

# Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon in the Old Norse Hagiographic Sagas

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One of the peculiar features of the religious works translated from Latin into Old Norse is the way in which the Nordic divinities replace the Roman ones in exotic contexts. As scholars have pointed out, it is sometimes difficult to find a pattern in this process of substitution. In this paper I have tried to look anew at the corpus of occurrences of Nordic and Roman gods and goddesses in the hagiographical translations, in particular in Unger's editions of *Postola sögur* and *Heilagra manna sögur*. On the basis of a systematic analysis and comparison of these occurrences with their Latin parallels it is possible to draw conclusions as to the different tendencies in this process of re-contextualization, which sometimes seems to imply a redefinition of the mutual relations between the different divinities.

In these hagiographical texts, only the "official" divinities in one of the pantheons have a counterpart in the other. The gods and goddesses extraneous to both pantheons are kept in their original form and not adapted to the known frame of reference. In the same way the demons and evil spirits from exotic

lands are quoted with the names they have in the Latin sources. Obviously no need was felt to make them familiar to the Scandinavian audience.

The most original and discussed passage about the pagan gods is undoubtedly the one from *Clemens saga*, on which Tveitane focused his attention in a paper on *interpretatio Norræna* delivered at the 6th Saga Conference in Helsingør in 1985.<sup>1</sup> The term *interpretatio Norræna* is coined on the concept of *interpretatio Romana*, already used by Tacitus in his *Germania* (XLIII, 4). Here Tacitus recognises in some of the Germanic divinities the same characteristics of the Roman ones, and uses for them the names familiar to his audience.<sup>2</sup> In the famous passage from the *Germania* (IX, 1) Mercurius is considered the highest divinity, and is quoted together with Hercules and Mars:

Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. Herculem ac Martem concessis animalibus placant.

The three gods correspond to Wotan/Óðinn, Donar/Þórr and Tiu/Týr. In the oldest sources there is equivalence between the foremost divinity of the Germanic peoples, that is Wotan/Óðinn, and Mercurius. This correspondence was canonized in the rendering of the planetary week days in accordance with the Latin model. The equivalence between Mercurius and Óðinn was based on the functional characteristics of Óðinn as god of poetry, wisdom, magic and eloquence. Moreover, Mercurius is the conductor of departed souls to the Lower World, which is another function he shares with Óðinn, the god of the dead and the presider of the *Valhöll*.

About the second equivalence, between Hercules and Þórr, Turville-Petre has pointed out that “it seems likely that Hercules, with his supernatural strength and his club, was sometimes identified with Thór”.<sup>3</sup> But later sources stress the characteristic of Þórr as the god of thunder and natural elements, which is the dominion of Jupiter. Cf. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (IV, 26):

Thor, inquit, presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat [...] Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.

In the same passage Adam emphasizes the characteristic feature of Óðinn as the promoter of war and struggle, thus identifying him with Mars:

Wodan, id est furor, bella gerit hominique ministrat virtutem contra inimicos [...] Wodanem vero sculpunt armatum, sicut nostri Martem solent.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mattias Tveitane, *Interpretatio Norroena. Norrøne og antikke gudenavn i Clemens saga*, in: *The Sixth International Saga Conference*, Helsingør 28.7-2.8.1985, Workshop Papers, pp. 1067-1082.

<sup>2</sup> An analogous *interpretatio Graeca* is found in the Greek authors, such as Erodotos, who interpreted the Egyptian pantheon.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, London 1964, p. 103.

This picture is in contrast with the traditional one, found both in Tacitus and in the names of the planetary week days, according to which Mercurius corresponds to Óðinn and Mars to Týr. Týr is one of the gods who seem to have been of less significance in the later heathen period, but he enjoyed an originally foremost position in the Germanic pantheon, at least if we judge from the etymology, which is the same as the Latin *deus*. The fact that there is no perfect correspondence between the Roman and Scandinavian pantheon is already evident from the existence of these two traditions: on the one side Tacitus and the classical authors, on the other side Adam, one of the precursors of humanistic storiography.

