

IMAGERY IN RELIGIOUS OLD NORSE PROSE LITERATURE
An outline

Introduction

The conversion to Christendom in Iceland of course involved a great need for teaching the new faith. There, as everywhere else, books became necessary for the training of the servants of the Church and for their preaching to the people. As is well known, helgar þýðingar are mentioned among the literary genres which had become established in the early 12th century.

The religious writings, from the beginning - naturally enough - translations and adaptations of foreign texts, introduced a new view of the world and of the destiny of man, many moral and religious concepts which must have seemed highly unfamiliar to the audience.

Sometimes we catch a glimpse of the difficulties for the Icelandic clerics in preparing their fellow-countrymen for the seed of God's word. In a prologue to a version of bishop Guðmundr Arason's saga, the author speaks of how the Lord has illuminated the world "með inum fegurstum gimsteinum ok lýsandi lömpum sinna ótalligra manna", not only in the east, south and west,

heldr ok jafnvel um inu ýztu útskaga norðhálfunnar, hvár er allra mest var forðum hörðnut af grimmleiksins frosti þeirra ótrúlyndra þjóða, er þar bygðu, ok steini harðari hjörðu höfðu í sinni þrjózku ok óheyranligri óhlýðni við sína andliga feðr ok guðs erendreka (Bisk I, 559).

Perhaps these lamentations about the hard and frostbitten hearts on the outskirts of the northern world have something to do with bishop Guðmundr's special troubles in his agitated period of service. In any case, the preaching of Christian faith to people with their roots in a peculiar heathen tradition must have made heavy demands on the rhetorical gifts of its representatives, not least in the time of conversion and transition. The homiletic skill, the efficient presentation of new religious and moral concepts became important for the spreading and deepening of Christian thinking and way of life. In that frame

of reference the new kind of imagery certainly had an important function. In fact, it was hardly possible to mediate central Christian principles and medieval theology otherwise than by making them palpable through metaphorical language. For, as men are taught in Homilíubók: "En þar es vér erum jarðligir at atferð várri, þá megum vér hug várum eigi nær of koma himneskum hlutum nema vér tækim dæmi af jarðligum hlutum, at vér megim it andliga skilja" (6).

My purpose has been to study the use of imagery in a representative corpus of Old Norse religious prose. In the domestic tradition metaphorical language was specific for the poetry. Secular saga literature restricted itself to an extremely moderate use of metaphors, mostly in quite conventional phrases. The high frequency of imagery in the religious prose is as such a principal innovation.

The corpus. Distribution of the imagery

The texts completely excerpted for this study, the editions used, and the abbreviations for their titles, are listed at the end of my paper. The corpus represents a wide spectrum of religious prose - both of Icelandic origin and, mostly, translations and revisions of foreign writings.

From our specific point of view, one can notice that the frequency of religious metaphors varies very much from one text to another. Homilíubók and Elucidarius, both of them from about 1200, with their strongly didactic design, are saturated with the imagery of medieval theology. On the other hand, in the oldest Icelandic bishops' sagas - Hungrvaka, Jóns saga helga, Páls saga biskups and Þorláks saga helga - from approximately the same time, early 13th century, metaphors are scanty and simple.

To count metaphors in order to make a quantitative analysis of their importance in different texts, is a hazardous enterprise. A metaphor is no clear-cut or homogeneous unit. It may be a plain epithet, or it may be a sentence or sequence elaborating an image in a network of terms from the same sphere of meaning. But with this reservation it seems, in spite of all,

possible to give a few approximate figures, measuring the frequency of metaphors by their number per 10000 words of text.

Thus, the older version of Jóns saga helga, with some 5 cases per 10000 words, is in sharp contrast to the later version, from the former part of the 14th century, with 28 instances. The youngest version of Guðmundar saga góða, from the same time, has 29. In both cases the theological and hagiographical elements are abundantly developed beyond the earlier versions. On the other hand, Árna saga biskups and Laurentius saga biskups, approximately contemporary with the latest Guðmundar saga, restrict themselves to some 8 and 2-3 examples only. The protagonists of these sagas were not regarded as holy men, and are dealt with in a plain biographical and historical style.

On the whole a high frequency of imagery in our texts goes together with a rhetorical and ornate diction, marking also syntax, vocabulary and other aspects of their language. As typical specimens of this elaborated style, with a rich religious imagery, one can mention Bergr Sökkason's translations and revisions of Mikaels saga and Nikolaus saga erkibiskups in Heilagra manna sögur, both of them with some 30-35 metaphors per 10000 words - much more than in the other texts of this voluminous collection.

In a similar way a late version of Jóns saga postola and Tveggja postola saga Jóns ok Jakobs dominate the imagery of Postola sögur, with the figures of 46 and 32 respectively. The earlier versions of Jóns saga postola present 2-3 instances only - a striking difference, indeed, as we have to do with the same subject-matter.

The domestic heritage: Old Norse mythology, vikings etc.

I will soon enter upon the central topic of my paper, the common religious imagery of the time, with its sources in the Bible and medieval theology. But first one can have a look at what might be named the native heritage in the way the translators reproduce the foreign texts. To a certain degree they apply words and concepts strongly associated with Old Norse culture. In the eyes of the modern reader this practise can

make the impression of a rather bizarre clash between different cultures. Perhaps one should not talk here of metaphors in the current sense of that term. Rather we have to do with the transmutation of old native words and concepts within a new frame of reference.

