

# At snúa - At setja saman. The Authorial Status of the Medieval Translator in the Composition of Old Norse Saints' Sagas

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As it often happens in the literary traditions of Medieval Europe, there are rare traces of named authors who can be identified as responsible for the production of the extant corpus of texts that belong to the Old Norse tradition. The anonymity of the author has come to be interpreted as one of the constituent features of Norse sagas, especially for what concerns more *indigenous* genres such as the Sagas of Icelanders, and has been variably explained as a result of their oral origin. However, the identity of those who first had developed the narrative has always interested the scholarly debate, both as regards the identification of a specific individual and the authorial dimension that comes out of textual criticism. Discussing the problem of authorship in Medieval Iceland, Steblin-Kamenskij interpreted the lack of a specific Norse word for *author* as indicating that the audience of vernacular literature and the producers themselves did not make much of a distinction between the agent and the act of writing.\*<sup>1</sup> In 2011, Lethbridge proposed to reinterpret the concept of authorship at its root. In her view, the autho-

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\* All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

<sup>1</sup> M. I. STEBLIN-KAMENSKIJ, *An Attempt at a Semantic Approach to the Problem of Authorship in Old Icelandic Literature*, in «Arkiv for nordisk filologi», 81, 1996, pp. 24-34.

rial conscience behind the composition of a text could be glimpsed at the different stages of the text's transmission, rather than at the moment of its composition. In these terms, the originality of a saga is not confined to what appears to be its first redaction, but can be appreciated in the variants that scribes introduced at each stage of its manuscript tradition.<sup>2</sup>

There is a shared consensus among scholars that this same perspective fits well when one looks at the development of *Heilagra manna sögur* (Saints' Sagas).<sup>3</sup> The genre, which originated as a product of translation, is particularly interesting when dealing with medieval authorship as it allows scholars to assess the degree of autonomy of the scribe in the adaptation of texts from a culture to another, as well as in their transmission within that culture after its adaptation. Given that the scribes' approaches are neither systematically accounted for in the Norse tradition nor are they systematic *per se*, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the creative approaches employed by Old Norse scribes in the adaptation and transmission of hagiographies, and to assess the degree of authorial interpretation behind their production.

The two infinitives that make up the title of the present paper are by no means the sole verbs used to identify the act of translation in Old Norse, nor is it here implied that they reflect a different percentage of their actual occurrence in the periods considered. The first infinitive, *at snúa*, which is parallel to the Latin *vertere*, suggests a straight movement from culture A (in) to a culture B; in its meaning of 'to convert', it also links the need and the event of translation with the very moment of the change of faith, which

<sup>2</sup> E. LETHBRIDGE, *Authors and Anonymity, Texts and Their Contexts: The Case of Eggertsbók*, in A. LASSEN – A. NEY – ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON (edited by), *The Legendary Sagas. Origins and Development*, Reykjavík, University of Iceland Press, 2011, especially p. 350. See also SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR, *Arctic Garden of Delights: The Purpose of the Book of Reynistaður*, in K. WOLF – J. DENZIN (edited by), *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, Ithaca, Cornell University Library, 2008, pp. 279–301; JÓHANNA KATRÍN FRÍÐRIKSDÓTTIR, *Ideology and Identity in Late Medieval Northwest Iceland. A Study of AM 152 fol.*, in «Gripla», 25, 2014, pp. 87–128.

<sup>3</sup> On the different approaches to translating and transmitting hagiography in the Norse world, and on the authorial dimension of the scribe at both stages, see in particular SVERRIR TÓMASSON, *Höfundur – Skáld: Author, Compiler, and Scribe in Old Norse Literature*, in S. RANKOVIĆ (edited by), *Modes of Authorship in the Middle Ages*, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012, pp. 236–50; S. BATTISTA, *The Compiler and Contemporary Literary Culture in Old Norse Hagiography*, in «Viking and Medieval Scandinavia», 1, 2005, pp. 1–13.

is the starting point of the genre under scrutiny.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, *at setja saman*, bears a (more) multidimensional meaning, as it involves the synchronic use of texts that have already been composed (either translated or, as it were, already ‘put together’, cf. *componere*) and are therefore part of a diachronic tradition. These significantly distant terms are used here as overly simplifying labels to describe the diverse translational policies followed by Norse scribes throughout the history of the genre. *At snúa* suggests a higher degree of closeness of translation between source and target text in what can be identified as the first period of production of Saints’ Sagas, which encompasses the first extant hagiographical texts in Old Norse up until the first traces of their re-elaborations (c. 1150-1250). Conversely, texts that were produced from 1250 until the arrival of the Reformation (c. 1550) tend to be rewritings and new redactions of previous hagiographies, which were undertaken with clear literary purposes in mind (*at setja saman*). Some of these texts, especially in the fourteenth century, are characterised by a growing tendency towards adaptation, manipulation and compilation, and point to the maturation of authorial confidence on the part of the scribes.

My interpretation of the shifts from source and the analysis of the authorial conscience behind the scribes’ different policies of translation and transmission are here conducted within the framework of *Descriptive Translation Studies* and *Polysystem Theory*. This combined methodology, which was elaborated by Gideon Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar in the eighties and nineties, is not new in its application to translated Norse literature. It accounts for the creative responsibility of the translator in responding to the variables that come up at the encounter between source and target culture (language, time, space, purpose, audience), and locates their activity in relation to other genres of the target system’s repertoire. In this paper, these parameters are here applied to a series of examples from Saints’ Sagas, particularly Sagas of Bishop saints. The analysis exemplifies the most common trends of the scribes’ activity and account for the reasons behind them in light of the systemic variables analysed by the methodological framework. I argue that, if these parameters are applied to the genre’s periodization in relation to the techniques employed by scribes, it is possible to account for the development of their different approaches in light of the variables of the polysystem and to assess the creative, authorial effort of scribes in their activity as translators and copyists.

<sup>4</sup> S. GRØNLIE, *Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity: ‘How Christianity Came to Iceland’*, in «Medium Ævum», 86 (1), 2017, pp. 123–46.