The most heterogeneous figure in the Nordic pantheon, and the most difficult to interpret, seems to be Óðinn. The ambiguity and complexity of his personality is expressed both in the Eddaic poems and in other sources. In the religious translations like elsewhere in Old Norse literature Óðinn and Þórr represent the pagan gods *par excellence*, in many occurrences quoted together as a sort of complementary/competitive figures to signify the whole pantheon. A couple of examples from *Clemens saga*:<sup>4</sup>

ex eorum libris et caeremoniis ostendebat, ubi nati et unde nati essent hi, quos *deos* putarent et colerent, et quid egissent et qualiter defecissent (516-8)

synde hann þeim með micille scynseme af þeira bócom sialvra, hversu illa oc flerþsamlega þeir Þórr eða Openn eða aþrer eser voro getner, oc hversu illa oc herviliga ðeir lifþo (14234-37)

Here the Latin text has only a generic *deos*, without any specific name. In the longer redaction of *Clemens saga*, preserved in AM 645 4<sup>o</sup>, we also find an example of *amplificatio* without counterpart in the Latin source, where Þórr and Óðinn are mentioned together to represent the pagan beliefs, which Clemens is trying to destroy:

Clementem hunc a populo seditiosa vociferatione impeti reperi, cui nulla possit probatio inveniri (71<sup>19</sup>-73<sup>2</sup>)

mikit sundrþyki geresc með Rumaborgar monnom af kenningom Clemens pafa, oc spenr hann alt folc oc allan landher fra alre dýrþ goða varra oc dregr i villo sina oc til atrunaþar við Cristum necqern, oc hann slęsc á it mesta ameþe við Þór eða Openn, oc alla fólur hann þa ese oc øll gob ór (147<sup>23-28</sup>)

In the eyes of the translator the two gods must have been complementary in many respects: not only in their functions, but also from a temporal, social and

<sup>4</sup> Where nothing different is specified, the Old Norse quotations follow Unger's editions: *Postola sögur*, Kristiania 1874, and *Heilagra manna sögur*, Kristiania 1877. As for the Latin sources, I refer to the ones listed in Ole Widding, Hans Bekker-Nielsen & L.K. Shook, *The Lives of the Saints in Old Norse Prose. A Handlist*, in: *Mediaeval Studies* 25 (1963), pp. 294-337, and *Ordbog over det Norrøne Prosasprog*. Registre, København 1989. For the text of *Passio sancti Clementis* cf. Franciscus Diekamp (ed.), *Patres apostolici* 2, Tübingen 1913.

maybe a geographical point of view. Most scholars agree that Óðinn seems to have been the god of aristocracy, while Þórr was worshipped by a wider part of the population. In the words of Jens Peter Schjødt, Óðinn was not only the king of gods, but also the god of kings. On the basis of the place-names evidence Turville-Petre suggests that the cult of Þórr prevailed in the farming areas of Scandinavia, more independent from a central government (Iceland and southwestern Norway), while Óðinn was venerated in the regions whose powerful military chiefs had little interest in agriculture (Denmark and southern Sweden).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the predominance of Þórr seems to have increased towards the end of paganism. According to Adam of Bremen (ca. 1070), Þórr enjoyed a central place among the three idols in the temple of Uppsala.

As already mentioned, the *Passio Sancti Clementis* and its Old Icelandic equivalent, *Clemens saga*, contain a peculiar passage about the two pantheons. A list of gods and goddesses is named both in the Latin source and in the Old Norse translation, but we find some discrepancies in the correspondences between the Roman and the Scandinavian deities:

Magis artibus ista faciens deorum nostrorum culturam evacuat. Iovem dicit deum non esse, Herculem conservatorem nostrum dicit esse immundum spiritum. Venerem deam sanctam meretricem esse commemorat, Vestam quoque deam magnam ignibus crematam esse blasphemat. Sic sanctam deam Minervam et Dianam et Mercurium simul et Saturnum et Martem accusat, numina etiam universa blasphemat. Aut sacrificet diis nostris aut ipse intereat (69<sup>11-19</sup>)