In two genres of our corpus, Heil and Post, we hear much of the gods of classical antiquity. The scene of these texts is the Mediterranean area, where apostles, martyrs and Christians in general had to vindicate their faith against the cult of the pagan gods.

In such cases the Icelandic translators almost everywhere replace the gods of classical antiquity by the æsir. On the whole it has been easy for them to find in their old native mythology the convenient equivalents of the Graeco-Roman gods: Jupiter becomes Óðinn (Heil I, 287) or sometimes Þórr (Post 126), Diana is rendered by Gefjun (Post 224) and so on.

In Post we find the most concentrated and elaborate example of the use of the gods' names in our texts. This passage also gives us an opportunity of comparing the translator's work with his Latin original. The protagonist of the story is reported to have abused the Roman gods in corpore:

Dicunt ab ipso affici contumeliis et lacerari patrios deos, ut qui Jovem, omnium deorum maximum, ne deum quidem nominaret; Herculem Alcmenæ filium (quem illi suum conservatorem aiunt) impurum quendam dæmonem et scelestum vocaret; carissimam et suavissimam Venerem meretricem induceret; atque optimam iaculatricem Dianam, sapientem Mercurium deum sermonis, bellicosum Martem, Saturnumque ipsum, ex æquo omnes infamaret atque criminaret. (xvi/xvii)

The translator has obviously been stimulated by this passage, and exploits it con amore. The Latin text names seven gods. But our man outdoes his original by far by collecting no less than fourteen of the Nordic gods, without taking it too seriously with equivalents. Moreover, he varies ingeniously the verbs of abuse, and lets them alliterate with the name of the god or goddess in question:

Ok ósæmir hann svá in göfðu goð vár, at hann segir, at Þórr sé eigi goð fulltrúi vár ok inn sterksti áss áráðisfullr, ok er nær hvárs sem hann es blótinn; en þá ósæmd ok óviró-

ing veitir hann Óðni úrlausnafullum ok hvarfsemi, at sá Clemens kallar hann fjanda ok óhreinan anda; en hann kveðr Freyju portkonu verit hafa; fælir hann Frey; en hræpir Heimdall; lastar hann Loka með slægó sína ok vélar, ok kallar hann ok illan; hatar hann Hæni; bөлvar hann Baldri; tefr hann Tý; níðir hann Njöró; illan segir hann Ull; flintir hann Frigg; en hann görr Gefjun; sekja dæmir hann Sif. (146)

In Niörstigningar saga we meet a remarkable acquaintance from Old Norse mythology as an equivalent of the creature that is named in the Book of Revelation draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus, et satanas (12:9): "Gildra sú er at Jörsölum er ger verði miógarósormi at skaða" (Heil II,4,20). In the same text the dragon is also compared "at mikilleik við miógarósorm, sá er sagt, at liggi um allan heiminn" (20). The gildra prepared for catching the dragon is described as a baited hook. In Hom we have a corresponding passage, quoting Job 40:20/21: "Mun eigi þú draga Leviathan á öngli eða bora kinnr hans með baugi." (75) Above the word italicized here the scribe himself has written miþgarþsormr! The fishing imagery reminds one of the Eddic poem Hymiskviða, where Þórr is not far from catching the miógarósormr on his hook.

The authors of our religious texts have also picked up a word and concept, well-known in the reality of the Íslendingasögur, but now with exclusively negative connotations: víkingr. In the Icelandic bishops' sagas I have found it only once, and in that case it is strongly depreciatory. The viking is seen as a base evil-doer. Bishop Arní refers to a certain behaviour by comparing it to the way in which "víkingr leggr hönd eör fót eör einhvern lim saklauss manns á höggstokk, ok kveóst hann munu af höggva, utan honum sé greitt svá mikit fé, sem hann kveðr á" (Bisk I,750).

The hotbed for the the use of the word víkingr in a "transmuted" sense are the foreign texts, such as Heil, Post and Stj. Satan himself is "hinn gamli hervíkingr" (Heil I,69). An "óhreinndandi", tempting a holy man, is rejected with the sentence: "Guð verði þér reiðr, hinn illi víkingr." (Heil II,472) The epithet here renders the Latin dæmon immunde.

Usually the denomination víkingr is applied not to infernal

creatures, but to ordinary men of varying status, enemies and persecutors of Christians or, in Stj, of the Jewish people. Thus, we hear of "eymó ok vesöld ins grimma hervíkings Herodis" (Post 917). In Stj only the concluding, voluminous section (349-654), presumably the oldest part of the work, makes use of the epithet víkingr. But here, in return, it appears more often than anywhere else, some twenty instances. Before his single combat with Goliath young David says trustfully to Saul: "Nú veit ek at þessum ófagnaðar ok vansignaða víkingi man fara allt á eina leið ok öðrum þeim sem dirfast at bölvva ok banna lýð lifanda guðs" (463). Shortly afterwards Goliath is referred to as "hinn vándi víkingr", "þessi herfiligi heiðingi" (464).