## 1. GENRE AND METHODS

### 1.1 HEILAGRA MANNA SÖGUR

Old Norse culture utilised translation as the principal tool in the development of its literary system since the very beginning of manuscript culture. Iceland's conversion to Christianity around the year 1000 brought the introduction of the writing culture through the study of the language of the Church in a society where orality had played a primary role for centuries.<sup>5</sup> Before writing down and composing original sagas, Icelanders acquired their writing and literary competencies on Latin religious works, whose translation was fundamental in the very process of Christianisation.<sup>6</sup>

Based on direct and indirect references, it seems that hagiographical texts were among the first genres of Christian literature that were translated into Old Norse. The corpus of these texts, canonically referred to as *Heilagra manna sögur* (lit. 'sagas of holy men'),<sup>7</sup> comprises the prose translation of the lives of around a hundred saints, divided into the traditional categories of apostles, martyrs and virgins, holy bishops, priests and hermits.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of the genre is reflected in the continuous manuscript traditions from the mid-twelfth century until the arrival of the Reformation, in the mid-sixteenth.<sup>9</sup>

Lives of saints were meant primarily for edification, and were produced and consumed in both ecclesiastical and lay environments. Their main centres of production were the two bishoprics of the island, the southern seat of Skálholt and the northern seat of Hólar, as well as monastic houses in the north and west. Saints' Sagas were also copied in lay ateliers situated in wealthy farmstead,

<sup>5</sup> On the concept of oral-written continuum, see S. RANKOVIĆ – L. MELVE – E. MUNDAL, (edited by), *Along the Oral-Written Continuum / Types of Texts, Relations and Their Implications*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> P. MEULENGRACHT SØRENSEN, *Social Institutions and Belief System of Medieval Iceland (C.870–1400) and Their Relations to Literary Production*, in M. CLUNIES ROSS (edited by), *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 8–29.

<sup>7</sup> C. R. UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur: Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder*. 2 vols. Christiania, Bentzen, 1877. For a summary of the scholarly work on Old Norse-Icelandic hagiography, see K. WOLF, *Medieval Icelandic Hagiography: The State of the Art*, in D. BULLITTA – K. WOLF (edited by), *Saints and Their Legacies in Medieval Iceland*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2021, pp. 11–28.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. CORMACK, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, Brussels, Société des Bollandistes, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the texts belonging to the genre, see K. WOLF, *The Legend of Saints in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2013.

especially from the fifteenth century. This absence of a clear-cut distinction between secular and lay agents of production suggests that the genre was not only meant for devotional purposes, but that more general literary interests were also at play, especially at a certain removal from the settlement of Christianity.

1.2 TRACING THE SCRIBE'S AUTHORIAL DIMENSION IN THE  
TRANSLATION AND TRANSMISSION OF SAINTS' SAGAS

When dealing with *Heilagra manna sögur*, one ought to take into account two different processes of production: translation from a source language, usually Latin, into the vernacular; and variation of the vernacular texts throughout the centuries of their transmission. These different steps imply also different approaches to the texts on the part of the scribes, suggesting something more about the literary conscience of these cultural agents, and possibly allowing one to attempt some assessments of their authorial status.

Some caution ought to be observed once faced with a product of the culture of the Middle Ages, particularly when a number of factors cooperate to define it as the result of adaptation from a culture to another. In such cases, it is important to understand the translational policy behind the text, for the degree of closeness of translation varies each time in accordance with several variables (e.g. aims, language, context of composition, audience). Translation finds its position at the border between cultures and it represents the principal meeting place of diverse influences. This privileged position as an instrument of both reception and diffusion, however, causes translation to belong to two separate literary traditions: both the target and the source culture. The result of this process, while ceasing to belong to the source culture, yet does not fit entirely among the genres of the receiving culture itself, and its anomalous nature constitutes the main condition that informs a product of translation.

Nevertheless, the introduction of a literary work into a cultural system from another culture via the process of translation is not, however, undertaken haphazardly. Scholars have underlined the positive approach to translation by scribes and authors in the Middle Ages and have recognised its position as one of the main elements in the development of European culture as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. R. COPELAND, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991; M. G. CAMMAROTA – M. V.

Translation responds to needs that arise in a particular moment in history, within a specific cultural and linguistic context. Thus, it is the target culture that is responsible for its determination, its outlook and its fruition. This means that, in filling the gap between two separate cultures, medieval translators did not operate with literal accuracy as their primary aim. Deviation from an original is not necessarily the result of a misinterpretation. In fact, it can come into being as a result of a deep understanding of the source text, as a conscious decision the translator made in order to overcome the incommunicability that is invariably inherent to two separate cultures. The shift from the source text is the product of a critical interpretation that takes into account the variables of the literary and broadly cultural context where the text is transposed into. The ability of transferring from a code to another using different degrees of adaptation of the matter as to make it fitting the new cultural context marks an elaborate literary conscience on the translator's part.

Moreover, the system of translation within a culture is in itself part of that culture's tradition and it actively contributes to it, both at the moment of the translation's production and throughout the history of the culture's evolution. Therefore, a proper analysis of a product of translation, especially in the Middle Ages, ought to take into account these two stages. The authorial perspective that comes out of the moment of translation can indeed be expanded when one looks at the tradition of translated texts. If one looks at the different redactions of the same text, or at different translations of the life of a saint made at different times, it is clear that scribes modified the texts according to the dynamics surrounding their redaction (i.e. audience, competing genres) along the transmission of a vernacular saga. This is indicative of changing variants in the literary and cultural system, and thus suggests different needs, purposes and approaches on the scribes' parts in handling the material they were deemed to transmit to posterity.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: DESCRIPTIVE TRANSLATION STUDIES AND POLYSYSTEM THEORY

The scribe's *freedom* in handing their texts may sometimes be overshadowed when a philological approach is applied to the study of a text's tradition.

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MOLINARI (a cura di), *Tradurre testi medievali: obiettivi, pubblico, strategie* (Bergamo 12-13 ottobre 2001), Bergamo, Edizioni Sestante, 2002.

However, when the interest lays on the understanding of the authorial dimension of the scribe, the context of production and the reasons behind the outlook of the text's redaction; when the presence and nature of a variant is interesting *per se*, without being discharged in the construction of an Ur-text, other approaches may serve the purpose best. The application of a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach in the study of translation changed the way scholars have looked at this complex phenomenon in a less absolute and more nuanced way.<sup>11</sup>

In his contribution to the development of *Descriptive Translation Studies*, Gideon Toury proposed to approach the phenomenon of translation based on two fundamental assumptions: 1) translation is never casual nor abrupt; 2) a product of translation is autonomous in its own right, being as it is a product of the receiving culture, rather than the source culture's.<sup>12</sup> By observing the phenomenon of translation in different contexts and different times, Toury identified two sets of recurrent, yet non-absolute norms that describe the event of translation and its make-up according to the variables that pertain to the receiving cultural and literary system. The first set of norms, which he labelled *preliminary norms*, has to do with the factors that govern the choice of the text-types to be imported via translation (*translation policy*) and the degree of *directness of translation*. A second set of norms (*operational norms*), accounts for the decisions the translator made at the very moment of adaptation, in the way the linguistic material is maintained, segmented, and distributed in the target text (*matricial norms*), and in its linguistic formulation (*textual linguistic norms*).

