he proposes as the 'fuel' propelling early literary endeavours in Iceland: where do we go when we die? Or more precisely (and I admit I am already taking poetic liberties with Haki's work here), who gets in to heaven? Haki identifies the early texts, which I would call the seeds of saga literature, as representing “intellectual aspirations and spiritual concerns ... [their authors were] deeply occupied with their own salvation and that of their more secular peers, and the profane tales they were told”.<sup>769</sup> In the examples upon which Haki draws, the doubt is fundamentally over whether those who have chosen the world over the church, kings and magnates, can be saved. Or is salvation the exclusive preserve of those in holy orders?

At the risk of stating the obvious, one of the most basic equations underpinning medieval Christianity (and most other religions) was that by subscribing to its tenets, one had chosen the correct, most true religion. Therefore, one could be certain of a place in heaven after death, pending good behaviour on earth in the meantime. As we saw earlier in the classic example of St. John Chrysostom, Jewish presence frequently appears to have troubled this otherwise promising equation. Living alongside a religion with which one shared more than a few traditions, i.e. the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, a certain reality became unavoidable: that there were other equations to which people were subscribing, and with which they seemed quite happy. What appears to have irritated Chrysostom the most is that amongst his flock some people appeared to be 'squaring' the difference, attending Jewish services as well as Christian, apparently unconcerned for the fate of their souls.

Perhaps Chrysostom would have been happier in monoreligious medieval Scandinavia. By the thirteenth century, the peninsula and its islands were uniformly Christian. Such homogeneity might be interpreted as stifling – there was certainly no avenue for the kind of exciting inter-religious exchanges which were happening in Paris, for example. However, all-pervading sameness appears to have had a paradoxically liberating effect in the remarkable case of Brandr Jónsson, a thirteenth century Icelander

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<sup>769</sup> Haki Antonsson 2012. p. 131.

who as we saw earlier also spent time in Norway. Without Jewish presence in his homeland, Brandr need not have worried about offending any Chrysostom-types, nor of being accused of Judaizing. As long as Jews remained a rather distant people in the minds of most Icelanders and Norwegians, Brandr was at liberty to explore their history and culture as best as he could (lacking the advantage of having actual Jewish informants, of course).

Did Brandr imagine that his Jews, so dearly treated in *Gyðinga saga*, would end up in Hell when they died? Living before the birth of Christ, they were most likely spared, perhaps via Christ's Descent, although we know frustratingly little of Brandr's own theology. Brandr's works are largely tight-lipped on the topic of contemporary, i.e. thirteenth century, Jewry. However, as was previously noted, he does not appear to take any delight in his account of the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian, in contrast to the joyous *Origo Crucis*. Brandr also refuses to comment on what other Old Norse authors refer to excoriatingly as *ótrú* "faithlessness" or *villu* "heresy, lit. waywardness" of the Jews. It would certainly appear that there was nothing about the ongoing existence of Jews in the world which disturbed or upset him.

The anti-Jewish commentator (I confess that I have made Chrysostom a bit of a punching bag to represent that position) has none of Brandr's coolness. I am inclined to suggest that he/she is possessed by a certain *-Semitism*, a need to "think with Jews". Anti-Judaism thrives most where people feel as though Jews are contesting the truth-claims of their faith. If the question of "who is saved" can stir men to create the Icelandic sagas, then it can certainly also impel people to hostility towards Jews. That is to say, the reluctance of Jews to accept the Christian equation outlined above produces its most devastating effects when Christians interpret it as a disturbance of their religions most palliative quality, the promise of the afterlife. (Naturally, far from all Christians are disturbed by this, and for many Christians, myself included, the faith's ability to understand *this* life is just as – if not more – important). When one has predicated ones morality - or perhaps ones ability to function without being paralysed by the fear of inescapably impending death - on a certain promise, the reaction to seeing that promised undermined by the existence of non-believers will usually be violent.

