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THE RAINBOW ALLEGORY IN THE OLD ICELANDIC PHYSIOLOGUS MANUSCRIPT

I

A NEW SEMI-DIPLOMATIC edition and close investigation of a neglected Old Icelandic homiletic fragment with two different ship allegories, preserved in the second booklet of the so-called ‘Physiologus manuscript’ (AM 673 a II, 4to, fols. 8^r–9^r), has recently demonstrated that patristic exegesis greatly influenced medieval preachers’ techniques in texts handed on within the Icelandic milieu.¹ Both ship allegories start as nautical catalogues, where parts of the ship are compared with Christian doctrinal elements or general topics (i.e. the whole ship with the world, the keel with true faith, the boards with baptism, etc., in the first allegory) or with liturgical and monastic canon (i.e. the ship with the mass, the oars with the Hours, the keel with *Te Deum* etc., in the second allegory). Then, both proceed to more general expositions, expanding syntax and making use of common rhetorical devices in order to instruct and convince the audience. Catalogue texts of this kind are known from patristic writings and, even if none of them can be taken as the only and direct source of our Icelandic preacher, my analysis has allowed the background lore to emerge clearly. Moreover, it was possible to bring to light some scriptural sources and exegetical connections never pointed out before, as well as to show how, in a number of cases, the homilist was able to combine Christian doctrine and a traditional

1 Cf. Carla Cucina, “*En kjölrinn jarteinir trú rétta*. Incidenza di tropi classici e cristiani sulle tradizioni anglosassone e scandinava,” *RILD. Rivista Italiana di Linguistica e Dialettologia* 12 (2010): 25–93, but especially 56–88 (§ 3.2. “Simbolica ‘scomposta’: le parti della nave nella letteratura omiletica islandese antica”) and 89–93 (APPENDICE). Ship imagery must be thought of as deeply rooted in Old Icelandic culture: apart from the homiletic production, various single specimens of allegorical treatment of the ship can also be found within the Old Icelandic poetical corpus (for instance, in Egill Skalla-Grímsson’s *Höfuðlausn* or in the *Sólarljóð*), and some passages from saga literature (for example, from the last sections of *Njála* and *Laxdæla*) exist, in which a metaphorical – traditional or Christian – sense for the ship need be implied to understand the author’s message properly. For a discussion, see *ibid.*, 56–66.

way of thinking successfully. Finally, it was pointed out that, although the Icelandic preacher of the ‘Physiologus manuscript’ obviously refers to a widespread literary stock for his ship allegories, he occasionally shows some originality, for instance in the choice and combination of allegorical items, in the attention to formal layout and in the insertion of realistic details pointing much more to everyday life than to exegetical sources.

A short allegorical sermon fragment on the rainbow, which has also been largely ignored by scholars, is found on the *versus* of fol. 9 in the same manuscript. The rainbow text has parallels in Old Icelandic literature, namely in the *Hauksbók* and in the so-called *Rímbegla*;² but it is worth pointing out that neither Finnur Jónsson in his and Eiríkur Jónsson’s edition of the *Hauksbók*,³ nor Kristian Kålund in his abridged quotation of a version of that same text from the late manuscript AM 731, 4to⁴ – which Stephanus Björnson’s edition of *Rímbegla* (*Rymbegla*) was also based on⁵ – mentioned the homiletic fragment in the Physiologus manuscript.⁶ Even in recent literature, the rainbow allegory in the older variant text has been disregarded.⁷

2 Cf. *Rymbegla*, i.e. *Computistica et chronologica varia veterum islandorum*, sumtibus Petri Friderici Suhm. Islandice et latine edidit Stephanus Björnson (Hafniae: apud F. Brummer, 1801), 336–337 (repr. of the older in-4to edition by Stephanus Björnson *et alii*, *Rymbegla, sive Rudimentum computi ecclesiastici et annales veterum islandorum* [Havniae: typis A.F. Steinii, 1780]). References to page numbers in this article are to the 1801 edition.

3 Cf. *Hauksbók*, eds. Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (København: Thieles bogtrykkeri, 1892–96), 174–175.

4 Cf. *Alfræði íslenzk. Islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur* III, ed. Kr. Kålund (København: S.L. Møllers bogtrykkeri, 1917–18), 9. Manuscript AM 731, 4to has been dated to 1600–1650.