Expanding on Toury's centrality of the target culture as a starting point for the analysis of this phenomenon, Even-Zohar made a major contribution to the development of the descriptive approach to translation. Based on the different kinds of variables within the receiving system that justify a culture to recur to translation to enlarge its literary repertoire, he proposed that the

<sup>11</sup> The discussion of the best editorial approach to apply to the study of Old Norse texts continues to be a matter of debate among scholars. See K. WOLF, *Old Norse – New Philology*, in «Scandinavian Studies», 65, 1993, pp. 338-48; O. E. HAUGEN, *A Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns: On the Merits of Old and New Philology in the Editing of Old Norse Texts*, in F. FERRARI – M. BAMPI (edited by), *On Editing Old Scandinavian Texts: Problems and Perspectives*, Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2006, pp. 9–38.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. TOURY, *Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond. Revised edition*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012, *passim*. A thorough overview of the development of *Descriptive Translation Studies* is available in A. A. ROSA, *Descriptive Translation Studies – DTS*, in Y. GAMBIER – L. VAN DOORSLAER (edited by), *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2016, pp. 94–104.

existence of variables of different nature suggested the existence of different source-systems they had to stem from within the overarching system that is the target culture. Hence, the scholar introduced the concept of *polysystem*:

a heterogeneous, hierarchized conglomerate (or system) of systems which interact to bring about an ongoing, dynamic process of evolution within the polysystem as a whole. [...] the various strata and subdivisions which make up a given polysystem are constantly competing with each other for the dominant position<sup>13</sup>

In virtue of the variables that stem from, and are representative of, the needs of the competing systems within the literary system and, potentially, in the polysystem as a whole, Even-Zohar concluded that translation comes into being as a central force in the development of the literary system only under specific conditions:

- a. when a literature is in the process of being established, not yet formed;
- b. when a literature is weak and/or peripheral within a larger literary panorama;
- c. when a literature is experiencing turning points, crisis or literary vacuums.

When one or more of these conditions apply, translation reaches a position of primacy in the development of the polysystem. Under all three of these conditions, a culture lacks strong, independent means to develop its own peculiar repertoire and turns to a more prominent, prestigious one to fulfil that vacuum via translation. In these cases, translators are likely to operate in an innovative way, according to a tendency that Even-Zohar called *primary activity*. Conversely, when variables change and the condition of the cultural polysystem has reached a certain stability, developing a peculiar repertoire, translation will invariably occupy a peripheral position, and will operate in a way that is more conservative in relation to the acquired repertoire, as no innovation would be as needed at this stage (*secondary activity*).

The observables proposed by Toury, together with Even-Zohar's structure can offer useful parameters in the interpretation of such context-related change of variables in the translation and transmission of texts in the Middle Ages. Scholars have already applied this framework to the study of the Old

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<sup>13</sup> M. SHUTTLEWORTH, *Polysystem*, in M. BAKER – G. SALDANHA (edited by), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London, Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, p. 197.

Norse literary system.<sup>14</sup> In particular, Siân Grønlie demonstrated the fruitfulness of the application of the methodology to the study of *Heilagra manna sögur*, especially as regards the genre's role in influencing other branches of Norse literature throughout its development.<sup>15</sup> The application of this framework to the analysis of the genre is particularly apt, given that translation had a pivotal role in its creation, and continued to be used in order to expand the literary repertoire, creating space for compilations and influencing other genres throughout the Middle Ages. From the perspective of the producers, it is therefore clear that the scribe/translator ought not to be viewed as playing a passive role within the literary system, as they operate as cultural agents who are conscious of what they are doing, why and when they are operating. Texts that were imported and unfamiliar at first started being approached with a growing sense of ease in the course of time by the same people in charge of their transmission, who felt that they could intervene on them in a more autonomous way. The changed perception the scribes had towards those texts depends on the change in status of the texts themselves, which had turned from products of a foreign literary system with one and a specific purpose (that of evangelisation) into stable parts of the literary system. As active part of the Norse literary system within the polysystem, they remained in service of the ecclesiastical needs that had caused their translation, while at the same time they became open to respond to other needs, as literary products in their own rights.

### 3. CASE STUDY: TRANSLATION AND TRANSMISSION OF SAGAS OF BISHOP SAINTS

Interpreting a text as part of the polysystem means to root it out of the category of 'given' product, especially in the case of genres such as hagiography, and

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. BAMPÌ, *Translating and Rewriting in the Middle Ages: A Philological Approach*, in H. LÖNNROTH (edited by), *Philology Matters! Essays on the Art of Editing Slowly*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2017, pp.164–81; M. BAMPÌ, *Literary Activity and Power Struggle: Some Observations on the Medieval Icelandic Polysystem after the Sturlungaöld*, in M. BAMPÌ – M. BUZZONI (a cura di), *Textual Production and Status Contests in Rising and Unstable Societies*, Venezia, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2013, p. 59–70; C. LARRINGTON, *Eddic Poetry - A Case Study: Sólarljóð*, in M. BAMPÌ – C. LARRINGTON – SIF RÍKHARÐSDÓTTIR (edited by), *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2020, pp. 245–58.