AM 645 4°

hann seger, at Þórr se eigi goð fultrue varr oc en sterxte Óss arþesfullr, oc er nēr hvars sem hann es blotenn; en þá osømp oc ovirþing veiter hann Óþne orlausnafullom oc hvarfseme, at sia Clemens callar hann fianda oc ohreinan anda; en hann qveþr Freyio portkono verit hafa; fðler hann Frey; en hrøper Heimdaull; lastar hann Loca með sløgh sina oc vðlar, oc callar hann oc illan; hatar hann Høni; bølvar hann Baldri; tefr hann Tý; niþer han Niorþ; illan seger hann Ull; flimter hann Frigg; en hann gør Gefion; sekia dømer hann Sif. Fir ilzco sina qveþr hann svát orþe. Oc sia lagabriotr fðler øll goð ór oc lastar þau miøc oc gremr at qss, oc engi þeira asa ma hann heyra vel latenn, hvártke Þór ne Oþenn. Øllom bindr hann þeim iamnan sciøld up goþom orom oc callar øll oh ef með øllo, eþa hvart heyrþo þer mann slict meþa fyrr? Blóte hann nu þegar í staþ, eþa hafe bana ella. Nu er sa domr várr allra of hann (146<sup>31</sup>-147<sup>6</sup>)

XXVIII a 4°

Segir hann, at Þórr sé eigi guð, ok kallar Óðin óhreinan anda ok segir Freyiu portkonu hafa verit. Fælir hann Frey. Hrøpir hann Heimdall. Lastar hann Loka. Hatar hann Høni. Bølvar hann Baldri. Tefr hann Tý. Níðir hann Njörð. Illan segir hann Ull. Flimtir hann Frigg. Geyr hann Gefiun. Sekia dømir hann Sif. øll goð ór gremr hann at oss. Blóti hann \*eða bana hafi. Sá er várr dómr (280<sup>4-9</sup>)

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Turville-Petre, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-70.

There is no perfect equivalence between the two groups of divinities, not even in their number. The style of the Latin source is rendered through a rhythmic, alliterating prose, where each sentence starts with a verb that alliterates with the name of the god. Some of the deities, like for instance Ull, belong to an archaic phase of Scandinavian paganism, so the list represents a wide range of divinities both in time and hierarchic position. The translator has obviously paid more attention to the style in the Old Norse text than to the truthfulness of the equivalences, and this is even more evident in the redaction of the saga transmitted in the fragment AM 655 XVIII a 4°, which is shorter and closer to the Latin source.<sup>6</sup> However, the identification of some of the gods is made easier by the related attributes. Jupiter's foremost position is reserved to Þórr, the equivalence that – as we have seen – is most common also in the Latin sources.

Hercules' connotation in the Latin text is *conservator*, that is “keeper, preserver, defender”. This particular feature is also typical of Þórr, the defender of the pagan world against the forces of chaos, but in this occurrence Hercules is instead identified with Óðinn, as showed by the attribute *immundum spiritum*. Apart from this, in the analyzed *corpus* there is only another, ambiguous example of the identification of Hercules with Óðinn (*Vitus saga* 330<sup>9-10</sup>).

A third equivalence that we can deduce from this passage in *Clemens saga* is the one between Venus and Freyja, traditionally associated with lustful behaviour. But somewhere else in the same text the planet Venus is called *Friggiar stiarna* (130<sup>24,28</sup>), thus suggesting that Venus corresponds to Frigg. For some aspects of her character and her functions the goddess of the Vanir, Freyja, can be seen as a parallel to the *ásynja* Frigg. But here it is more probable that the translator has just used the common Old Norse name for the planet Venus, without thinking of the equivalence with the Roman goddess.