I suggest that in the anti-Jewish mind an inner discussion is taking place very much like that I quoted from *The Old Norse Un samedi þar nuit*. For anti-Judaism, the Jew has joined forces with the pernicious *Æðra* "Fear" in the dialogue. "You're going to die!", it shrieks, and the figure of the Jew is able to add tauntingly: "and the promise of your heaven is a lie!". *Hugreki* "Courage" is thus outmanoeuvred in its reasonable protestations. Happily, Brandr shows us another way. For Brandr, the Jew is no enemy, but

an admirable friend. Indeed, what is it that the Maccabees of whom he writes teach, if not courage? Brandr's Jews are human beings facing extraordinarily difficult situations (indeed, their human-ness often seems to be stressed to the reader of *Gyðinga saga* far more than their Jewishness). As noble *exempla*, they offered guidance on the central matter of this conclusion: being human. There is no better reply to Fear's grim howls, that indeed if we cannot decide when we will die, we can at least decide *how* we will live.

## Appendix I: An Analysis of AM 685d 4to, 30v-31r

*Aleph* might be a severely distorted א

*Bet* might be an inverted ב but looks more like a B

*Gimel* is quite like ג

*Delet* is quite like ד

*He* bears a passing resemblance to the cursive form of ה

*Uau* is unrecognisable

*Zan* is unrecognisable

*Eth* is clearly an E

*Thet* is a recognisably distorted ט

*Iob* is an oversized י

*Caph* could be a rotated כ

*Lamech* is clearly an L

*Mem* is a correct מ

*Nim* bears some resemblance to cursive נ but is probably just an S

*Samech* is clearly Z

*Alin* is close to ו

*Fe* is unrecognisable

*Sadech* resembles an inverted cursive צ but is otherwise unrecognisable

*Coph* although very close to P is recognisably derived from פ

*Res* is unrecognisable

*Sin* is clearly ש

*Thav* is clearly T

## Appendix II: N 248 & N A362 - Echoes of the *Sefer HaBahir*?<sup>770</sup>

N 248 (also known as the Madla Cross) and N A3632 are a pair of lead crosses from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.<sup>771</sup> N 248 was excavated from the graveyard at Madla Church, Rogaland. It has a 15cm vertical stave, and although the left arm is damaged, we can guess from the complete right arm that the horizontal stave was around 9cm across.<sup>772</sup> N A 362 was excavated from a grave mound at Skiljaberg, also in Rogaland. It is 10.9cm tall, and 8.3cm centimetres across.<sup>773</sup> These two crosses are described here as a “pair” because their inscribed texts are remarkably similar. N 248 reads:

§A + esse krucem tomini fugite pa=rtes atu=erse : uicit leo \* de tribu iuta ratiks ta=uit

§B kua(uo)=r grana : in penta=lum : kuo (f)on... ..-i aa=ro=n \* iessus \* kristus

§C ma=rikus ma=peus lukas ioh--hannes

§D tetragramato=n ÷ atpha e=t o ÷ <sup>774</sup>

§A Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversæ. Vicit leo de tribu Juda, radix David.

§B Quatuor grana [= gramis? Gemmis?] in pentalum [= petalon, πεταλον, Pentateuchum?] quo fron[te tull]it Aaron, Jesus Christus.

§C Marcus, Matthæus, Lucas, Johannes.

§D Tetragrammaton. Alpha et O[mega].<sup>775</sup>

§A Behold the cross of the Lord; flee, you inimical powers. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.

§B Four grains [letters? Jewels?] on the *pentalum* [= forehead-plate? Petal? In the Pentateuch?] that Aaron bore on his forehead, Jesus Christ.<sup>776</sup>

§C Mark, Matthew, Luke, John.

§D Tetragrammaton. Alpha and Omega.

While N A362 reads:

§A + esse krusem tomini : fugite pa=rtes at=uerse uisit le(o) te t=ribu iuta -----... -----

kua(t)=uo=r gra=na in pentalum in--... fo(n)te t=utit : aaron : iesus +

§B -(o)hannes ma=rkus ma=peus lukas

<sup>770</sup> Excerpted and adapted from: Richard Cole. “Hebrew in Runic Inscriptions and Elsewhere”, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 12 (2016, forthcoming)

<sup>771</sup> K. Jonas Nordby. “Arbeidet ved Runearkivet, Oslo”, *Nytt om Runer* 16 (2001) p. 16.

<sup>772</sup> Magnus Olsen. *Norges Innskrifter med de Yngre Runer*. vol. 3. (Oslo: A/S Bokcentralen, 1954) p. 227.

<sup>773</sup> Nordby 2001. p. 13.