<sup>15</sup> S. GRØNLIE, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature. Studies in Old Norse Literature*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2017.

creative processes such as translation. In particular, the application of the combined methodology of *Descriptive Translation Studies* and *Polysystem Theory* in the study of the authorial dimension of the producers of *Heilagra manna sögur* allows for an analysis that does not stop at the *inter-cultural* moment that produces the genre, i.e. translation. Starting from the concept of authorial process suggested by Lethbridge, interpreting the evolution of a text through the dynamics of the *polysystem* helps assessing the scribes' approach at the different stages of its redactions from an *intra-cultural* perspective. This twofold approach, which Even-Zohar has defined as one of *polychrony*, helps to establish the degree of authorial creativity not only in the process of translation from source to target culture, but also in the diachrony of its appropriation and transmission within the new cultural system.<sup>16</sup>

In the following sections, examples from the Sagas of Bishop saints will illustrate the most common trends scribes have followed in their activity throughout the history of the genre. The extant corpus comprises the lives of sixteen saints, which were composed from the late twelfth century until the arrival of the Reformation.<sup>17</sup> This particular category within the corpus of Saints' Sagas has been chosen as it seemed suitable to follow the development of one single category within the genre, and because it has never been specifically taken into account in the scholarly literature. Moreover, given the potential inherent to these sagas in the description of episcopal authority, the paper argues that the changing variants of the literary system were also possibly influenced by changing variants in the conscience of the ecclesiastical elite and their supporters. I suggest the category is useful as it is easier to find historical reasons behind their production, as the protagonists of these texts were se figures were actively influencing the composition of sagas of Icelandic bishops.

The analysis will follow the periodization delineated above and identify the texts' ultimate sources based on Wolf's authoritative handlist, which refers to *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* (*BHL*).

<sup>16</sup> I. EVEN-ZOHAR, *Polysystem Studies*, «Poetics Today», 11 (1), 1990, p. 87.

<sup>17</sup> For the sake of economy, I am taking into account only complete sagas, leaving out single episodes and exempla. The corpus under consideration comprises the four Latin Doctors (Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, Jerome of Strydon, Gregory the Great), one pope (Sylvester), and eleven archbishops and bishops (Basil of Caesarea, Blaise of Sebastea, Denis of Paris, Dunstan of Canterbury, Erasmus of Formia, John Crysostome, Martin of Tours, Nicholas of Myra, Remigius of Reims, Servatius of Tongeren, Thomas Becket).

### 3.1. AT SNÚA: TRANSLATION AS A TOOL OF CONVERSION AND EVANGELISATION (CA. 1150 - 1250)

Since the official adoption of Christianity in Iceland translations of liturgical texts, homilies and lives of saints were undertaken for the purpose of evangelisation. According to Even-Zohar's terminology, translation comes into being as a central, innovative force within the Norse literary system at an important turning point for Icelandic culture.<sup>18</sup> At this stage, the Norse literary system is already mature as an oral heritage, both as regards language, contents and composition, whereas it is new to the written culture.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the system is open to innovation (*primary activity*), and receptive of external influences as literary models and modes of composition. From the linguistic point of view, *preliminary* and *operative norms* respond to the practical needs of constructing clear narratives, closeness of translation representing the aim as well as the most secure approach for the newly formed learned class (*direct transfer procedures* tend to be dominant).

The Norse lives of St Basil of Caesarea and St Martin of Tours are among the first preserved Sagas of Bishop saints. The first extant redaction of *Basiliuss saga* is found in Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 655 4to VI, a fragmentary manuscript that was written in the early thirteenth century, and it is ultimately based on *BHL* 1022.<sup>20</sup> The first redaction of *Marteins saga biskups* is preserved in Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 645 4to, which dates to the second quarter of the thirteenth century, and is ultimately based on *BHL* 5610.<sup>21</sup> When compared to their ultimate sources, the texts of the two sagas give a sample of the general tendency towards conservation in the first moment of adaptation from Latin into Old Norse:

Interea inruentibus intra Gallias barbaris Iulianus Caesar coacto in unum exercitu apud Vangionum ciuitatem donatium coepit erogare militibus et, ut est consuetudinis, singuli citabantur, donec ad Martinum uentum est. Tum uero opportunum tempus existimans, quo peteret missionem, neque enim integrum sibi fore arbitrabatur, si donatium non militaturus acciperet, hactenus, inquit

<sup>18</sup> EVEN-ZOHAR, *Polysystem Studies...*, cit., p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> J. QUINN, *From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland*, in CLUNIES (edited by), *Old Icelandic Literature...*, cit., pp. 30–60.

<sup>20</sup> *Basiliuss saga*, in G. MORGENSTERN (Hrsg.), *Arnemagnæanische Fragmente (Cod. AM. 655 4to III–VIII, 238 fol. II, 921 4to IV 1.2): Ein Supplement zu den Heilagra manna sögur*, Leipzig-Copenhagen, Møller, 1893, pp. 24–25.

<sup>21</sup> *Marteins saga biskups I*, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 554–74.

ad Caesarem: “Militaui tibi: patere ut nunc militem Deo. Donatiuum tuum pugnaturus accipiat, Christi ego miles sum: pugnare mihi non licet.”<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, while the barbarian army was invading Gaul, the Caesar Iulianus, after the army had been gathered in the city of *Vangionum* [Worms], started giving donations of money to the soldiers and, as it was the custom, soldiers were called one by one, until it came to Martin. Then, Martin thought it was a good moment to ask for leave, since he did not consider it right to get the donation if he were not to remain a soldier. He spoke to Caesar: «I worked in the army for you: allow me now to become a soldier of God. Those who will fight for you shall get the donation, but I am a soldier of Christ: I am not allowed to fight».

En er vikingar herioþo a Fraclande, þa samnaði Julianus liþe oc tok at heita heitfe þerom. Þa þotesc Martinus finna macliga tiþ at leynas fra riþera syslo oc melte við konongenn: «Hingat til þionaða ec þer, latu mic nu þiona guði. Taki sa giof þina, er beriasc scal, en ec em Cristz riþere, oc er mer eigi lofat at beriasc.»<sup>23</sup>

When the Vikings were arraying Frankia, then Julianus gathered the army and took to give them donations. Then Martin thought to have found the best moment to part from the cohort of the knights, and spoke to the king: «I have served you up until this point, let me now serve God. He shall take your donation, he who shall fight. But I am a knight of God and it is not permitted to me to fight».

Basiliius autem iuxta ripam factus, proiecit se in humum, et cum lacrimis ac clamore forti, postulat signum revelari eius fidei. Resurgensque cum tremor, dispoliat se vestimentis suis, et cum ipsis vere vetusto homine<sup>24</sup>

Basil came to the shore, cast himself to the ground and with tears and loud shouting asked for a toke of his faith. Raising up while shivering, he took off his clothes and his old name together with them

En er basiliius com allr fram a iorðanar bacca.þa varp han ser niþr á iorþ, oc baþ meþ tarom oc callaði til guþs.at i þessom atburþ scvldi necqvert tacn vitrasc af

<sup>22</sup> *Sulpicii Severi Vita sancti Martini*, in B. MOMBRIUS, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae sanctorum*, 2 vols., Paris, Apud Albertum Fontemoing, 1910, vol. 2, p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> *Marteins saga biskups* I, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., p. 555.