Strikingly enough the words berserkr and hólmganga, so strongly associated with Old Norse paganism and savagery, seem to be applied only to ardent representatives of Christian faith. However, the instances are few. Of a holy man and his heroic struggle against the Devil it is said that "Jesus Kristr gleymdi eigi hólmgöngu síns berserks" (Barl 54). Later in the same saga young prince Josaphat is fighting like the holy man against the Devil and carnal temptations: "En sá hinn ungi berserkr gekk fram með óskjálfanda hjarta, ok skipaði æ hinn hæsta guð sér til verndar" (197). Even Christ's death on the cross is seen in the light of the old native form of single combat, and as a decisive victory in a long and tough war: "Í þessum bardaga frömdu þeir hólmgöngu brúðguminn [i.e. Christ] ok hórkarlinn [i.e. Satan] á frjádag langa, þá er Kristr í gegnum lagóí fjandann með krossins broddi ok batt andligum böndum." (Post 622)

The passages quoted, strange as they might seem, are only part of the flourishing martial imagery for the defenders and preachers of Christian faith, God's own soldiers and knights.

Theological symbolism. Homilfubók:

The examples of native Old Norse elements in the religious imagery, of course, are quite marginal. The overwhelming bulk of metaphors in our corpus originates in, or is inspired, by

the Bible and, above all, common medieval theology. Theologians early developed ingenious strategies for finding, or rather inventing, correspondences on different levels between earthly and heavenly things, profane and spiritual meaning. The fundamental division was between the literal level, historia or littera on one hand, and allegoria on the other. The last-mentioned concept could be subdivided into two or three levels.

Hom provides us with excellent illustrations of this background. Again and again these homilies explicitly speak of two distinct levels of meaning, one concerning the extrinsic appearance, the other revealing the intrinsic and deeper truth. Thus we are told in a sermon on All Saints' Day that "lítit stoðar at halda ina ýtri hátíð omnium sanctorum á jörðu, ef hjórtu vár fýsask eigi til innar ióri hátíðar þeirra á himni." (41) Hom amply exploits the possibilities of theological hermeneutics, taking its point of departure in the biblical episodes, the historia. A single example may illuminate the procedure.

After an account of the wedding celebration at Cana the author comments: "Nú höfum vér rætt nökkvat of ina ýtri skilning guðspjallsins, en þó eru enn eptir in ióri ok in æðri tákn þess óliðuð." Thus the brúðgumi of the story is Christ himself, his brúðr is heilög kristni, and the invited guests are allir trúaðir menn. That the wine ran short at the celebration symbolizes that the laws that had been given to the Jews "höfðu þá dofnat eða in heldr þrotnat í hjórtum þeirra á þeirri tíð es Kristr lét hingat berask" (189).

We also have a sophisticated explanation of the fact that Jesus made wine out of water and not out of nothing, which he could well have done. The intrinsic meaning of this miracle is that he came here, not in order to break the old law but to improve it, "at snúa því öllu til andligrar skilningar es líkamliga var boðit í lögum" (190). The sermon is followed up by comments on the concept andarvín. When Jesus made "líkamligt vín úr vatni í augliti lærisveina sinna, þá gerði hann andligt vín fyr hugskots augum þeirra; þat es hann sneri hjórtum þeirra

frá ótrú Gyðinga til sinnar trú" (191).

The compound andarvín (191) is an example of how a metaphor crystallizes out of the religious symbolism. And once found it can appear elsewhere detached from the specific context of Hom and the wedding celebration at Cana. One should also notice the metaphor hugskotsauga. In sight ("í augliti") of his disciples Christ made "líkamligt vín" out of water, but "andligt vín fyrir hugskots augum þeirra", i.e. before the eyes of their souls. In an analogous way Hom also speaks of hugskotseyra (185), hugskotshönd (186), and even hugskotsjöró (36), i.e. 'Hjertets Jord (hvori Guds Ord skal bære Frugt)' (Fritzner). A word like hugskotsauga - frequent not only in Hom but widespread in our corpus - is typical of the religious imagery, combining and fusing into a conceptual whole an abstract "tenor", hugskot, and a concrete "vehicle", auga.

From Old Norse poetry the audience was used to metaphorical language associated with myth and religion. But the religious imagery which we are now dealing with, is of a quite different kind and purpose. It is strongly didactic, emphasizing the exclusive importance of spirit and Heaven against body and earth. As already said, the doctrines and ethics of Christian faith could hardly be illustrated otherwise than by a language of a more or less metaphorical cast. Only so they could gradually become understood by people to whom the concepts of medieval theology must have seemed very strange.

The great majority of the religious metaphors in the Old Norse texts seems to have close counterparts in the Latin originals. Where we have an opportunity of comparing a translation with its Latin original, we usually find the same metaphors on both sides. It would take us much too far here to make such comparisons wherever it is possible. Only sporadically I point to the Latin equivalent of a metaphor in our corpus. Sometimes, however, we certainly have to do with new contributions in the Old Norse, or at least elaborations on the common medieval pattern of religious imagery.

It goes without saying that in the present paper I have had to confine myself to a few typical semantic fields. Only a

small fraction of the material can be presented.

Life and death, exile and native country

A basic, or the basic, antithesis in Christianity is the one between Heaven and earth. Within the Christian frame of reference, life and death have been paradoxically revalued. The contrast is strongly emphasized in metaphorical language, often with the two concepts opposed to each other in the same passage.