5 Cf. Stephanus Björnson in the *Rymbegla* introduction ‘Ad lectorem’ (no page number; f [long s] has been normalized): “Partem hanc tertiam [i.e. miscellanea qvædam historica, ex historia sacra, ecclesiastica, universali, naturali & geographica ... etiam aliqva theologica & chronologica] in latinum sermonem transtuli juxta exemplar e Num. 730. legati Magnæani exscriptum, collatum fuit hoc exemplar cum exemplari Biörnsonis Skardsáensis, qvòd in legato tenet Num. 731, & in lectionibus variantibus indigitatur littera B, ad dextram lunulæ posita; item cum alio manuscripto, qvòd tamen ex priori, aut certe ex eodem originali excriptum videtur, & in variantibus notatur littera D ad dextram lunulæ.” No such variant forms occur in the rainbow allegory section (*Rymbegla*, Part. III, Cap. VII). See below, § III.

6 Cf. *Hauksbók*, CXXII: “Kap. 15 handler om r e g n b u e n, dens tre farver og disses betydning. Stykket genfindes i Rímbegla (1780) ..., hvor teksten er omtrent ens. Originalen ved jeg ikke at påvise”. Kr. Kålund only mentioned *Hauksbók*’s recension and *Rymbegla* edition (cf. *Alfræði íslenzk* III, 9).

7 See for example Kirsten Wolf, “The Colors of the Rainbow in Snorri’s *Edda*,” *Maal og minne* 1 (2007): 52 and 58–59, note 2.

As in the case of the two nautical catalogues with symbolical implications, the text of the rainbow allegory was first edited by E. Kölbing in 1879⁸ and then more reliably by L. Larsson in 1891.⁹ The relevant page of AM 673 a II, 4to, which is incidentally one of the oldest Icelandic manuscripts,¹⁰ is badly damaged due to the parchment being of a very soft

8 Cf. E. Kölbing, "Geistliche Auslegung von Schiff und Regenbogen," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 23 (1879): 258–261 (rainbow allegorical text: 261).

9 Cf. Ludvig Larsson, "Nochmals Schiff und Regenbogen," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 35 (1891): 244–248 (rainbow allegorical text: 247–248). Larsson's edition is basically the source of the text printed both by Håkon Hamre, "Pá er vér erum á skipum staddir..." Fornislenzk prédikun," *Skírnir* 123 (1949): 186–190 (normalized Icelandic edition, with a few minor alterations: 189), and by James W. Marchand, "Two Notes on the Old Icelandic Physiologus Manuscript," *Modern Language Notes* 91, 3 (April 1976): 501–505, but especially 503–505 (text and modern English translation: 504).

10 In fact, AM 673 a I and II, 4to (ca. 1200) are the oldest *illustrated* manuscripts preserved in Iceland. They have been the subject of special editorial and critical attention, their content being mainly concerned with the *Physiologus* tradition. AM 673 a, 4to is actually composed of three different manuscripts or manuscript fragments (cf. AM 673 a I–III, 4to), all illustrated and mostly dealing with allegorical matters. Fragment I (two leaves) opens with the Old Icelandic so-called *Physiologus A* (fols. 1^{r-v}), a moral interpretation of five symbolic animals with illustrations for all but the last, followed by an iconographic cycle illustrating Isidorus' *portenta* derived from *Etym.* XI, III (fols. 2^{r-v}), with pictures arranged in three lines and from the same hand as the first folio's illustrator. Fragment II (eight adjoining leaves plus one separate leaf) contains first the so-called *Physiologus B* (fols. 1–5), an Old Icelandic rendering of the *Physiologus* proper, that is descriptions of 15 animals and their allegorical meaning, all but one of which (deer) is illustrated; then an illustrated text on four more animals, again interpreted allegorically but derived from commentaries on the Bible rather than from the *Physiologus* or bestiaries tradition (fols. 5^v–6^v); and finally, a double ship allegory in a homiletic form, followed by a symbolical interpretation of the colours of the rainbow, which is our main concern here (fols. 8–9). Fol. 6^v and the single leaf inserted as fol. 7 of this second manuscript contain various material in later hands, namely a Latin evangelical fragment (palimpsest, 16th century) and a medical text in East Norwegian dialect (about 1370), together with two different pictures of the elephant, which is the last animal discussed on fol. 6^v. Manuscript III (21 fols.) is the famous 'Drawing Book' (*Teiknibókin*), an independent illustrated manuscript dating from the 15th century and dealing with episodes from the Bible and various sacred subjects. The core of the editorial tradition concerning the 'Physiologus manuscript' is still Halldór Hermannsson, *The Icelandic Physiologus*, Islandica 27 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1938; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1966), 7–15 for a paleographic and codicological description, 17–21 for the *Physiologus* text. See also V. Dahlerup, "Physiologus i to islandske bearbejdelser. Udgiven med indledning og oplysninger," *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 2, 4 (1889): 199–290 (diplomatic edition of the texts, with careful paleographic analysis and lithographic facsimile of the relevant pages). On *Teiknibókin* see Björn Th. Björnsson, *Íslenzka teiknibókin í Árnasafni* (Reykjavík: Heimskringla Prentsmiðjan Hólar H–F, 1954). A new facsimile edition with commentary by Guðbjörg Kristjánsdóttir is