<sup>24</sup> *Amphilochii episcopi Iconii in vita et miraculis sancti Basilii archiepiscopi Cappadociae*, in G. CORONA (edited by), *Ælfric's Life of Saint Basil the Great: Background and Context*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2006, p. 227.

himni i hans tru. Síþan spretr han up með scialpta oc fleśc or cleþom sinom oc með siqlfom sanliga þeim cleþom þar með fer han or en forna manni.<sup>25</sup>

When Basil came all forth to the shore of the river Jordan, he cast himself to the ground and asked with tears and shouted to God that at that moment a certain token of his faith shall appear from heaven. Then he rose up shivering and took off his clothes and with those same clothes he had carried on he took off his former name

The fact that some degree of variation already operates at this stage shows that scribes perceived when a text had to be modified in some aspects in order to be accepted by the system, especially for making it understandable by an audience that had to be educated in the Christian faith. This is particularly clear in the case of syntax, which tends to be adapted to the target code so as to avoid particularly marked foreign constructions, such as absolute ablative (*inrumentibus...barbaris, coacto...exercitu*) and participial constructions (*existimans; Basilius...factus, despolians*), both generally rendered with finite clauses in the past tense (*vikingar herioþo, Julianus samnapi; þotesc, basilius com, spretr han up*).<sup>26</sup> Moreover, contents that are not immediately transparent are also explained in various ways, be it with a paraphrase, the introduction of a gloss, or the substitution of referents. The latter happens with a rather high frequency in reference to Roman deities, which were adapted with what scribes thought be their indigenous counterparts in the pantheon of their pre-Christian past. This phenomenon, known as *interpretatio norrena*, was active since the very beginning of the adaptation of hagiographical texts into the vernacular and throughout the history of the genre, as shown in the case of the first complete version of the saga of St Nicholas of Myra (*Nikuláss saga erkibiskups*):<sup>27</sup>

Mercurium maxime patiebatur infestum, Iouem brutum adque hebetem esse dicebat<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Basiltuss saga*, in MORGENSTERN (Hrsg.), *Arnarnagnæanische Fragmente...*, cit., 24.

<sup>26</sup> S. BATTISTA, *Translation or Redaction in Old Norse Hagiography*, in P. H. ANDERSEN (edited by), *Pratiques de traduction au Moyen Âge. Actes*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusulanum, 2004, pp. 100–10.

<sup>27</sup> S. BATTISTA, *Old Norse Hagiography and the Question of the Latin Sources*, in R. SIMEK – J. MEURER (edited by), *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages*. The Proceedings of the 12th International Saga Conference 28 July–2 August 2003, Bonn, University of Bonn, 2003, pp. 26–33.

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogus Severi* [II], in MOMBRIUS, *Sanctuarium...*, cit., vol. 2, p. 221.

He [Martin] considered Mercury as particularly hostile, and said that Jupiter was dull and stupid.

Þor callaði hann heimscan, en Óþen deigan, en Freyio portcono.<sup>29</sup>

He called Thor a fool, Odin a coward, and Freya a whore.

Præterea cum vsque ad tempus illud, serui Dei regio illa simulacrum Dianæ coluisset [...] hæc est impudica Diana

Because, up until the time of that servant of God, that region had worshipped a statue of Diana [...] that is the unchaste Diana.

Sva er sagt, at allra blota mest var þa magnat Gefjonar blot [...] þat var en odygva Gefjon<sup>30</sup>

So it is said that the greatest of all sacrifices was that of Gefjon [...] that was the unfaithful Gefjon.

### 3.2. SETJA SAMAN (CA. 1250 – 1550)

By the mid-thirteenth century, the diminished pressure on evangelisation causes translations to move to the periphery of the literary system. Scribes seem to approach new translations in a rather conservative way, given that the Christian message had been already spread and was not in further need of special explanation. This approach is evident in the case of the version of *Gregors saga páfa* found in the fragmentary Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 238 fol. X (c. 1300-50). The text is a fairly close translation of *BHL* 3641 and, according to Wolf, is related to or derived from the same saga transmitted in an earlier manuscript, Oslo, Riksarkivet, NRA fragm.71 (c. 1250–75), with little variation.<sup>31</sup> As seen in the previous examples, the conservative tendency that results in a high degree of closeness of translation does not imply a total lack of shifts from source to target text. In fact, significant divergences can be seen in the linguistic outlook

<sup>29</sup> *Marteins saga biskups* I, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., p. 569.

<sup>30</sup> *Nikuláss saga erkibiskups* I, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 2, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup> K. WOLF, *An Excerpt on Saint Gregory the Great in AM 764, 4to*, in ÁSDÍS EGILSDÓTTIR – R. SIMEK (edited by), *Sagnaheimur: Studies in Honor of Hermann Pálsson on His 80th Birthday*, 26th May 2001, Wien, Fassbaender, 2001, pp. 287–94.

of the texts. Previous versions from late in the twelfth and early in the thirteenth century are significantly updated in their linguistic outlook as to meet the necessities of a language that develops over time, especially in the written means.

Conversely, products of the first period are by now completely assimilated as stable elements of the system, and are handled with more flexibility. The growing array of genres available within the system at this stage made scribes aware that these products had to be adapted if they were to remain strong competitors in the system. Furthermore, a number of texts is not transmitted anonymously anymore, but some texts are associated with specific compilers, be it due to indirect tradition or because scribes themselves signed their own work, in a rather authorial manner.

Some sagas underwent a process of revision that adapted their contents, linguistic and stylistic features, according to the demands of their public. A case in point is *Ágústínus saga*, which is a translation of a Latin hagiography similar to *BHL* 789, but augmented with some material that in all likelihood constitutes an independent addition by its Norse compiler.<sup>32</sup> The first witness of the tradition, the thirteenth-century Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 221 fol., attributes the saga to Runólfr Sæmundarson (d.1306/7), abbot of the Augustinian house at Þykkvabær, in the south of Iceland. In his version, Runólfr maintained and expanded the learned and theological material of his Latin source, chiefly hagiographic, encyclopaedic and liturgical in character.<sup>33</sup> As Kalinke noted, the fact that the saga addresses Runólfr's fellow brothers as its main audience demonstrates that the compiler had undertaken the compilation with a specific audience in mind, which dictated his choices.<sup>34</sup> He privileged certain aspects of the saint's life, such as his learnedness and his ties with the monastic life, which he knew would have been understood and appreciated by people who probably had been already familiar with more popular versions of his hagiography. Thus, Runólfr's activity ended up having a double purpose: by producing an updated version of the canon house's saint, his text had both an edifying character and a literary appeal that consciously moved away from past models.