The existence on earth is seen as an exile, útleigð, from our true home. The first man "vas braut rekinn úr paradísar fagnaði í þessa heims útleigð". We are all descended from him and alnir í myrkrum þessar útleigðar" (Heil I, 234). With yet another sorrowful metaphor for this life, St. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, is said to have passed away from "sorgarfullum útleigðardal", "burt farandi úr þessa heims útleigð ok sýtiligum sorgardal" (Dunst 2).

The earth is even a prison, myrkvastofa, a frequent metaphor in our texts. Persecuted and tortured a Christian looks hopefully forward to being delivered "úr myrkvastofu þessa heims" (Heil II, 233). We are "stórum syndafjöðrum bundnir í þessi myrkvastofu" (Mar 334). "Hverr skal mik frelsa veslan mann úr myrkvastofu þessa lífs" (Barl 80), the apostle Paul (Rom 7:24) is freely quoted.

Our earth is also disdainfully regarded as dust or clay: "leirbúð heimsins" (Bisk II, 157; Thom 442). Usually, however, the clay metaphor more specifically refers to the human body: Bishop Jón dies, "fyrirlátandi líkamliga leirbúð (Bisk I, 249), and his colleague Guðmundr Arason passes away from "myrkvastofu þessa heims ok leirliku keru líkamans" (Bisk II, 157).

If life on earth is an exile and imprisonment, Heaven is our fóstrjörð, föðurleifð, eignarjörð, erfð or óðal. The Lord opens "dyrr paradísar, at vér hverfjm aptr til fóstrjarðar várrar" (Post 829). Just as the Israelites after many decades of Babylonian exile could return "til síns eigin fóstrlands", so "allir góðir menn ok rétttrúandi munu aptr hverfa til sinnar föðurleifðar, þat er til himinríkis" (Stj 50). Paradise "er

eignarjörð ok óðal Guðmundar Arasonar" (Bisk II, 10/11) - it is holy king Ólafr himself who prophesies in the vision of a pious woman, while the future bishop is still resting in his mother's womb. Towards the end of Guðmundr's life a Norwegian priest writes a letter to him, saying among other things: "Ek veit, góði herra, at löng dvöl frá erfð himinríkis er yör mjök þungbær í harðri útlegð" (151) - where útlegð of course refers to the bishop's harsh life on earth.

Emphasizing the elevation and glory of Heaven - in sharp contrast to the base leirbúð of temporal life - it is often seen as a palace. After having passed through dauðadyrr (Bisk I, 246; Bisk II, 11, 105; Heil II, 75; etc.) we enter himinríkis höll (Heil I, 541; Heil II, 125, 127). A certain bishop passes "sælliga fram af þessi heimligri myrkvastofu til bjartrar himinríkis hallar" (Mar 421).

Heaven and earth set the stage where the dualism of man's life and destiny unfolds itself.

"A sea of troubles"

Human life seen as a dangerous sea voyage is an old metaphor. Hamlet speaking in one of his monologues of "a sea of troubles" (III, 1), has many forerunners in literature. To our Christian writers, with their so to speak programmatically pessimistic view of human life, a stormy sea, rocks and breakers, could offer fitting symbols of the hardships we have to face. The apostles, for instance, knew from personal experience what the Mediterranean was like, and in Post we hear a lot of real shipwrecks. Among the seafaring peoples of the North, descendants of the vikings, the sea imagery of our texts could certainly be estimated with some expertise.

The sea metaphors take many forms, both simple and more elaborate. Among the vehicles we find words of a general kind, like haf, stormr and skip, but also alda, bára, bylgja, sker, boði or boðafall 'breaker', kafa 'dive under water', mara 'float on or under the surface of the water', besides terms for the rescue from the raging sea in an anchorage or harbour, læggi or höfn.

Men lead a precarious existence "í veraldarinnar bylgjum ok bárum" (Stj 27). The life of Guðmundr Arason is succinctly summarized in the sentence: "í svá bröttum bylgjum ok hörðum hvirfilvindum reiddi þenna blessaða biskup, er at lyktum fann fagrt lagi." (Bisk II,4/5) People crying implore the apostle Peter not to abandon them "svá sem á brotnu skipi at eins uppi marandi millum bylgna ok þjótandi storma ófriðar heiðinna manna" (Post 107). In this example is drawn a parallel between storm and shipwreck on one hand, and the persecution by the pagans on the other.

In a similar manner the dangers of the sea are sometimes metaphorically coupled to more specific threats - perhaps from one's own sinful inclinations, or from the wicked plots of other men. A monk and dedicated hermit is harassed by carnal desires, "af brennandi bylgjum lostasemdar" (Heil II,359; Lat: libidinis fluctibus). Men pray for help and mercy, "reikandi í beiskleik glæpa bylgjunnar" (Mar 683). We run the risk of being shipwrecked "á flúð eða skeri gagnstaðligra hluta" (684) or being lost, "kafandi í sárligum djúpleika illsku várrar" (789). Archbishop Thomas in the end submits to "boðaföll mannligrar grimmdar með sárum dauða" (Thom 356). Earl Magnús of the Orkneys, the future martyr, lives "í miðil storma ok stórra boða leyndrar ófundar ok undirhyggju" (Magn 355).