consistency as well as being rotten in more than one place.¹¹ This, together with the opportunity of checking previous editions and possibly correcting some readings, is the reason why I print here, as a first step towards a serious critical evaluation of the short text, a new semi-diplomatic edition, with textual and explanatory notes, above all intended as a guide to Kölbing's and Larsson's editorial practices and hints, in order to restore textual authority even where the *lectio* now fails due to manuscript corruption.

After giving a brief account of the Old Icelandic parallel texts and analogues on the subject in order to offer a comprehensive view of the treatment of our *topos* within the literary corpus, the next step and main concern of my investigation will be to focus on the metaphorical implications of the rainbow and its colours, particularly against the Latin-Christian background of exegetical literature. Now, the rainbow also occurs within the Old Icelandic mythological tradition as told in *Snorra Edda*; but, though the Bifröst/Bilröst tradition of the rainbow/bridge has gathered some critical attention, mainly within general approaches to Old Icelandic cosmography, and most recently also from the point of view of the rainbow colours,¹² not much has been written on the figure of the rainbow in patristic exegesis as a possible direct source for the Old Icelandic preacher.¹³ It is this second case, then, that the present article particularly intends to focus on, my purpose being to verify possible connections between the rainbow imagery in the Old Icelandic homiletic fragment and the figural interpretations of the *topos* within the works of the Fathers, particularly concerning the context of *Genesis* and the rich ship-Christ's Church-Noah's ark symbolism, but also relating to (general) colours symbolism. Some parallel

forthcoming (cf. http://www3.hi.is/page/arnastofnun_hand_onnur%20rannsoknarverkefni; accessed June 29, 2011).

11 This is the case with fol. 8^{r-v} and, obviously, fol. 9^f.

12 Cf. Wolf, "The Colors of the Rainbow": 51–62.

13 The only relevant item is a very brief note by James W. Marchand, in fact a half-page comment following his quotation (with translation appended) of Larsson's edition of the rainbow allegory. Cf. Marchand, "Two Notes": 504–505. Our sermon fragment is also mentioned in the context to its possible Latin-Christian background literature by Peter Dronke, "Tradition and Innovation in Medieval Western Colour-Imagery," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* XLI (1972): 51–106 (reprinted in Id., *The Medieval Poet and His World*, Storia e Letteratura: Raccolta di Studi e Testi 164 [Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984], 55–103, from which I quote here).

treatments of the rainbow allegory in medieval poetic and prose texts from the wider Germanic speaking area, for instance in the Early Middle High German biblical epic poetry on Genesis, will also be taken into account here, to suggest a consolidated exegetical stock or *repertoire* widely circulating in the vernacular literatures of the medieval West. Moreover, some penitential implications in our short text suggest a possible connection also with the Irish monastic background, namely with the old tradition of the three forms (and colours) of martyrdom we find in some Hiberno-Latin Continental texts and, above all, in the well-known fragmentary Old Irish sermon commonly referred to as Cambrai Homily.