In other cases, scribes eliminated the homiletic and theological passages that had been sought after in *Ágústínus saga*, and privileged the introduction

<sup>32</sup> *Ágústínus saga*, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 122 – 49.

<sup>33</sup> P. G. FOOTE (edited by), *Lives of Saints. Perg. fol. nr. 2 in the Royal Library, Stockholm*, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1962, pp. 22–3.

<sup>34</sup> M. E. KALINKE, *Augustinus saga: A Learned and a Popular Version*, in SVERRIR TÓMASSON (edited by), *Samtíðarsögur / The Contemporary Sagas: Höfundar / Preprints*, I-II, Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1994, pp. 435–49.

of historical material instead.<sup>35</sup> The first extant redaction of *Ambróstiuss saga byskups*, Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 655 XXVIIIa 4to, was composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, around the time of Runólfr's activity. The saga is in an expanded version of the most popular life of the saint, Paulinus of Milan's *Vita Ambrosii* (BHL 377). Scribes used different sources in providing a rounded historical background to the rather dry text of its ultimate source, especially drawing from late-antique *historiae* such as Orosius' *Historiae adversos paganos* and Pseudo-Cassiodorus' *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*, as well as adding original episodes.<sup>36</sup> The internal coherence of the resulting text speaks in favour of an authorial mind behind the compilation of the saga. For the sake of coherence and narrative cohesiveness, scribes reshaped the internal structure of the base-text and introduced the additional material following a strict chronological order. They also adapted the text to the literary strategies that are common to secular saga-literature, such as dramatization.<sup>37</sup> In the passage below, Paulinus' short description of the confronting scene between Bishop Ambrose and the usurper Magnus Maximus is the occasion for the Norse scribes to stage a close and dramatic exchange of words that echoes similar scenes of dialogue in contemporary secular literature:

Ipsum vero Maximum a communionis consortio segregavit, admonens ut effusi sanguinis domini sui, et quod est gravius, innocentis, ageret poenitentiam, si sibi apud Deum vellet esse consultum. Sed ille cum poenitentiam declinat superbo spiritu, non solum futuram, sed etiam praesentem salutem amisit, regnumque quod male arripuerat, femineo quodam modo, timore deposuit, ut procuratorem se reipublicae, non imperatorem fuisse confiteretur.<sup>38</sup>

Ambrose excommunicated Maximus, admonishing him of undergoing penitence for having shed the blood not only of his lord, but also – and that is

<sup>35</sup> S. WÜRTH, *Historiography and Pseudo-History*, in R. McTURK (edited by), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, Malden, Blackwell Pub., 2005 pp. 155–72.

<sup>36</sup> FOOTE, *Lives of Saints...*, cit., pp. 21–22.

<sup>37</sup> On dramatization and dialogue as peculiar features of saga writing, see, among others, P. HALLBERG, *Direct Speech and Dialogue in Three Versions of Óláfs saga helga*, in *The Third International Saga Conference, Oslo, July 26th–31st*, (Oslo, 1976), pp. 1–41; D. MAČEK, *Dialogue as a Discourse Pattern in Saga Literature*, in *Fourth International Saga Conference, München, July 30th–August 4th, 1979*, München, Institut für nordischen Philologie der Universität München, 1979, pp. 2–16.

<sup>38</sup> *Vita Ambrosii*, in MOMBRIUS, *Sanctuarium...*, cit., vol. 1, p. 56.

worse –, of an innocent person, if he wanted to be counted among God's flock. However, since he had declined to undergo penitence with arrogance, not only he lost his future salvation, but also his present. He deposed the power he had seized by evil means with a certain unmanly fear, when he declared he had been a deputy of the republic and not its ruler.

M[aximus] s[egir] Eigi fer ek þangat, mældu her [slik]t er þu vill. Ma ek, segir B[yskup], banfæra þik her, ef þu vill eigi skript taka. M[aximus] [sva]rar: Vil ek taka skript. Syn þu i því iðran þina, segir B[yskup], attu legg niðr keisera [nafn] ok ber eigi corono ok haf hertoga nafn sem fyrr. Þetta ma ek eigi gera, segir M[aximus], i moti [tign] minni. B[yskup] s[egir] ef þu matt þetta eigi gera lostigr, þa skalltu þat sama skamz bragz gera [nøði]gr ok þat riki er þu hefir at røngu tekit [skalltu þa med svivirþingu ok qvol lata]. Nu ef þu vill sattr verða við guð, [þa ta]k þu iðran eða ella banfæri ek þik þegar, er þu hefir drepit þin herra. M. [villdi] eigi ganga undir skriptina firir metnaði sinum. En B[yskup] gerir hann fraskila postoligri [kristni ok qollo sam]neyti kristinna manna. En sva er sagt, at þaðan i fra ber [eigi Maximus fra corona ok tynir bædi] likamligri heilso ok anligri.<sup>39</sup>

Maximus said: «I won't go anywhere, you do whatever you want here». The bishop said: «I can banish you on the spot, if you won't take the penitence». Maximus said: «I want to take the penitence». The bishop said: «Show then that you are ready for it. Bow to the name of Caesar and do not wear the crown, and take up the name of captain instead, as [you had] before». Maximus said: «I can't do that against my honour». The bishop said: «If you cannot do that willingly, then you shall do that same thing against your will, and you will lose the kingdom you have wrongly seized with dishonour and grief. Now, if you want to reconcile yourself with God, do undergo the penitence, otherwise I will banish you henceforth, since you have killed your lord». Maximus did not want to undergo penitence because of his pride. Then, the bishop separated him from the Apostolic Christianity and all the community of Christians. And so it is said, that henceforth Maximus did not leave the crown and wasted his salvation, both his physical and spiritual salvation.