Mar is the hotbed of sea imagery. The main reason apparently is the fact that one of the traditional and favourite epithets for Our Lady is stella maris. (Can the resemblance in sound pattern, María:mar(is), have promoted the combination?) "María þýðist sjávar stjarna" (7,345). The Blessed Virgin is "sönn sjávar stjarna", "skínandi sjávar stjarna" (334). As star of the sea she not only helps men out of troubles at sea, but also, in a metaphorical sense, on their perilous life-voyage. Thus, after having been told how Our Lady has rescued some people at sea and acted as "þeirra stýrimaðr, leiðandi þeirra far í miklum kyrrleik til blíðrar hafnar", we get the moral: "Sú sama dróttning, sem þessa menn hjálpaði í sjávardjúpi, dragi oss synduga af bröttum bylgjum veraldligs váða, hefjandi vart hugarskip af marabotnum lastanna" (272).

As sjávar stjarna the Blessed Virgin is involved in many sequences of sea imagery. One more example can give an idea of the variety of specific metaphors applied in elaborating the motif. As Christians we are exhorted:

Ger svá vel, kristinn maór, [...], í guðs nafni: skilr þú þik heldr reika millum boða í framfalli þessarrar veraldar en yfir jörð farandi, snú þú eigi brott augu þín af birti þessa himintungls [i.e. sjávar stjarna], ef þú vilt forðast undirbrot ok kafsteyting bylgjufallsins. (684/85)

Among the technical terms here, kafsteyting means 'Handlingen at styrte en ned i Vandet, hvor der er dybt, og han er udsat for at synke tilbunds' (Fritzner). Referring to our example, among others, Fritzner renders the word undirbrot only by 'Undertvingelse, hvorved man bryder og lægger noget under sig'. But I suspect that in our case we have to do with a more palpable sense such as 'breaker (on a sunken rock)'. Then we would have another sea metaphor, complementary to the downward movement of kafsteyting.

More often than one would perhaps guess, the sea metaphors in our corpus have close equivalents in Latin originals. It may be of some interest to have a look at the following passage from Vita patrum:

Dicit enim scriptura: Qui stat, videat ne cadat. Incerti ergo navigamus in hoc mundo; sed nos quidem quasi in tranquillo mari navigare videmur, sæculares vero quasi in periculosis locis. Nos quasi in die sole iustitiæ illustrati, illi vero in ignorantia quasi per noctem. Sed frequenter contingit, ut sæcularis in tenebrosa nocte navigans, vigilans autem et clamans, priopriam navim salvet; nos autem dum in tranquillo navigamus, sæpius ex ipsa securitate negligimus et perimus, humilitatis gubernaculum relinquentes; sicut enim impossibile est navim firmam fieri sine clavis, ita impossibile est hominem sine humilitate salvari.

In Icelandic the passage runs thus:

Er því svá ritat: Sá er stendr, sjáist hann fyrir, at hann falli eigi. Því at ýmsar siglingar váru í veröld þessi, ok má þó svá sýnast, sem vér siglim hægjan sjó, en veraldarmennirnir háska hafsins. Vér siglum ok svá sem ljósan dag lýstir af sjálfri réttlætis sólinni, þar er hinir hafa æ myrkr óvitzku nærinnar. En þat kann optliga verða, at veraldarmaórin, sá er sýnist sigla í dimmu nærinnar, at hann heldr heilu skipi til hafnar, því at hann kallar vakrliga á guð til hjálpar; en vér fyrirlátum lítlætis stýrit ok

fyrirförumst svá af várri vangeymni ok óvarugó, þótt vér hafim þar til blifó sæviðri siglt. Er þat ok ómáttuligra, at nökkurr maðr megi hjálpað utan lítillæti, en skipit verðit traust ok sterkt utan þess neglingar. (Heil II, 598/99)

As you can see, the Icelandic follows faithfully, and skillfully, in the footsteps of the original. For instance, the characteristic religious metaphor humilitatis gubernaculum 'rudder of humility' is rendered literally by lítillæti stýrit. And without nails, sine clavis, it is impossible to make our ship firm: utan [...] neglingar.

An instance of how unfamiliar classical mythology has been aptly transformed, is to be found in the oldest version of Thom. The translator renders the metaphor in medio Charybdis et Skyllæ by the saying "millim skers ok báru" (167) - and the readers or listeners must have felt at home.

Living water

Fresh water in various forms - wells, spring waters, dew, rain and so on - has from time immemorial been a rich source of imagery, for vital forces, for life itself.

Water and wells are often mentioned in the Old Testament, as an indispensable element of daily life. But we also meet them there as metaphors, in didactic and poetical contexts. For instance, the bride of the Song of Songs is praised as fons hortorum, puteus aquarum viventium, quæ fluunt impetu de Libano (4:15).

From the New Testament we remember Christ's meeting with the woman of Samaria at "Jacob's well" (Joh 4). On that occasion he develops in a way as graphic as it is sublime the symbolic sense of what he names aquam vivam. The woman misunderstands the phrase as meaning usual fresh water. Jesus explains to her that he who drinks the water he gives him, will never be thirsty again. This water becomes in him fons aquæ salientis in viam æternam 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life'. This passage in Holy Writ certainly is the most important origin of the abundant water imagery in Christian writings.