II

Although Kölbing's *editio princeps* (1879) of the rainbow allegorical fragment in AM 673 a II, 4to, fol. 9^v, contains several uncertainties and some evident mistakes,¹⁴ the manuscript was in far better conditions at that time. It is worth pointing out, for instance, that already in 1889 Dahlerup decided to publish the lithographic facsimile of the *Physiologus* sections of the book, which had been realized some thirty years before, because at that date the manuscript "utvivlsomt var i en noget bedre stand end nu".¹⁵ We can agree with Kölbing himself, when he expresses his regret that Guðbrandur Vigfússon could not help him in revising the transcription of the manuscript leaves which formed the basis for his own edition.¹⁶

Some ten years later, Larsson could properly correct Kölbing's editorial uncertainties, as well as some of his scriptorial misunderstandings and 'interpretative' readings in a new and more reliable edition published in 1891; in more recent times, the few occasional extensive quotations of the ship and rainbow allegories in the Arnarnagnæan manuscript – namely the texts printed by Håkon Hamre, by James W. Marchand and, for the two ship allegories only, by Wolfgang Lange – are all still based on Larsson's edition.¹⁷

14 Cf. Larsson, "Nochmals Schiff": 245.

15 Cf. Dahlerup, "Physiologus": 252.

16 Cf. Kölbing, "Geistliche Auslegung": 259.

17 Cf. Hamre, "Þá er vér erum á skipum staddir...": 187–189; James W. Marchand, "The Ship Allegory in the *Ezzolied* and in Old Icelandic," *Neophilologus* 60 (1976): 238–250 (text and English translation of the two ship allegories: 245–247); id., "Two Notes": 504;

In this respect, the present edition proves to be no exception, many of the restorations of single or adjoining letters, which today could only be conjectural given the damaged state of the leaf, being also based on Larsson's text. But I have carefully scrutinized the relevant page of the manuscript – which has caused some different readings and new conjectural restorations to be suggested –, and in the textual notes here appended, not only Larsson's readings but also Kölbing's 'interpretations' have been taken into account (with the exception of his insertions of syntactic punctuation and of marks for syllabic division), in order to make clear – as far as possible – what was fully or partly 'readable' in the last decades of the 19th century on our manuscript page, and what was tentatively restored by the editors. It is a fact that neither Kölbing nor Larsson distinguished in their printed texts fully conjectural restorations from uncertain or partial readings of single letters; in the present edition, all the letters and textual sequences now definitely lost in the damaged parts of the leaf appear within square brackets. Whether some of them were possibly (half-)preserved in Kölbing's and Larsson's time is discussed in the textual notes. In the standard Old Icelandic transcription of the same text, which follows in order to offer a more convenient basis for the English translation and the commentary, only proper conjectural restorations are enclosed in square brackets.

Editorial procedures and conventions in the text printed below are as follows. Line division on the manuscript page is marked by a vertical bar | with progressive line number indication; end of page is marked by a double vertical bar ||. Unambiguous abbreviations are expanded in *italics*. Superscript letters are enclosed in ` '. Damaged, missing or only partially preserved letters are enclosed in square brackets []. Illegible or missing letters are reconstructed in the text wherever the readings are unproblematic; readings by nineteenth-century editors are discussed in the notes. Text lost in the damaged sections of the page is indicated by oooo (the number of noughts corresponding roughly to the letters lost in the gap regardless

Wolfgang Lange, *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung der Nordgermanen 1000–1200*, Palaestra. Untersuchungen aus der deutschen und englischen Philologie und Literaturgeschichte 222 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 257–258 (text of the two sermon fragments about the allegorical interpretations of the ship in standard Old Icelandic, with some notes appended).

abbreviations). The manuscript leaf is reproduced in figure 1 with the kind permission of the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum in Reykjavík, which I wish to thank here.