Elsewhere, I have argued that it is significant that the two sagas under analysis are among the sources of inspiration of *Árna saga biskups*, the saga of Bishop Árni Þorláksson of Skálholt (1269-98).<sup>40</sup> The bishop played a major

<sup>39</sup> *Ambrósius saga biskups*, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 1, p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> D. SALMOIRAGHI, *Bishop Saints as Sources of Episcopal Authority in Árna saga biskups*, «Apardjón Journal for Scandinavian Studies», 3, 2023, forthcoming.

role in the consolidation of the rights of the Icelandic Church against the powerful chieftains of the time, especially in terms of ecclesiastical properties. *Árna saga* celebrates the bishop as the champion of the rights of the Church, paralleling him with bishop saints such as St Augustine and St Ambrose to enhance the importance of his episcopal authority. This suggests that, despite genuine religious and literary interests behind these sagas' re-elaboration, other political instances might have been at play. In particular, this might reflect a need of the ecclesiastical elite at a particular moment of crisis in the history of the Icelandic Church, especially regarding the fight between secular and lay powers for the ownership of wealthy estates and the overruling of Norway.

The tendency towards the elaboration of previous sagas reaches its utmost in the course of the fourteenth century. On one hand, some saints' sagas, and Sagas of Bishop saints among them, were reworked into completely new versions. On the other hand, this freedom towards older versions influenced the translation and compilation of new hagiographies. In both cases, scribes combined translated and original material, and exaggerated the taste for chronology introducing material from universal histories of the twelfth and thirteenth century, such as Vincent of Beuvais' *Speculum historiale* and Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*. Moreover, they opted for a particularly learned and flourished style, which shows a great interest in literary writing for its own sake, more than for a specific edifying purpose.

Principal authors of this trend are a group of Benedictine monks who operated in northern Iceland, between the monasteries of Munkaþverá and Þingeyrar, in the diocese of Hólar, known to scholars as the 'North Icelandic Benedictine School' (*Norðlenski Benediktinskólinn*).<sup>41</sup> It is significant that the Norse tradition does not only preserve their names attached to these works via indirect tradition, but that they named themselves in their works, manifesting a great confidence in their skills and a complete awareness of their role as authors in their own rights.

Among other works, this group left three Sagas of Bishop saints. Monk Árni Lárentiusson (b. 1304), was responsible for an *ex novo* compilation of a saga of St Dunstan of Canterbury. In his *Dúnstanuss saga*, he reworked two hagiographies of St Dunstan (*BHL* 2343 and *BHL* 2346) and implemented

<sup>41</sup> SVERRIR TÓMASSON, *Norðlenski Benediktínaskólinn*, in J. LOUIS-JENSEN – C. SANDERS – P. SPRINGBORG (edited by), *The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28.7-28.8 1985: Workshop papers I-II*, Copenhagen, Det arnamagnæanske Institut, 1985, pp. 1009-20.

them with material from *Speculum historiale*.<sup>42</sup> In a short preface to the saga, Árni names himself as the author of the text and explains the reasons of his undertaking and his process of composition. He wanted to put together (*saman-setja*) a complete series of exempla of the archbishop's saintliness, more than a chronologically structured life:

Öllum góðum mönnum ok rétt-trúöndum þenna bækling heyröndum ok yfir lesöndum, sendir Bróðir Arne Laurentii eilífa heilsu-kveðju í Dróttni vórum Jesú Christo. Meðr því at nökkurir góðfúsir menn hafa beðit mik, at ek munda saman-setja í eina frásögu þat sem ek fynda í helgum ritningum af lífi ok jarteinagjörðum sæls Dunstani, Kantarabyrgis erchibiskups [...] því hefi ek saman lesit í fylgjandi frásögn þau æventyr sem mjög hafa staðit sundrdreift í imissum bókum af fyrr-nefndum Guðs vin ok vórum andligum feðr Dunstano.<sup>43</sup>

To all good men and faithful believers who may read and listen to this little book, brother Árni Laurentiusson sends everlasting greeting in our Lord Jesus Christ. Since some men of good intent have begged me that I would put together in one story what I found in holy writings of the life and miracles of the blessed Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury..., I have compiled in the following story these adventures which have stood scattered in various books of the above-named friend of God and our spiritual father Dunstan.

The most prominent of this group of clerics is Bergr Sokkason (d. 1370), who became monk at Þingeyrar and became abbot at Munkaþverá in 1325. Bergr is considered the author of *Thómass saga erkibiskups* II, whose attribution is pending between him and another important member of the group, Arngrímur Brandsson (d. 1361 / 2), and *Nikuláss saga erkibiskups* II. The latter is an extensive rewriting of the hagiography of the bishop Nicholas of Myra.<sup>44</sup> In its composition, Bergr drew on previous translations of the life of St Nicholas and expanded the narrative with the addition of encyclopaedic and historical material, creating a text that extends five or six times the size of the other versions. As in most of his works, his version of the hagiography

<sup>42</sup> *Dúnstanuss saga*, in GUDBRAND VIGFUSSON – G. W. DASENT (edited by), *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles*, 4 vols., London, 1887–94; rpt. Millwood, 1964, vol. 4, pp. 397–420.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>44</sup> *Nikuláss saga erkibiskups* II, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 49–158.

is marked by a particularly involute style, which heavily echoes the bombastic Latin of the Continent at the time. Despite its learnedness, length and, sometimes, obscurity, Bergr's version achieved great popularity, as shown by the manuscript tradition, which counts fourteen extant witnesses.<sup>45</sup>

Bergr's way of operating can be grasped at a glance when comparing his text to other, more straightforward versions of *Nikuláss saga*, which is extant in a fifteenth century legendary:

1. En gud heyrði bæn þeira ok let ser soma at syna þeim bratt, hvilíkr verða mundi sveinninn; þviat þegar er hann var borinn, stóð hann einn í munnlaugu retrr halfa stund dags, er honum var þvegit.<sup>46</sup>

God heard their [Nicholas' parents'] prayers and let His honour show them of what kind the infant would be, so that, when he was born, he stood straight in a basin for half a day when he was being washed.