In Hom the spiritual meaning of water is associated with Christ's baptism in the river Jordan by John the Baptist:

"Þvát þá es heims græðari sté niðr í vatnit, þá helgaði hann öll vötn ok brunna í tákni skírnar sinnar, svát hverr maðr hreinsask í Krists brunni, hvargi sem hann vill skírask í nafni Domini." (80)

Thus, by that ritual all waters and wells were hallowed. Some theological interpretation like this one seems to lie behind a long passage in the "middle" version of bishop Guðmundr's saga. He had become well-known for his practice of consecrating springs wherever he came in the country. In the miracles ascribed to him these springs play an important part, and the concept Gvendarbrunnur is still current in modern Iceland. But the zealous bishop's many enemies among his fellow-countrymen seem to have regarded his consecration of springs as a kind of spectacular humbug.

Guðmundr is summoned by archbishop Þórir in Norway, where he has to answer questions concerning the unrest in his episcopate. Among other things his superior brings up the consecration of springs, with some suspiciousness: "þar er enn mikit orð á um þær" (Bisk I, 575). Then Guðmundr gives an eloquent lecture on the profound Christian symbolism of water. The river Jordan is sacred, he says, "þar sem dróttinn várr var skírðr í henni". Since then this river "helgar vötn öll ok hreinsar allar uppsprettur ok stöðuvötn, ok jafnvel leirkeldur sem önnur vötn"; "hún ein er vatn í öllum heiminum þat it sama, er dróttinn skapaði í upphafi heimsins í paradísu" (576/77). (Cf. the quotation from Hom above.)

With a bold association of a kind certainly not unparalleled in medieval theology, bishop Guðmundr ends his vision of the universal circulation of water by referring to the tears of repentance:

"Nú þá er maðrinn er fyrirfarinn af syndum heimsins, þá renn Jórdanar vatn, þat er í líkam mannsins er fest, til hjartans ok sprettr upp í brjóstinu, ok kemr fram úr augsteinunum til iðranar ok hjálpar mannum" (578).

With such a background, both in the Bible and in medieval theology, it goes without saying that water imagery will be a favourite didactic device in our corpus.

The biblical agua viva turns up in some places. Of John the Baptist we are told that he had prepared for his wedding, but that Jesus had "kallat hann brott af brúðar faðmi". Thanks to his sacrifice of "festarkonu brjóst", John was "makligr at drekka lifanda vatn af lausnarans brjósti" (Post 543/44). From having been a small well ("Af litlum brunni"), the preaching of the apostle John, his life and activity on the whole, grow into mighty streams of "living water": "En nú váttaf ríki austr í Asía, hversu lifanda vatn gengr fjögurra vegna út í allar áttir af hans munni, jartegnum ok lífi" (472).

The dominant noun vehicle of the water imagery is brunnr, with more isolated cases of kelda, uppspretta and æð. As a sign of the near relation between Christ and his favourite Disciple, John at the last Communion "drank from the well in the heart" of his Master: "Sé, hvat hann drakk af brjófstföstum brunni hins blessaða Jesu í síðasta snæðingi" (Post 482/83). Young Josaphat calls upon his God: "þú ert lífs kelda ok heilsu brunnr" (Barl 196). The creation of the world bears witness to "almenniligan guðligrar æðar ok uppsprettu velgerninginn" (Stj 30).

The typical form of religious metaphors, here as well as in other semantic fields of this imagery, are the numerous noun compounds, fusing an abstract tenor and a concret vehicle into one concept. Christ is over and over again characterized as a brunnr, a well of higher wisdom, spiritual health, humility, mercy, love and eternal life. We have already heard of the Disciple John drinking from his Master's "brjófstföstum brunni". He is also said to lean over "spektarbrunn blessaðan faðm dróttins síns" (Post 555). From "þeim lífsbrunni drakk hann lifanda seim ok sætleik himneskrar læringar, sem síðan fór ok flaut í allar áttir heimskringlunnar" (466). The verb fljóta expands the metaphor and emphasizes the streaming, dynamic and all-embracing force of the divine Word. Among people who come in order to be baptized in the Jordan is "sjálfr líftlætis-brunnrinn [C: réttlætisbrunnrinn] dróttinn Jesus Krístr" (543). Jesus answers questions by his Disciples: "Svá svarar elsku-brunnrinn nú at sinni þeirra bæn" (553).

The most frequent of these compounds is miskunnarbrunnr. Christ's birth may be worded thus: "miskunnar brunnr lét berast frá mey" (Eluc 483). This passage includes the Saviour's mother. In the voluminous text devoted to Our Lady, we are often reminded of how "miskunnar brunnrinn [i.e. Jesus] spratt upp fyrir brjósti hennar" (361), from "þat brjóst er miskunnar brunninn ól, ok má aldrei þorna af miskunn" (106). The concluding phrase suggests that the Holy Virgin's breast is itself an overflowing well of mercy. Thus she shares the epithet with her son: "Sé, hin mildasta dróttning ok jungfrú, sjálf miskunnar brunnrinn" (794).

Specifically applied to Our Lady are líknarbrunnr and mildibrunnr. With her renowned mildness and mercy towards wretched sinners she appears as their spokesman before God - a pervading theme in Mar. "Þessi mæð ok móðir er hinn sætasti mildibrunnr milli guðs ok manna" (419). A man invokes "þessaða guðs móður", "biðjandi líknarbrunninn miskunnar" (224), or prays to her kneeling "til lífæðarinnar, fram rennandi af brunni gæzkunnar" (274).