<sup>774</sup> Rundata 2.5.

<sup>775</sup> To my knowledge, the first to propose the correction to *gramis* was: Lilli Gjerløw. “*Deus Pater Püsiime* og blykorsene fra Stavanger bispedømme”, *Stavanger Museums Årbok* 54 (1954) p. 94.

<sup>776</sup> The reading *in Pentateuchum* is proposed in: Olsen 1954. p. 235. Olsen also suggests πενταθλον which I have disregarded.

§C -a=gla alpha et o + - :

§A Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversæ. Vicit leo de tribu Judah, [radix David]. Quatuor grana [= gramis? Gemmis?] in pentalum [= petalon, πεταλον, Pentateuchum?] ... fronte tulit Aaron, Jesus.

§B [J]ohannes, Marcus, Matheus, Lucas.

§C Agla. Alpha et O[mega] ...

§A Behold the cross of the Lord; flee, you inimical powers. The lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, has conquered. Four grains [letters? Jewels?] on the *pentulum* [= forehead-plate? Petal? In the Pentateuch?] that Aaron bore on his forehead, Jesus.

§B John, Mark, Matthew, Luke.

§C AGLA. Alpha and Omega.

There are a number of allusions at play in these inscriptions. The opening is ultimately derived from Revelation 5:5, which reads in the Vulgate: *et unus de senioribus dicit mihi ne flevris ecce vicit leo de tribu Iuda radix David aperire librum et septem signacula eius* - “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof”. However, there are a great many intermediary sources which might have informed the carver. Lille Gjerløw proposed the *Ecce Crucem* antiphone.<sup>777</sup> Rudolf Simek situated the inscription in the general milieu of exorcism formulae which would eventually solidify as the *Rituale Romanorum* in the Early Modern Period.<sup>778</sup> To these we might add the legend of St. Anthony, who was said to have exorcised a demon with a piece of parchment containing the prayer: *Ecce Crucem Domini, / Fugite, partes adversae, / Vicit Leo de Tribu Juda, / Radix David, alleluia.*<sup>779</sup> The formula also appears in one Late Medieval Danish inscription, DR 205. For our purposes, the ultimate derivation is not so important. The most relevant implication of line §A *Ecce crucem Domini, fugite partes adversæ. Vicit leo de tribu Juda, radix David* is the semantic field it establishes. Despite originating in the final book of the New Testament, here God is invoked in distinctly Old Testament terms: the “tribe of Judah”, and the “root of David” affect the atmosphere of the Hebrew Bible.

The assumption of an Old Testament register continues with the reference to Aaron, son of Moses, in

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<sup>777</sup> Gjerløw 1954. p. 94.

<sup>778</sup> Rudolf Simek. “Elves and Exorcism: Runic and Other Lead Amulets in Medieval Popular Religion” in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*. ed. Daniel Anlezark (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) pp. 41-43.

<sup>779</sup> Nancy Caciola. *Discerning Spirits. Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) pp. 249-251. Cf. Mindy MacLeod & Bernard Mees. *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006) pp. 205-207.

lines (§A/§B): *Quatuor grana [?] in petalum [?] quo fron[te tul]it Aaron*. Gjerløw argued that this was drawn from the hymn *Deus pater piissimi*: (lines 155-164):<sup>780</sup>

Nec mens nec sensus hominum.  
Nomenque anecfoneton,  
Quod front tulit Aaron  
Sculptum per tetragrammaton  
Quatuor gemmis in petalon:

Joth, He, Vau, Heth Hebraicum.  
He iste sonat proprium,  
Vau vita, Joth principium  
Heth passionis obitum.  
Latine sic expositum <sup>781</sup>

Neither the mind nor the reason of men.  
And the name *Anecfoneton*  
Which Aaron wore on the forehead  
The tetragrammaton was sculpted  
Four gemstones on the *petalon* [forehead-plate worn by Jewish priests]:

*Joth, He, Vau, Heth* in Hebrew  
*He* which resounds in its own way,  
*Vau* is life, *Joth* the first  
*Heth* coming suffering.  
Thus they are interpreted in Latin.