[AM 673 a II 4to, fol. 9^v:] [o] regnboga [e]r[o þ]rir liter. þaz oc brenofteinfloga
 1² oc ælldz [þ]at miner off a [a]t ottafc þrefallda 1³ r[e]iþe gu[þ]f þa er kðmr
 [ý]fer heimin . Vatn 1⁴ kom í noa floþe . Brenofteinfloge . kom ýper 1⁵
 fodomam oc gomorram . Eldr mon ganga ýper 1⁶ allan heim fyrrer domfdag
 . Þeffer ener fomo litir 1⁷ a [oooo]boga . mer[ki]a þrefalda fyrgefning fýn-

1: [o] Only confused traces in fading red ink are preserved of the initial capital, too slight to determine whether it was a J (as an ornamented form of I) or an A; Kölbing apparently could read A, as no hint is given of uncertain reading, but Larsson judged the letter “unleserlich”; Hamre restores in Icelandic as [Í]; Marchand prints as [A]. [e]r[o þ]rir: [e], [o] and [þ] are only partly preserved due to parchment laceration caused by adjoining holes (the damage extends to a couple of lines underneath), but the letters are still readable; Kölbing read plainly ero þrir, Larsson er[o þ]rir. þaz unabbreviated form for ethymological vatns (gen. sing. of vatn) is current in the oldest manuscripts. 2: [þ]at is also Kölbing’s and Larsson’s reading; now only the lower rounded part of þ is preserved. [a]t Kölbing read at, Larsson [a]t; now only faint traces of ink, but no certain stroke, remain of the vowel. 3: r[e]iþe The first e is damaged but still readable. gu[þ]s The upper part of þ is lost. [ý]fer Both Kölbing and Larsson have [y]fer, from either partial reading or conjectural restoration; today no hint of y remains because of the torn parchment. Vatn Small capital with well-preserved inline stroke in red-pink (traces of red-pink are found in all the other small capitals of the page as well). 4: í Kölbing marked no accent. Brenofteinfloge . Kölbing omitted the punctus. ýper The typical Latin abbreviation sign for -er is used consistently in the text. 5: gomorram Abbreviation mark for -m hardly visible for heavily faded and expanded ink. mon is still readable but fading, because of a darkening of the parchment which extends to three more lines underneath. 6: Þeffer Kölbing read þesser, Larsson correctly Þesser (the first letter is certainly a small capital with traces of red ink). fomo Kölbing erroneously read somu, but the final -o is clear. 7: a [oooo]boga . Reconstruct a [regn]boga . Kölbing has [a regn]boga, Larsson [** regn]boga ., but an a is clear at the beginning of the line before the gap of four letters, due to loss of parchment (this is the upper edge of the largest hole in the page, which extends to seven more lines underneath); the reconstruction [regn]boga is certain and graphically confirmed by available writing space on the line and parallel alignment of letters in the opening of l. 1. The punctus after the word is not read by Kölbing. mer[ki]a Both Kölbing and Larsson read merk[i]a; now only a hint of the upper part of i remains, and the right-hand strokes of k are also lost in the same small parchment hole. fýn- There is a clear mark of syllabic division at the end of the line, which is neglected by Kölbing. 8: [. e]in Kölbing read

|⁸ þa [. e]in er ifkírn . ænor er i iþron fýnþa . |⁹ en[þooooo e]r í lifláte fýr
gupf fakar . Vatf litr |¹⁰ [ooooooooor]gefning fýnþa i fskirn · þvi fýlger |¹¹
bliþleik[r m]ikill oc enge torvell[de .] Brenofteinf |¹² loge mer[ke]r [i]þron