Ok þegar er þessi sveinn er skryddr veralldlugu liosi, geislar alla Liciam *skinandi* iarteigna blomi ok blomberanlig dæmi, uheyrð fyrr í verolldinni, þviat þessi sveinn nyborinn frá modurkvidi stendr retrr upp nær halfa stund dags í munnlaugu annanna fulltingi, takandi sva roskinmannliga þvattar þionustu í mot mannligu edli. Hvar fyrir líkligt ma þíckia, at sa væri hreinsadr af hinni gomlu synd í modurkvidi, sem yfir nyfæddum skinu þegar þvilíkar iarteignir; þviat eigi mun sa framburdr visum monnum skylrigr synaz, at yfir þeim nyfæddum geriz iarteignir, sem helvitismadr væri, ef hann yrði eigi hreinsadr fyrir vatn ok helgan anda.<sup>47</sup>

The child was adorned by a worldly light, he beamed all over Lycia, shining as a flower of miracles, and a bloom-bearing example, unheard before in the world, because this baby, newly born of his mother's womb, stood right up nearly half the day in the basin without any help, taking the bath as a grown up, contrary to human nature. It seems indeed very likely that he was purified by that ancient sin in the mother's womb, when such miracles shone over the newly born. For this speech will not appear reasonable to wise men, that miracles were accomplished over the newly born, who would be a creature from hell, if he were not purified through water and holy spirit.

<sup>45</sup> P. HALLBERG, *Bergr Sökkason and Icelandic religious literature*, in SVERRIR TÓMASSON (edited by), *Samtíðarsögur...*, cit., pp. 296–300, esp. p. 297.

<sup>46</sup> *Nikuláss saga erkbiskups I*, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 2, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Nikuláss saga erkbiskups II*, in UNGER (udgivne af), *Heilagra manna sögur...*, cit., vol. 2, p. 62.

As can be seen from the examples, one of the major characteristics of the rewrites is the overly Latinate style, a characteristic that places these group of texts in particular contrast with the tradition that had preceded them. This particular flourish, which sometimes may obscure the contents in comparison with the hagiographies' previous versions, must have had an appeal that went beyond devotion, and influenced other scribes of the same environment, who applied it in the composition of new sagas, and the rewriting of other genres.<sup>48</sup>

It has been noticed that after the Black Death had arrived in Iceland, first in 1402–4, and again in 1494–5, private farms became more prominent as centres of copying than the monasteries.<sup>49</sup> At this stage, the creativity that had characterised the fourteenth century leaves place to a certain tendency towards conservation. This is the case of the sagas of holy bishops in the greatest extant legendary from Medieval Iceland, now Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stock. Perg. Fol. No. 2. The fifteenth century manuscript is an almost complete collection of Saints' sagas, containing twenty-six sagas of which eight concern holy bishops. In this manuscript context, scribes copied older versions of these sagas, with a certain closeness of translation, from which they deviate for updating the language.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the last extant legendary from Medieval Iceland, the sixteenth-century Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stock. Perg. Fol. no. 3, constitutes an *unicum* in Norse literature. The manuscript, known also as *Reykjahólabók* from the name of the scribe's farm in the western part of northern Iceland, constitutes a unique scholarly effort, as it was put together by a single individual, Björn Þorleifsson (c.1480–1548/54). The legendary is a collection of twenty-five lives of saints. The majority of the sagas are drawn from Low German sources, whereas three of them, the sagas of St Ambrose, St Stephen

<sup>48</sup> On the evolution of the style in the translation and composition of Saints' sagas, see JÓNAS KRISTJÁNSSON, *Learned style or saga style?*, in U. DRONKE (edited by), *Speculum Norroenum*. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre, Odense, Odense University Press, 1981, pp. 260–92; ID., *Sagas and Saints' lives*, in *The Sixth International Saga Conference...*, cit., pp. 551–72.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR, *Saints and Sinners. Aspects of the Production and Use of Manuscripts in Iceland in the Period 1300-1600*, in K. HESLOP – J. GLAUSER (edited by), *RE:writing. Medial Perspectives on Textual Culture in the Icelandic Middle Ages*, Zürich, Chronos, 2017, pp. 181-94.

<sup>50</sup> For a general assessment of the sagas in the legendary and their composition, see the general introduction to FOOTE, *Lives of Saints...*, cit.

and St Lawrence, are redactions of earlier versions.<sup>51</sup> Sagas that derived from previous versions were copied closely, and new translations from Low German were also followed with a high degree of closeness of translation. Overall, the compiler adapted the language and style of both kinds of sources in order to achieve an overall homogeneity in the legendary.

In translating his sources, Björn organised the legends according to an editorial and authorial mind, translating them quite closely to the original, but cutting and adapting wherever he thought it appropriate, be it for personal interest (religious or narrative) or for matters concerning the structure of the compilation. For instance, when the same episode appears in two separate sagas, the author did not translate it twice, but made a cross-reference from a text to another in the compilation. This is the case of Augustine's baptism by St Ambrose in *Ágústínus saga* and *Ambrósius saga*, which Björn maintained in the first text and eliminated from the latter, and indicated where the episode could be found in the collection.

Björn's legendary was produced at the end of the Catholic period of the Icelandic Church, when the arrival of the Reformation caused a decline in the production of hagiography. Thus, the genre could not benefit of his innovative approach in selecting and handling his sources, and any further development of an authorial conscience in its scribes and compilers along with it.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

With this essay, I hope to have shown that in translating and copying saints' lives, Norse scribes did not play a passive role within the literary system. The *inter-cultural* effort of the scribes (*at snúa*) had turned hagiographies from being products of a foreign literary system with one specific purpose, that of evangelisation, into stable and active parts of the target culture they were operating in. In the process of translation, scribes intervened on the source texts on various levels, and adapted their contents and structure in order to create products that were available, understandable, and appealing to the greater public. Furthermore, after the adaptation has made the genre a stable element in the literary tradition of the receiving culture, other degrees of variation throughout its transmission show the increasing confidence of

<sup>51</sup> A. LOTH (udgivet af), *Reykjábólubók: Islandske helgenlegender*. 2 vols., Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1969–70; M. E. KALINKE, *The Book of Reykjábolur*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996.

the scribes in their literary skills as creative authors and their understanding of the literary system as a whole. The continuous production of Saints' sagas over the course of four centuries of Old Norse-Icelandic literature meant constant interaction and mutual exchange with other genres, with the scribes' updating activity keeping the genre a strong competitor within the literary system. Changing variables in the literary system required them to make further changes throughout the genre's history in order to promote and sustain its acceptability both synchronically, at the moment of the redaction, and diachronically, in the long run of its tradition. This double *inter-* and *intra-*cultural effort demonstrates the authorial conscience of the scribes: not only they were able to integrate hagiographies into the literary system, but also managed to keep them as active agents in the development of the system itself. In translating and transmitting saints' lives, scribes operated as autonomous agents in the literary system, active contributors to their cultural heritage.