The scene the hymn is referring to is from Exodus 28:36-38: “And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, *Holiness To The Lord*. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord”. This is an explanation for the origin of the *πετάλον* (*petalon*), the golden plate worn over the forehead by Jewish priests. The word is originally from the Septuagint, e.g. Exodus 28:36: *καὶ ποιήσεις πέταλον χρυσοῦν καθαρὸν καὶ ἐκτύπώσεις ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτύπομα σφραγίδος Ἁγίασμα κυρίου* [my emphasis].

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780 Gjerløw 1954. p. 94.

781 *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*. vol. 15. ed. by Guido Maria Dreves (Leipzig: O.R. Riesland, 1983) p. 14.

The brief invocation of the *petalon* found on N 248 and N A363 prompt two questions: 1) what inspired this particular reference? 2) What are we to make of the discrepancies in vocabulary between the runic version and the verses from *Deus Pater Piissime*? Tetragrammata are very common in runic formulae. The detail that the tetragrammaton is also found on the Jewish *petalon*, and the origin of this practice with Aaron, the first High Priest of the Jews, seems at first somewhat random and extraneous information. These details demonstrate the extent to which the carver – or his teacher – understands the murkier details of the “Old Covenant”, but it is hard to understand what further purpose they may serve. Strikingly, there is one other source that puts special emphasis on the supposed potency of the *petalon* and the tetragrammaton with which it was inscribed. The *Sefer HaBahir* (“Book of Illumination”) is one of the oldest and most important works in the tradition which would later cohere as Qabalah. Although the earliest manuscript dates from 1298, the work emerged through many generations of recensions and interpolations from Near Eastern, Provençal, and German sources. It seems to have achieved a relatively stable form amongst Ashkenazi pietists during the thirteenth century<sup>782</sup>. There, we find the following notes on the special properties of Aaron's tetragrammaton:

ישב רבי שהילי ודרש, מאי ייי' מלך ייי' מלך ייי' ימלוך לעולם ועד, [אלא] זה שם המפורש שנתן בן רשות לצרף ולהזכיר, דכתי (במ' ו כז) ושמו את שמי על בני ישראל. והוא בן שתים עשרה כשם ש[ב]ברכת כהנים [י"ב], (שם ו כד) יבר[כ] ייי' וגו' שהם שלשה והם שתים עשרה, נקודו כן יפְעַל יפְעַל יפְעַל. כל השומרו בטהרה ומזכירו בקדושה ובטהרה מתקבלין כל תפילותיו, ולא עוד אלא [שהוא] אהוב למעלה ואהוב למטה, נחמר למעלה ונענה מיד ונעזר<sup>783</sup>

Rabbi Ahilai sat and expounded: What is the meaning of the verse, “God (YHVH) is King, God (YHVH) was king, God (YHVH) will be King forever and ever.”? This is the Explicit Name (שם המפורש *Šem HaMəfores*), for which permission was given that it be permuted and spoken. It is thus written [regarding the above-mentioned Priestly Blessing] (Numbers 6:27), “And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” This refers to the Name containing twelve letters. It is the name used in the Priestly Blessing, “May God bless you...” It contains three names [each having four letters] making a total of twelve. Its vowel points are *Yapha'al Y'pha'oel Yiph'ol*. If one safeguards it and mentions it in holiness, then all his prayers are heard. And not only that, but he is loved on high and below, and immediately answered and helped. This is the Explicit Name that was written on Aaron's forehead. The Explicit Name containing 72 letters and the Explicit Name containing twelve letters were given over by the Blessed Holy One to [the angel] Mesamariah, who stands before the Curtain. He gave it to Elijah on Mount Carmel, and with them he ascended and did not taste death.<sup>784</sup>

782 Daniel Abrams. “Bahir, Sefer Ha-” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. vol. 16. ed. Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2007) pp. 62-63.

783 *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*. ed. by Daniel Abrams (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1994) p. 167.

784 Rabbi Nehuniah ben HaQanah. *The Bahir*. trans. by Aryeh Kaplan. (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1979) pp. 42-43.