As a special group of vehicles in the water imagery one can notice such words as regn, skúr, dögg and döggva, illustrating the refreshing and life-giving power of the Word, Holy Writ. We hear of "guðspjallsins skúrir", "skriptarinnar skúrum ok ritningarinnar regnum", "læringar regn til at döggva ok endr-lífga sálina" (Stj 30). The evangelist John is eager to "döggva jörðina með sætri skúr sinna ritninga". His gospel is "einn brunnr af þeim .iiii., er upp spretta í paradísu ok döggva allan skóginn með lystiligri framrás ok blómga jörðina til ýmislegs ávaxtar" (Post 637).

Tears of grief or repentance are sometimes enhanced by water metaphors, reminding of certain kennings in the Old Norse religious poetry: "hrynregn hvarma", "barmskúr hvarma" (Maríu-flokkur). The grief at the death of archbishop Nicholas of Mirra is violent. Some people "kasta sér upp á líkamann ör-endan kyssandi ok í tálalækjum döggvandi þann þessaða munn" (Heil II, 125). A woman repenting her serious sins goes "til sjálfs herra páfáns ok fellr til fóta honum með hinum sárasta

hörmungar gráti, margan tára fors af sínum augum út steypandi" (Mar 165).

Such exaggerations, in the spirit of baroque poetry, may seem banal and pointless. But perhaps in our context we should, like Guðmundr Arason (p. 14 above) see them in the light of a universal religious water symbolism - as an outflow of the water once for all hallowed by Christ's baptism in the Jordan?

Conclusion

In this paper it has not been possible to present but a few aspects of the religious imagery. Many others, however, could be of equal importance and interest. In conclusion I will briefly refer to a few of them.

Life as a road or path, in the right or the wrong direction, is a well-known metaphor both in the Old and the New Testament. It is also very frequent in our corpus. You can walk on a safe heilsugata (Heil II,605; Lat: via salutis), but many people rove about on a glapstígr (Hom 153) or an illskuvegr (Barl 208).

From time immemorial light and dark have been elements of an imagery with fairly natural and stable connotations. "Ego sum lux mundi" (Joh 8:12). In our corpus God, Christ, Our Lady and leading characters in Christendom, as well as their deeds and preaching, are constantly seen as bright and shining. Christ is "sjálf réttlætis sólin lukt í líkam" (Post 466), and the Holy Virgin "gimsteinn allra gimsteina" (Mar 844). But a man far from the divine light dwells in syndaskuggi (Post 866) or villupoka (Eluc 491).

Equally archaic and archetypal are the metaphors of heat and cold, a main field of dualistic imagery in religious literature. "Guð er andligr eldr" (Eluc 471). We hope for the wonder that "guðs ástar eldr kyndisk í hjörtum várum" (Hom 27). Thomas of Canterbury is "allr glóandi í guðligum anda" (Thom 231; Lat: tamquam spiritu fervens). A man's heart is hit by "elding heilags anda" (Mar 290). The heat and fervour of the Word melts the ice of human mind. The apostle John succeeds in regaining a renegade "aptr í faðm heilagrar kristni", as if he "brott

ræki með sínum yfirsöngvum ok bræddi með sínum höndum þann jökul ok linlega, sem sýlt hafði þat hjarta hit auma" (Post 647).

The opposites sweet and bitter/sour are another favourite topic of religious imagery. The name itself of the Holy Virgin "er hunangfljóttandi" (Mar 231), and she speaks to us mildly, "með hunangligum seim sinna orða" (1046). But "gallsúrar djöf-ulsins ráðagerðir eru til fulls eitrliga bruggaðar" (Heil II, 91). Sinful man is tormented by "gall beiskrar samvizku, þeirrar sem ekki blotnar til sætrar ióranar" (Post 37), or is adrift "í beiskleik glæpabylgjunnar" (Mar 683).

From a religious point of view man's state of mind is often seen in terms of illness and health. Christ is born "sjúku kyni Adams til heilsubótar" (Post 540). We suffer from andar-sár (Bisk I, 105) and should strive for attaining andarheilsa (Heil II, 457; Lat: animæ et spiritus sanitas). Christ himself is our "sannr læknir" (Heil I, 516), and the Fathers of the Church are "andligir læknar" (Heil II, 504; Lat: medici spirituales).

A servant of God is frequently, with a humility topos, presented as his þræll (Lat: servus) or ambátt (Lat: ancilla or famula). The apostle Paul addresses his fellow-believers in Corinth: "Páll þræll Jesus Krists, er kallaðr er postoli, sendir kveðju" etc. (Post 304) - we remember the standard salutation introducing his letters in the Bible: "Paulus, servus Iesu Christi, vocatus Apostolus" (Rom 1:1). It strikes one that þræll, by far the most frequent metaphorical epithet for Christian males, is totally missing in the Icelandic bishops' sagas. Perhaps the word had of old so strong negative connotations that the authors shrank from applying it to individuals of their own people?

Often, however, God's servants appear in a less humble shape, as his kappi or riðdari. Archbishop Thomas is "guðs kappi" (Thom 278; Lat: Dei athleta). The apostle Jacob is presented in full panoply, as "byrjar dyggugum riðdara í stríð at hafa" (Post 584/85), with skjöldr, hjálmr, brynja, sverð, brynhosur and so on; the spiritual meaning of each piece of armour is

carefully explained. A pious Icelandic peasant girl is not with the usual epithet "guðs ambátt", but the author names her "skjaldmey dróttins vápnáða með bænnum, ok búna til bardaga móti fjandanum ok hans flokkum, ok brynjaða með heilagri trú, en hjálmáða með váninni, ok skjaldaða með psálma söngvum" (Bisk I, 204).