*Clemens saga* is not the only *postola saga* where we find incoherence between the names of the deities and placenames which contain these names in their etymology. In the older redaction of *Páls saga* (AM 645 4°) the placename *Athenis* occurs first in its Latin form (221<sup>15</sup>), and later in the text as *Aþenisborg* (222<sup>6</sup>). The *Areopagus* is interpreted and translated with *hof Opens* (221<sup>23</sup>), which implies the identification of Óðinn with the Greek god Ares (Mars). The name of the inhabitants, *Athenienses*, is rendered with *Opensborgar* (221<sup>25,27</sup>). But in the same saga we find the following passage, which translates the *Acts of the Apostles*:

Et vocabant Barnabam Iovem, Paulum vero Mercurium, quoniam ipse erat dux verbi. Sacerdos quoque Iovis... (Act. 14, 11-12)      oc cølluþo þeir Paulum Oþin en Barnabas Þor. Þa com þar blotmaþr Þors... (220<sup>3-4</sup>)

<sup>6</sup>The text of the shorter redaction is quoted from Dietrich Hofmann, *Die Legende von Sankt Clemens in den skandinavischen Ländern im Mittelalter* (“Beiträge zur Skandinavistik” 13), Frankfurt am Main 1997.

Here Óðinn is identified with Mercurius, and not with Mars, so there is inconsistency in the same translation, or at least the translator has not understood the etymology of the Greek term. Another possibility is that he used an already existing equivalent of *Areopagus*, based on the same identification of Mars with Óðinn already found in Adam of Bremen. A comparison of this redaction of *Páls saga* with the one in AM 234 fol shows in the latter the use of *hof Tyss* (246<sup>9</sup>) to translate *Areopagus*, according to the more traditional interpretation Ares/Mars = Týr, which emphasizes the function of Mars' Hill as the highest juridical assembly in Athen and of Týr as the god of the *þing*, the Dumézilian “god of law”.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Polomé<sup>8</sup>:

the link between Mars and Týr rests on the Germanic concept of war as a judgment by arms (ON *vápnadómr*), which puts it into the domain of the juridical functions of Týr, whose association with the judicial and legislative assembly (ON *þing*) is also evidenced by the votive inscriptions to *Mars Thincsus*.

This correspondence is also found in both versions of *Tveggja postola saga Philippus ok Jakobs*:<sup>9</sup>

Deiicite hunc Martem: et confringite: et in loco in quo fixus stat Crucem dei mei Iesu Christi affigite: et hanc adorate. Tunc illi qui cruciabantur cœperunt clamare: recuperetur in nobis uirtus: et deiicimus hunc Martem (385<sup>12-14</sup>)

AM 630 4b

Briotit niðr líkneski þetta, er í Tys líki þíkkir gort verit hafa, en reisit upp þar í staðinn kross drottins Jesus Kristz, er honum er sigrs ok pínungar mark en hinn styrkasti stolpi varrar hialpar ok lausnar. En hinir siuku menn eggjuðu miok, at þat skyllði fram fara sem skiotast, ef þeir væri þa nokkut nærr heilsu sinni en aðr. Oc var sva gert (73617-22)

AM 628 4<sup>a</sup> (< Codex Scardensis)

Dragit þer ut skurgoðit þetta ok briotid, enn setid þar í stadinn cross drottins mins Jesus Cristz. þa kaulludu þeir sem siukir voru: Gef þu oss afl ok heilsu, ok munu vær brióta Ty þenna, sem vær höfum blotad (7413-6)

Also the texts from the *Heilagra manna sögur* show quite different interpretations of the Roman pantheon. The canonical readings, corresponding to the names of the week days, are found for instance in *Martinus saga* and

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux des Germains*, Paris 1959, chapter 2. The aspect of Týr as a counterpart of the Roman god of war is found for instance in the prologue of *Rómverja saga*: er svá sagt að þeir (Romulus ok Remus) væri synir Martis er Rómverjar kölluðu orrostuguð en vér köllum Tý.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Edgar C. Polomé, The Indo-European Component in Germanic Religion, in: *Essays on Germanic Religion* (“Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Number Six”), Washington 1989, pp. 1-29, esp. note 9; first appeared in Jaan Puhvel (ed.), *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans. Studies of Indo-European Comparative Mythology*, University of California Press at Berkeley and Los Angeles 1970, pp. 55-82.