Thus, according to the *Sefer HaBahir*, the name of God that was written on Aaron's forehead causes the bearer to have immediate divine attention paid to his prayers, to be “loved on high and below, and immediately answered and helped”. There is also the implication that the name played a role in facilitating the ascension of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11: “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”). In light of these details, the choice to deploy the reference to Aaron and his *petalon* on N 248 and N A362 can be understood as a clear attempt on the part of the carver to bolster the efficacy of the inscription, so that “all his prayers are heard”. An oblique reference to knowledge derived from the *Sefer HaBahir* explains the motivation behind appropriating text from the *Deus Pater Püsiime*, and it might also explain the apparent infidelities therewith. As Gjerløw points out, the oldest versions of *Deus Pater Püsiime* read: *Quatuor gramis in petalon*, where *gramis* is a loan from Greek γράμης “letters”. The emendation to *gemmis* (gemstones) is first attested during the fifteenth century.<sup>785</sup> Presumably Although *gramis* is obviously closer to the runic **grana** (grains) than *gemmis*, this does not fully explain the inconsistency. *Grana*, from sing. *granum*, is not a nonsensical corruption, but an actual Latin word that conveys an intelligible, if divergent, meaning.

The image that the *petalon* should be adorned with *gemmis* is consistent with its various other decorations. As the Vulgate explains in Exodus 28:36-37, the forehead plate should be fashioned *de auro purissimo* (of the purest gold), and bound with *vitta hyacinthina* (blue lace). It is not much of a leap to enrich the description with gemstones. *Grana*, on the other hand, seems at first to be totally out of place. But it is possible to imagine a context where the allusion makes sense. The four letters of the tetragrammaton which Aaron wore on the *petalon* are, as the *Deus Pater Püsiime* makes clear: יהוה (*yod, het, vav, het*). From the perspective of a dilettante Hebraist, or more likely, a student of a Hebraist whose enthusiasm outstretched his resources, each of the Hebrew letters, with their disjointed strokes and detached superscript or subscript staves, might well be described as a *granum*. The superficial granularity of the Hebrew script – especially compared to the contiguous staves of Latin or runic – is further enhanced when one supplies the *mappiq* suggested by the *Sefer HaBahir*: יהוה יהוה יהוה *yahavah yaboveh yibavob*. The substitution of **grana** for *gramis* from the *Deus Pater Püsiime* thus becomes a kind of pun, which subtly boasts the extent to which the carver is steeped in his knowledge of ancient Israel. Within the same line, the corruption of *petalon* to **pentalum** rather undermines the carver's posturing, but while his pretensions of erudition are somewhat deflated, his intent remains appreciable.<sup>786</sup> Whatever

<sup>785</sup> Gjerløw 1954. p. 94.

<sup>786</sup> Although as Gjerløw (*ibid.*) demonstrated, the inaccuracy is not too severe. St. Isidore of Seville, himself a Hebraist, Latinises *πεταλον* as *petalum*: St. Isidore of Seville. *The Etymologies*. p. 383. [XIX, XXI:7]

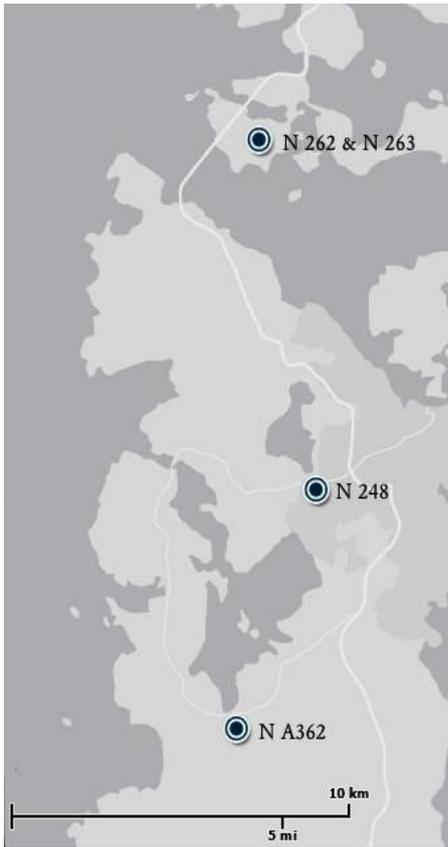
the purpose of the two lead crosses was, be it exorcism, talismans for the dead, or simply devotion, the invocation of Hebrew learning must have been intended to augment their efficacy.