[va]tn, Larsson [e]in; upper right part of e is still readable, while it is probable that Kölbing misjudged a dark sign on the parchment between i and n as the ligature tn; a punctus is restored here before the pronoun because of available space in the gap, such a mark of syntactic pause being consistent with the scribe's habit. ifkírn . Kölbing separated the phrase as i skirn and noted no punctus, Larsson read an accented í in skirn, of which some trace is still found today. ænor Kölbing erroneously read ausat, Larsson corrected as ænor; the letter before the final -r was possibly misinterpreted by Kölbing because of a parchment venature, but no reason is found for his misreading of the other letters, which are still clear today. i iþron Kölbing erroneously read i þion; the ink has faded considerably at this point of the line (and of three to five lines underneath), but the letters are still clear enough to be read. 9: en[þooooo e]r Reconstruct en[þriþia e]r. Kölbing could read only en er, Larsson read and reconstructed en[þriþia] er; the first þ is only partially preserved but certain upon close examination of the decaying parchment on the left-hand edge of the large hole (see note to l. 7 above), while only the upper part of e in er remains at the right-hand edge of the same hole; Larsson's conjectural reconstruction of ordinal numeral þ[riþia] takes it as nom. sg. fem. in reference to fyrgefning (cf. also [e]in and ænor), and this is confirmed by the Hauksbók and Rímbegla texts. í lifláte Kölbing noted the accent on á only (í lifláte), Larsson corrected as i lifláte, the accents being still rather clear. fýr Kölbing read fyrer, Larsson corrected as fyr, since no trace of abbreviation is visible upon the r. Vatf litr Kölbing erroneously read Vatslur, Larsson corrected as Vats litr; the letters are still clear, with fading traces of red ink along the small capital. 10: [ooooooooor]gefning Reconstruct [merker fýr]gefning or [iarteiner fýr]gefning. Kölbing read and reconstructed [merkia fy]r gefning; Larsson noted the gap and only restored the nominal compound: [* * * * * fy]rgefning. Only the right-hand stroke of r is preserved, but the restoration of the noun is certain. I would tentatively suggest to reconstruct the preceding gap of six to seven letters as [merker], which is consistent with the Rímbegla version (Kölbing's restoration as pl. form merkia being obviously incorrect), or alternatively as [iarteiner] (truncated form with the Latin -er abbreviation mark consistently used by the scribe), which is also the lesson of Hauksbók. þvi MS þ with standard abbreviation mark for þui, þvi; Larsson erroneously read the letter as a small capital. 11: Kölbing omitted to note line division at this point. bliþleik[r] was read as bliþleik[r] both by Kölbing and by Larsson; apart from restored final -r, the word is still readable, notwithstanding the loss of parchment and the bending down of the writing line. [m]ikill (Kölbing and Larsson: mikill) is clear enough, though the first minim of m is now lost and the first three letters stand on brown-darkened parchment. torvell[de .] Kölbing and Larsson could read the sequence plainly, but the last two letters and the punctus have since faded and are now hardly visible in the re-exposed image. Brenofteinf The first letter is a small capital, but was read as a minuscule by Kölbing. 12: mer[ke]r merker was both Kölbing's and Larsson's reading; the common abbreviation mark for er is still clear on m, but the following two letters are now almost completely lost in the brownish

fýnþa . þvi fylger [b]eif^cleicr |¹³ mikill . El[oooooooo] merker fýrgefning
fýnþa í- |¹⁴ liflate fyr guþf fakar . þvi fylger ogn mi |¹⁵ kil oc biartleicr [mi]
kill . Þessa þrefallda |¹⁶ [o]gn reiþe guþf taknar regnboge . Hann þar |¹⁷ [ei]
ge fén fýrer noa [f]loþ . Síþan er [hann] fýnðr |¹⁸ i min[ooo] heitz þeff er