<sup>9</sup> The *Passio Beati Philippi Apostoli* is quoted from Boninus Mombritius (ed.), *Sanctuarium, seu, Vitae sanctorum* 2, Paris 1910.

*Agǫtu saga meyju:*<sup>10</sup>

Mercurium maxime patiebatur infestum, Iouem brutum adque hebetem esse dicebat ( <i>DialMart</i> <sup>17-18</sup> )	Þor callaði hann heimscan, en Oþen deigan, en Freyio portcono ( <i>Martin</i> <sup>1</sup> 569 <sup>25-26</sup> )
Frequenter autem diabolus [...] nam interdum in Iouis personam, plerumque Mercuri, saepe etiam se Veneris ac Mineruae transfiguratum uultibus offerebat ( <i>VitMart</i> 131 <sup>7-11</sup> )	Optliga bra diðfullinn a sik ymsum likium [...] stundum i Þors liki, stundum Odins, stundum Freyiu, en stundum i Friggjar liki edr annarra heidinna manna ( <i>Martin</i> <sup>3</sup> 618 <sup>23-25</sup> )
Agatha respondit: Sit talis uxor tua: qualis tua dea Venus fuit: et tu sis talis qualis deus tuus Iouis extitit ( <i>PassAgat</i> 38 <sup>16-18</sup> )	Heilog mæR svaradi: Ver þu sem gud þinn Odinn, en kona þin slik sem Freyia gydia þin ( <i>Agat</i> <sup>1</sup> 2 <sup>31-32</sup> )

But the equivalence between Mercurius and Óðinn on the one hand and Jupiter and Þorr on the other is not so immediate in some other translations. The problems related with the rendering of the Roman Jupiter into Old Norse are evident if we compare version *A* and *C* of *Ceciliu saga*:<sup>11</sup>

Locus igitur qui vocabatur Pagus quarto miliario ab urbe situs erat, in quo per templi ianuam transitus erat, ut omnis qui ingrederetur, si Iovi tura non poneret, puniretur (*PassCaec* 214<sup>1-3</sup>)

Bær sa var fiorar milor fra Romaborg, er þjodgata læ fyrir framan dyr hia hofi Þors, ok var hverr pindr, er eigi villdi blota Þor (CecA 28916-18)	Stadr var kalladr Pagus, sa var fiorar milur fra Romaborg, þar la þjodgata i gegnum Odens hof... (CecC 289 n. 3)
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The equivalence between Jupiter and Óðinn occurs also in another passage of version *C* of *Ceciliu saga*:

Almachius dixit: Ergo Iobis Dei nomen non est? ( <i>PassCaec</i> 211 <sup>20-21</sup> )	Almachius mællti: Er eigi Oþenn gud? ( <i>CecC</i> 287 <sup>30</sup> )
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In Unger's edition, version *A* is taken from the manuscript Holm perg 2 fol (c1425-1445), while version *C* is taken from AM 429 12° (c1500). They seem to represent two different traditions and therefore two alternative interpretations in the rendering of the Roman Jupiter.

If we turn to the goddesses, the two already quoted examples where an identification is possible show the canonical correspondences of Venus with Freyja and Minerva with Frigg. Among the lesser deities, Diana and Vesta are both translated with Gefjon, in *Agnesar saga* and *Nikolas saga* respectively:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The quoted sources of Martinus saga are Vita S. Martini and Dialogi Martini, in: Carolus Halm (ed.), Sulpicius Severus: Libri qui supersunt, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 1, Wien 1866. For the Passio sanctae Agathae cf. Mombricitus, op. cit. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Passio sanctae Caeciliae, in: Hippolyte Delehaye (ed.), Étude sur le Légendier Romain: Les Saints de Novembre et de Décembre, Subsidia hagiographica 23, Bruxelles 1936.

<sup>12</sup> For the Latin texts cf. Acta S. Agnetis, in: Bolland & Henschen (ed.), Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii 2, Antwerpen 1643, and Vincentius Bellovacensis, Speculum Historiale, Douay 1624.