An important field of imagery, with many equivalents in the New Testament, might be called the agriculture of Christian teaching. The soul of man is the soil to be prepared for the seed of the Word, "sáðkorn fagrliga plantat í hjartans akri" (Bisk I, 219) for a coming kornskurðr (582), and at last harvested "í kornhlöðu várs herra" (Mar 183). Like an ox we should carry the Lord's yoke and draw "orða plóg guðs, þat eru helgar kenningar, yfir hugskots jörð náunga várara" (Hom 182). Earl Magnús of the Orkneys turned "Paulus af Saulo" and "tók at erja jörð síns hjarta með vöskum ristli viðkomningar" (Magn 349/50).

The spirit of charity among the Christians, and between them on one hand, and God, Christ and Our Lady on the other, is emphasized by the frequent use of words from the family sphere: faðir, móðir, sonr, bróðir, systir, systkin. But a more striking expression of this intimacy of relationship is the bride-and-bridegroom imagery. In a theological sense the relation is established already by Christ's birth: "Á burðartíð dróttins [...] es Krístr tengdr við brúði sína kristnina sjálfa, svásem at andligu brúðkaupi" (Hom 217). "Krístr es brúðgumi en heilög kristni brúðr hans" (189).

The metaphor is applied on different levels. Bishop Páll returns from Norway bringing with him "tvá glerglugga at fara kirkjunni í Skálaholti, festarmeyju sinni andligri" (Bisk I, 131). The church itself is the bride, receiving gifts from her bridegroom. Usually, however, the relation has a more personal or individual note. For instance, a virgin martyr or a nun is often seen as Christ's brúðr, he as her brúðgumi. On the other hand, Our Lady is the brúðr, festarmær or unnusta of individual males. Such a relation sometimes gets a touch of sensuousness, by the use of more specific words of intimacy as faðmlag and hálsfang. The Holy Virgin assures that she will help men,

"nærandi þá með mínum höndum ok umfaðmandi elskuligum hálsföngum" (Mar 415), or she accuses a man of having made himself "ómakligan míns faðmlags" (119).

The imagery of the religious Old Norse prose no doubt played an inestimable part in making Christian concepts and values accessible to the audience. On the whole it must have had an enormous importance by developing the vocabulary for mental phenomena.

Editions quoted

- Barl Barlaams ok Josaphats saga. En religiøs romantisk Fortælling. Udgivet af R. Keyser & C.R. Unger. Christiania 1851.
- Bisk I-II Biskupa sögur, gefnar út af Hinu íslenzka bókmentafélagi (Guðbrandur Vigfússon & Jón Sigurðsson), I-II. Kaupmannahöfn 1858-1878.
- Dunst Dunstanus saga. Edited by Christine Elizabeth Fell. Copenhagen 1963. (Editiones Arnarnagæanæ. Series B, vol. 5.)
- Eluc Elucidarius. In: Hauksbók. Udgiven af Det Kongelige nordiske Oldskrift-Selskab (Finnur Jónsson). København 1892-96.
- Heil I-II Heilagra manna sögur. Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder. Udgivne av C.R. Unger, I-II. Christiania 1877.
- Hom Homiliu-bók. Isländska homilier. Utgifna af Theodor Wisén. Lund 1872.
- Magn Magnúss saga lengri. In: Orkneyinga saga. Finnbogi Guðmundsson gaf út. Reykjavík 1965. (Íslenzk fornrit XXXIV.)
- Mar Mariu saga. Legender om Jomfru Maria og hendes Jertegn. Udgivne af C.R. Unger. Christiania 1871.
- Post Postola sögur. Legendariske Fortællinger om Aposternes Liv. Udgivne af C.R. Unger. Christiania 1874.
- Stj Stjórn. Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra Verdens Skabelse til det babyloniske Fangenskab. Udgivet av C.R. Unger. Christiania 1862.
- Thom Thomas saga erkibyskups. Fortælling om Thomas Becket Erkebiskop af Canterbury. Udgiven af C.R. Unger. Christiania 1869.

The Latin Bible is quoted from: Biblia sacra. Vulgatae editionis Sixti V Pont. Max., Iussu Recognita et Clementis VIII auctoritate edita. Ratisbonæ et Romæ MCMXIV.

Some works of secondary literature

Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen, Ole Widding, Norrøn fortællekunst. Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie. København 1965.

Kurt Schier, Sagaliteratur. Stuttgart MCMLXX.

Bernhard Kahle, Die altnordische Sprache im Dienst des Christentums. I. Teil: Die Prosa. Berlin 1890. (Acta Germanica, Organ für deutsche Philologie. Band I.)

Wolfgang Lange, Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000-1200. Göttingen 1958. (Palaestra. Band 222.)

Astrid Salvesen, Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Norse Elucidarium. Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1968.

For certain texts in Bisk, Heil, Mar and Thom, cf. Peter Hallberg, Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrøn sagalitteratur. Göteborg 1968. (Nordistica Gothoburgensia 3.)

PETER HALLBERG.

University of
Göteborg