decaying left edge of the parchment hole. [i]pron Kölbing read þion, Larsson [i]pron; the first letter is lost in the gap, but the restoration is certain and the rest of the word comparatively clear. [b]eif^cleicr Kölbing read beisleicr, Larsson corrected as beiscleicr, noting that a c was added above the line; this superscript letter is still clear, but the initial B is only partly preserved, having rather the form of a reduced small capital than of a standard minuscule. 13: El[oooooooo] Reconstruct El[dz litr]. Kölbing read and reconstructed En [elldr], Larsson E[n eldr]; before the gap, the small capital E with traces of red ink is clear, followed by a vertical stroke which was interpreted by editors as the first minim of an n, but which is the same shorter l to be found in l. 5 Eldr; space available on line (cf. Kölbing's conjectural double -ll- in [elldr]), context (cf. parallelism with Vatf litr, end of l. 9) and comparison with the Hauksbók and Rímbegla texts suggest a reconstruction of the sequence as El[dz litr]. í- Kölbing read i; a clear mark of syllabic division at the end of the line (cf. l. 7 fýn-), meant to note the continuous sequence iliflate, is neglected by Kölbing and curiously printed as — (space + long bar) by Larsson. 14: liflate Kölbing apparently read lif late (since he marked no syllabic division at the end of the printed line), Larsson liflate. fyr guþf Apart from f, upper end of characters is lost in the gap (so y may be inferred by consistency with the scribe's style, but is not certain), but the sequence is plainly readable; Kölbing read fýrer, but whether an abbreviation mark was then visible above the -r is impossible to determine; the phrase runs identical in l. 9, where the short form of the preposition is used. 15: [mi]kill Kölbing read mikill, Larsson m[i]kill; the first two letters are only partially preserved but certain. Þessa Kölbing read þessa, but the first letter is a small capital with traces of red ink. 16: [o]gn Kölbing read . . gn, Larsson [o]gn; now only faint traces of ink remain of the initial letter; because of the thickening of parchment, even the following letters are barely readable. reiþe Kölbing read reiþi, but final -e is clear; letters are slightly crowded, due to parchment wrinkles. Hann Kölbing read (interpreted?) er, Larsson corrected Hann; the writing is clear, abbreviated h being a small capital. 17: [ei]ge Kölbing read eige, Larsson [e]ige; now only an indistinct stroke of the first e and part of the i remain before ge. [f]loþ Both Kölbing and Larsson read floþ, but the first letter is now partly lost in a small hole in the parchment. [hann] was read plainly by Kölbing, [hann] by Larsson; only the right-hand stroke of abbreviated h is preserved. fýnðr (Kölbing: syndr; Larsson: syndr) shows the uncial form of d. 18: i min[ooo] Reconstruct i min[ing]. Parchment is badly preserved and wrinkled, ink being faded in the first four letters and a space of about three characters following with only traces of ink, too indistinct to be read. Kölbing read or reconstructed [sakir], Larsson noted only a long gap *****. The first four letters are still faintly readable, the first i being of larger size; my reconstruction as O.I. i minn[ing], consistent with the Hauksbók and Rímbegla lectio, seems acceptable. g[u]þ Both Kölbing and Larsson read guþ, but most of the u is lost in a little hole. ei- Kölbing did not note syllabic division at the end of the line. 19: ge is still faintly readable on the wrinkled

g[u]þ het noa . at ei- ¹⁹ ge ský[l]ðe oftar flóþ koma þat er heim ²⁰ en e[y]þ
þe fya fem á hanf dogom hafþe ²¹ orþet ||

parchment at the beginning of the line. flý[l]ðe Kölbing read sky[l]de, Larsson skylde; but only l is partly lost in a little parchment hole, and d has the uncial form δ. oftar Kölbing's incorrect reading s[v]o stoR was corrected by Larsson. flóþ Kölbing marked no accent. 20: en is hardly readable (see beginning of l. 19). e[y]þe Kölbing's reading he[r]jaþe has no paleographic grounds; Larsson corrected as e[y]þe, y being partly lost in a little parchment hole. á Kölbing marked no accent. 21: last word is aligned at the right-hand margin of the page and preceded by the snail sign 9. The end of the text is marked by a combination ∴ of three puncti.

[Standard Old Icelandic transcription:] [Á]¹⁸ regnboga eru þrír litir: vatns ok brennusteinsloga ok elds. Þat minnir oss á at óttask þrefalda reiði Guðs, þá er kǫmr yfir heiminn. Vatn kom í Nóaflóði; brennusteinslogi kom yfir Sódómam ok Gómorram; eldr mun ganga yfir allan heim fyrir dómsdag. Þessir enir sǫmu litir á [regn]boga merkja þrefalda fyrgefning synða: ein er í skírn, ǫnnur er í iðrun synða, en þ[riðja] er í lífláti fyrir Guðs sakar. Vatns litr [merkir]¹⁹ fyrgefning synða í skírn; því fylgir blíðleikr mikill ok engi torveldi. Brennusteinslogi merkir iðrun synða; því fylgir beiskleikr mikill. El[dz litr] merkir fyrgefning synða í lífláti fyrir Guðs sakar; því fylgir ógn mikil ok bjartleikr mikill. Þessa þrefalda ógn reiði Guðs táknar regnbogi. Hann var eigi sénn fyrir Nóaflóð. Síðan er hann sýndr í minn[ing] heits þess, er Guð hét Nóa, at eigi skyldi oftarr flóð koma, þat er heiminn eyði svá sem á hans dǫgum hafði orðit.