Symphronius Præfectus dixit: Vnum tibi e duobus elige, aut cum virginibus Deæ Vestæ sacrificæ... (*PassAgn* 352a<sup>21-22</sup>)

Simphronius mællti: Nu skalt þu kiosa um tvo kosti, annattveggia at blota Gefion gydiu vora med meyum... (*AgnesA* 17<sup>16-17</sup>)

Præterea cum vsque ad tempus illud, serui Dei regio illa simulacrum Dianæ coluisset [...] hæc est impudica Diana (*NicSpecH* 530a<sup>15-39</sup>)

Sva er sagt, at allra blota mest var þa magnat Gefionar blot [...] þat var en odyggva Gefion (*Nik2* 30<sup>11-28</sup>)

Gefjon appears in most occurrences as the counterpart of Diana, for instance also in both redactions of *Páls saga* (224<sup>2</sup>, 253<sup>25</sup>). As Peter Hallberg has pointed out:<sup>13</sup>

Diana, or Artemis, was a goddess of fertility, and so was Gefjun. Moreover, according to Snorri Gefjun was a virgin, and Diana is seen as a symbol of virginity. Thus the equivalence Diana-Gefjun seems to be appropriate.

On the other hand – I think – the equivalence Vesta-Gefjon can be based on the fact that the cult of the Roman goddess was associated with her priestesses, the Vestal virgins, an aspect which also corresponds to what Snorri says about Gefjon: *hón er mærl ok henni þjóna þær, er meyljar andast.*

The most original interpretation of Óðinn as a counterpart of a Roman god is found in *Sebastianus saga*:<sup>14</sup>

Numquid antequam Saturnus Cretensibus imperaret, et filiorum suorum carnes comederet, Deus in cælis non erat, aut Creta insula habebat Regem, et cæli Deum non habebant? Valde errat qui putat Iouem filium eius, imperare fulminibus, homuncionem in quo malitia et libido regnabat [...] quia sordidissima Iuno quod et soror et coniunx fuerit gloriatur (*PassSeb* 271b<sup>23-33</sup>)

Eda mundi eigi gud vera fyrr a himni, en Odin var konungr i Krit, þa er hann át holld sona sinna, sem þækr ydrar segia? Miok villaz þeir, er Þor son hans eþla elldingum styra, þann er ser sialfum styrdi eigi fra oþefum hlutum, ok fôdur sinn let meida, en atti systur sina at eiginkonu (*Seb* 230<sup>14-19</sup>)

Here the parental relationship between Saturnus and Jupiter is privileged and kept in the translation, therefore Saturnus is rendered with Óðinn. Fritzner quotes no other examples of this equivalence, but the problem of the non-coincidence of Óðinn's and Þorr's genealogical tree has also been touched upon by other medieval authors, such as Ælfric and Saxo. In his *Gesta Danorum* Saxo observes that:<sup>15</sup>

Eos tamen, qui a nostris colebantur, non esse, quos Romanorum vetustissimi Iovem Mercuriumque dixere, vel quibus Græcia Latiumque plenum superstitionis obsequium exsolverunt, ex ipsa liquido feriarum appellatione colligitur. Ea enim, quæ apud nostros Thor vel Othinus dies dicitur, apud illos Iovis vel Mercurii feria nuncupatur. Si ergo Thor Iovem, Othinum Mercurium iuxta designatæ interpretationis distinctionem accipimus,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Peter Hallberg, Imagery in Religious Old Norse Prose Literature. An Outline, in: *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102 (1987), p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> The Latin source is quoted from *Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii* 2.

<sup>15</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 6, 5, 4.

manente nostrorum assertione Iovem Mercurii filium exstisse convincitur, apud quos Thor Othini genitus vulgari sententia perhibetur. Cum ergo Latini contrario opinionis tenore Mercurium Iove editum asseverunt, restat, ut constante eorum affirmatione Thor alium quam Iovem, Othinum quoque Mercurio sentiamus exstisse diversum.