It goes without saying that the carver of N 248 and N A362 did not ever see a copy of the *Sefer HaBahir* himself, and even if he had, there is no reason to suppose that he would have been able to read it. Again, the Jewish resonances of these inscriptions are most likely indicative of second hand knowledge. Like AM 685d 4to or the distorted Hebrew characters in the *First Grammatical Treatise* these runic inscriptions are not so much evidence of Hebraism as they are of decayed remembrances. The proposal that a Victorine might have known of the *Sefer HaBahir* or the traditions that went into it is quite plausible. As seen, Jewish teachers at St. Victor seem to have felt at liberty to discuss quintessentially Jewish authors and works: Maimonides, Rashi, Yosef ben Šime'on Qara, Šmu'el ben Me'ir, Yosef ben Yizḥaq Bəkor-Šor, perhaps even the *Sefer Yezirah* and the *Sefer Toledot Yešu*.<sup>787</sup> A Norwegian Victorine who came to hear of the special powers of שם המפורש *Šem HaMəforeš* “The Explicit Name” and subsequently returned to Norway might well be expected to share this knowledge with his colleagues. But by the time any such scholarly acquisition reached the carver of N 248 and N A362, it was probably little more than an understanding that the name engraved on Aaron's *petalon* was particularly potent, and that this name would originally have been inscribed in the curiously pointillistic Hebrew alphabet – a script which the carver could perhaps dimly envisage, but which he probably had never seen for himself and certainly could not reproduce. It is worth noting that, with the exception of N 348, all of the runic inscriptions hitherto discussed as examples of Hebrew formulae are concentrated within a few miles of Stavanger (see **fig. 26**.) Gjerløw suggested that references to the hymns *Alma Chorus Domini* and *Deus Pater Püsiime* were attested in Norwegian runic inscriptions - indeed, solely in the Norwegian runic corpus excluding the rest of Scandinavia – owing to a direct connection to the Parisian schools, possibly in the person of Parisian alumnus Eiríkr Ívarsson (Bishop of Stavanger 1171-1178).<sup>788</sup> It is quite conceivable that the Abbey of St. Victor not only provided Norwegian clergy with novel Christian texts, but also informed its alumni with originally Jewish knowledge on how to use them. In time, these details became hazy, more suited for esoteric pretence than scholarly exegesis; a link in a chain of transmission that began with the vibrant inter-religious exchanges of Paris, and ended with a lead cross buried in a Norwegian grave.

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787 Raphael Loewe. “Hebraists, Christian” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. vol. 8. ed. by Michael Berenbaum & Fred Skolnik (Detroit: MacMillan Reference, 2007) pp. 511-512 ; O' Donoghue 2005. pp. 97-98. Cole 2014b.

788 Gjerløw 1954. p. 106. cf. p. 85.



**Fig. 26:** Runic inscriptions containing Hebrew formulae or allusions within the greater Stavanger area, Rogaland

### Appendix III: Moyses in Bergen, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1340.

The letter now survives as one of Árne Magnússon's apographs. The text here is reproduced from: *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. vol. 8. pp. 144-145 [nr. 134]. The letter is from Bishop Hákon Erlingsson of Bergen (r. 1332-1342) to King Magnús Eiríksson (r. 1319-1364). The language sits somewhat uneasily on the cusp between Old Norse and Middle Norwegian, the morphology tending towards the former and the orthography tending towards the latter.

Ad dominum regem.