From the analysis of the names of the planetary weekdays we learn that Jupiter corresponds to Þórr and Mercurius to Óðinn. On the other hand it is well known that Þórr is Óðinn's son, while Jupiter is Mercurius's father. By this exercise of eloquence – as Friis-Jensen has defined it – Saxo comes to the conclusion that the Roman gods are not the same as the Scandinavian ones.<sup>16</sup> The same objection about Jupiter's identification with Þórr is found in Ælfric's homily *De falsis diis*.<sup>17</sup>

More confused passages, from which it is difficult to draw conclusions, are found for instance in *Vitus saga*, where the same gods occur in a different sequence twice in the text:<sup>18</sup>

hactenus nescisti o fili deos esse inuictos Iouem et Herculem. Iunonem. Mineruam et Appollinem: quos diui principes: et uniuersus excollit orbis romanus? ( <i>Mombr</i> II, 635 <sup>17-19</sup> )	Veizt þu eige oðaudleg god vera Odenn, Þor ok Frey, Frigg ok Freyiu, er konungar göfga ( <i>Vitus</i> 328 <sup>10-11</sup> )
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Vitus dixit: Si sanus vis fieri, abrenuntia Jovi, Herculi, Junoni, Minervæ, Vestæ, atque Apollini ( <i>PassVit</i> 1023a <sup>13-15</sup> )	Vitus mælte: Neit þu Þor ok Odne, Frigg ok Frey ok Freyiu (330 <sup>9-10</sup> )
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According to Tveitane, this saga is more than 200 years younger than a text like *Clemens saga*, and therefore from a time when the correspondences between the Roman and the Norse gods were no longer clear for the translator. However, in the two Old Norse quotations we find the same gods and goddesses. If we assume that the sequence in the Icelandic text follows the Latin, in the first case Jupiter corresponds to Óðinn and Hercules to Þórr, while in the second it is the other way round. But in other sources we have seen both examples of equivalence, Jupiter = Þórr/Óðinn, Hercules = Þórr/Óðinn, which must have contributed to some confusion in the translator. In the first example Frigg and Freyja correspond to Juno and Minerva respectively, while in the second there is no one-to-one equivalence between the Roman and the Norse goddesses. The

<sup>16</sup> Karsten Friis-Jensen suggests that this passage be read as an ironical comment by Saxo, to underline that the two pantheons actually are similar. Cf. Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Nordisk hedenskab og europæisk latinhumanisme hos Saxo*, in: Niels Lund (ed.), *Norden og Europa i vikingetid og tidlig middelalder*, København 1993, pp. 212-232, esp. pp. 231-232.

<sup>17</sup> Nu secgað þa Deniscan on heora gedwylde / þæt se Iouis wære, þe hi Þór hátað, / Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon hatað; / ac hi nabbað na riht, for þam þe we rædað on bocum, / ge on hæpenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetola Iouis / to soðan wære Saturnes sunu, / and þa béc ne magon beon awægede / þe þa ealdan hæðenan be him awriton þuss; / and eac on martira þrowungum we gemetað swa awriten (141-149).

<sup>18</sup> A single Latin source for this saga has not been identified, since the translation corresponds in part to the version of the *passio* found in Mombricitus and in part to the one in Henschen & al. (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum Iunii* 2, Antwerpen 1698.

god Freyr could in both cases be the equivalent of Apollo, but it is more probable that his name appears as a counterpart of Freyja, and for the sake of alliteration. Actually there are no other examples to testify the use of an Old Norse equivalence to the god Apollo in the texts that I have analysed. He is only quoted in the original form, for instance in *Clemens saga: i musteri solar goðs, es Apollo heiter* (127<sup>33-34</sup>). Freyr appears in *Laurentius saga* as the counterpart of Mars:<sup>19</sup>

Sed ducantur ad templum Martis iterum: et sacrificent [...] Sanctum uero Xistum episcopum et Felicissimum et Agapetum diacones duxerunt in cliuum Martis ante templum ( <i>PassSixt</i> 650 <sup>52</sup> -651 <sup>4</sup> )	leidit þa til Freys hofs ok hoggvit þa [...] En þeir leiddu Sixtum pafa ok diakna hans Felicissimum ok Agapitum i Freys brecku hia hofinu ( <i>Laur</i> 425 <sup>2-14</sup> )
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In some occurrences all the names of the Roman divinities are kept in Latin in the hagiographic translations, like in *Antonius saga*:

Liberæ raptum, terram; semiclaudum Vulcanum debilem, ignem; Junonem, aelem; Apollinem, solem; Dianam, lunam; Neptunum, maria; et libidinum principem Jovem ætherem interpretantes (105 n. 2)	Libervm favðvr, en iorðina Simiclavdivm, elld Wlkanvm, loptið Jvnonem, sol Apollinem, tvngll Dianam, hafit Neptvnm, Jovem hofðingja allrar lostasemi segit er himinloptið sialft vera (105 <sup>7-10</sup> )
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As we have seen from the analysed texts, different translations show a wide range of different interpretations, and this is especially true in the case of the most ambiguous figure in the Scandinavian pantheon, that is to say, Óðinn. The data found in the hagiographical texts – though they do not add any new element to our knowledge of Old Norse mythology – confirm the polyhedric image that other sources, both indigenous and not, give of the Scandinavian pantheon. To sum up, I have found examples of the following equivalences:

Óðinn: Mercurius, Mars, Jupiter, Hercules, Saturnus; Þórr: Jupiter, Hercules; Týr: Mars; Freyr: Mars; Freyja: Minerva, Venus; Frigg: Juno, Minerva, Venus; Gefjon: Vesta, Diana.	Mercurius: Óðinn; Jupiter: Óðinn, Þórr; Mars: Týr, Óðinn, Freyr; Hercules: Þórr, Óðinn; Saturnus: Óðinn; Venus: Freyja, Frigg; Minerva: Freyja, Frigg; Diana: Gefjon; Vesta: Gefjon.
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The hagiographic translations are quite late, from a period where paganism had officially been replaced by Christianity, so this process of interpretation and adaptation of the Roman pantheon is significant in itself. In re-contextualizing the Scandinavian deities into an exotic frame the translators show the same concern for the pagan religion as for instance Snorri with his *Edda*. In the words

<sup>19</sup> The Latin text is quoted from Mombritius, *op. cit.* 2.

of Margaret Clunies Ross:<sup>20</sup>

[...] one of Snorri's aims was to give a comprehensive account of the language of skaldic poetry. However, this aim seems to have been coexistent with and sometimes subordinate to a desire to show how the language of early Icelandic poetry expressed the basic tenets of the pre-Christian Scandinavian religion and represented a serious attempt to understand the basic principles of the cosmos.

Different choices taken when translating the same Roman deity could simply be seen as a sign of the fact that knowledge of the Scandinavian pantheon was no longer so immanent for the translators. Another consideration could be the issue of how much these authors/translators actually knew about the Roman pantheon in the first place. But the wide range of possible interpretations in the analysed texts can also reflect different traditions and the extent of the popularity one particular god or goddess enjoyed during a particular period. For instance, the fact that Mars is sometimes translated as Óðinn (*Páls saga* in AM 645 4s) and Freyr (*Laurentius saga*), instead of the canonical Týr, can support the hypothesis that Týr's cult was fading in the later period of paganism, while Freyr was becoming more important. If Þórr in many ways was a Hercules, because of his strength and his role as the defender of the pagan world, he enjoyed on the other hand a much more pre-eminent status in the Scandinavian pantheon, a status that corresponds more to that of Jupiter. As for the goddesses, it seems that the borders between the different spheres of influence were not very clearly defined.

In the process of conversion from one frame of reference to the other, there can be in some cases a discrepancy between the role and function of the god and his hierarchic position in the pantheon. Sometimes the translator seems to choose a counterpart of the Roman that reflects correspondence of status, while in other cases he privileges the functional role. This is especially evident in the case of Jupiter, the uncontrasted chief god among the Romans, whose counterpart in the Scandinavian pantheon shifts between Óðinn and Þórr. This is both due to the non-coincidence of their functions and to the different status that Óðinn and Þórr enjoyed in the course of time, among different social classes and in different areas in Scandinavia.

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál*, Odense 1987, p. 20.