Firir morgh ok kærlegh bref. oss af ydri konunghleghri tighn send. bidium ver gud allzualldanda yder þakka. ok ver þokkum. Þakka vilium ok skulum med hollre þionosto. æftir mætte. Mædal annarra luta baðo þeer oss. at ver skyldim aatsia vm kosthalld j. garde. ydrum. hofwm ver þar vm talat uid Gunnar. herra Erlingi ok odrum godom monnum hiauandom. funnum ver hann j þui viliughan. seghiane sik j. þi ok ollu odru ydart bod vilia hallda. Mon han sialfer nu til ydar komande yder seghia med sannendom. hwat. æder hwimykit falla mæghi. af fehyrdslunni. en þat vitum ver at Moyses lauk honom. eftir ydrum brefom ok boðe. herra Erlings. ok vaarre tilloghu .lxxx. pund ensk ok æina mork brenda. en Ole Hælghason villdi med ængho mote. saker þess serlegha brefs. er þeer hofdur honom skrifwat. annat. en til ydar flytia, skræid. riklingh. rafwe. hwitskin. graskin. mardskin. ok falka. Monu þeer. þa sialfer vndirstanda. hwat en j. hwæriu feller. hygdim ver þo. med ydru orlofwe. hentare vera. at vpplykizst fehyrði ydrum j. Biorgwin hwat. æda hwimykit sem j hwærium stad fylli. þat sem þeer villdir til fehyrdslunnar hafwa. med fullri græin ok ræikningh. so at þeer mættet vndirstanda. neer ydrar inrentor mætto minka eder vaxa. en sijdan fehyrdin ydru bode standa hwat. en þeer villdir af hwæriu gera. vm toll ydarn. ok adra luti sem her falla. mægho Gunnar ok sira Æinar. yder fulkunnicht gera. vm knorren være hæntleght. at þeer so vmhugsader. at hans færð mætte sem fyrst flytazst ok med enghom hætte talmazst. mon þo marght aat þui skiapplazst. ef æi skal hin same formader vera. sem seer hæfir nu skipara ok forunauta walt ok ætlat. firir sannende seghium ver yder. sem ver kunnum vndirstanda at Gunnar hæfir haft sik her j ydrum ærendom. sem goder dughande mader. er honom nu þo marght kunnicht ok liost vm æina luti ok adra. sem yder hær varda. ok þi hygdim ver. at æi være miok hæntleght vmskipti a gera. þui at yder ber þann j þui starfwe hafwa. sem þeer vilir truat hafwa. mædan þeer hittir af honom dygd ok hollosto. Remunder de Lamena. dwælst miok rygger j. Biorgwin. sakær þess. at hann ma ydrum ærendom æighi framkoma eftir sinum vilia ok skyldu þui at æi fek hann sakær vanæfna mæira af gardenom. en hællzst vm twa eder þria gæirfalka. sem Gunnar kan sialfer yder sæghia. bioder til vaar ydars þionostomanz vm þat yder vællijkar. yder ok alla yder vælviliande g/oe/y mi ok styrki gud allzualldande. vttan ænda. Skrifwat j Biorgwin iij. Nonas Nouembris.

To Our King,

For the many affectionate letters sent to us from your Royal Highness, we ask almighty God to thank you. And we thank you. We wish to thank you with the most complete service in our power, and we shall. Amongst other matters you commanded us that we should oversee the rent at your lodging [garðr]. We have discussed it with Gunnarr, Lord Erlingr and other good men who were present. We found him [Gunnarr] to be willing in this, saying that in this and all other matters he would obey your orders. He will now come to you and tell you truthfully what or how much has been made from the treasury, and we know that Moyses paid him 80 English pounds and one mark of burnished gold according to your letters and the order of Lord Erlingr, and our permission. But Óli Helgason would by no means accept because of the special letter which you otherwise had written him, that you should be paid in dried fish, flounder jerky, amber, white furs, grey furs, martens' furs, and falcons. Then you would understand for yourself what and where you profit. However, with your permission, we think it would be more convenient to have your treasuries [fóhirð] discharged to Bergen whatever or however much might have been profited in each place, whatever you want to have in your treasury, with complete documentation and accounting, so that you might understand whenever your rents might decrease or increase, and then what debits stand against your treasury, and they will do likewise regarding your tolls and other matters which arise here. Gunnarr and Sir Einarr will be able to make you fully aware if the longship [kenorr] is available, if you are so inclined, so that its voyage might be hastened in advance and in no way delayed, even if it is very much laden with goods. If not, it will be the same official who has been chosen and intended as the captain and crewman. In truth, we tell you that we can understand that Gunnarr has been taking care of this area of your business, as a well-meaning man, and he is indeed a well capable man, and much is known and apparent to him about one thing and another which concerns you here, and therefore we think, that it would not really be possible to change this, because he has done that work for you as you would have thought, as you have come across his virtue and loyalty. Rémundr of Lamena stays in Bergen in much distress, for the reason that he cannot complete your business according to his desire, because he got but humble returns from Garðar [in Greenland], and no more than two or three gyrfalcons, which Gunnarr can tell you himself he offers to us, your servant, if it pleases you well.

Very much wishing you and all yours the remembrance and strength of God Almighty without End. Written in Bergen, 4<sup>th</sup> November.

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