[English Translation:] In the rainbow there are three colours: of water and of sulphur-flame and of fire. This reminds us to fear the threefold wrath of God, which comes upon the world. Water came in Noah's flood; sulphur-flame came upon Sodom and Gomorrah; fire will go over the whole world before Judgement Day. These same colours in the rainbow signify the threefold forgiveness of

18 The preposition is restored mainly on the basis of the author's use in l. 7 (cf. earlier, in the textual notes), but see also the *lectio* in the *Hauksbók* variant text (cf. *Hauksbók*, 174). The *Rímbeḡla* version has "I", both in AM 730, 4to, p. 81 (cf. *Rýmbeḡla*, 336) and in AM 731, 4to, f. 19^r (cf. *Alfræði Íslenzk* III, 9).

19 Or, alternatively, [jarteinir] (see above, the relevant item in the textual notes [l. 10]).

sins: one is in baptism, the second is in repentance of sins, the third is in losing one's life for the sake of God. The colour of water signifies²⁰ the forgiveness of sins in the baptism; great mildness and no difficulty belong to it. Sulphur-flame signifies the repentance of sins; great bitterness belongs to it. The colour of fire signifies the forgiveness of sins in martyrdom for the sake of God; great terror and great radiance belong to it. This threefold terror (and) wrath of God betokens the rainbow. It was not seen before Noah's flood; since then it is seen in memory of that promise which God made to Noah, that never again would a flood come to lay the world waste like the one which had been in his day.

III

Two variant recensions of this same text, which I have both occasionally referred to, are found in the *Hauksbók* and in the so-called *Rímbeḡla*. Both versions are very near to our text, but sensible differences also occur, together with occasional expansions or omissions, which may be useful to note here. I shall start by taking into account the *Hauksbók* version, which I print below from Eiríkur Jónsson's and Finnur Jónsson's standard edition, followed by my English translation, in order to make the comparative analysis easier. Textual variant forms and additions are underlined for the reader's convenience.

[*Hauksbók, Heimslýsing ok helgifræði*, c. 15: 'Vm regnboga', 174–175]
 A Regn boga ero þrír lítir. vatnz lítir oc ældz lítir oc brenno steins loga lítir. þat minnir oss a at ottast þrefallda reiði guðs þa er kemr oc komet hefir yfir heímenn. Vatn kom i Noa floð. Brennu steins loge kom yfir Sodomam oc Gomorram. ældr man ganga yfir allan heímenn firir doma dag. þessir hínir somo lítir regnboga iij Merkia þrefallda firir gefnúng synda. Ein er i skírn heilagre. onnor er i iðran synda. hín þriðia er liflat þeira er pínðir ero firir guðs sacar. vatnz litr iartegnir firir gefnúng synda i skírn heilagre. þui fylgir bliðleikr mikill en eí toruelde. Brenno steins loge merkir iðran synda. þui fylgir beiskleikr mikill. Eldz litr merkir firir gefnúng synda i liflate

20 Or, alternatively, "symbolizes" (see preceding note).

firir guðs sakar. þui fylgir ogn mikil oc biartleikr mikill. þessa þrefalda ogn oc reiði guðs tacnar regnbogem. hann var eigi *semm* *firir* Noa floð. Siðan er hann syndr i míning vítnis burðar guðlegs satt mals oc friðsemdar þeirar er guð het Noa at vera skildi millim guðs oc mann kynsens meðan regn bogem seist oc nokor miseri siðan at eigi skilldi oftar floð koma þat er heímen oýddi sua sem a hans dogum hafðe orðet.

[*Hauksbók*, from the *Dawn of the world and Holy lore* section, ch. 15: 'About the Rainbow'] In the rainbow there are three colours: the colour of water and the colour of fire and the colour of sulphur-flame. This reminds us to fear the threefold wrath of God, which comes and has come upon the world. Water came in Noah's flood; sulphur-flame came upon Sodom and Gomorrah; fire will go over the whole world before Judgement Day. These same three colours of the rainbow signify the threefold forgiveness of sins: one is in holy baptism, the second is in repentance of sins, the third is the loss of life of those who are tormented for the sake of God. The colour of water symbolizes the forgiveness of sins in holy baptism; great mildness and on the other hand no difficulty belong to it. Sulphur-flame signifies the repentance of sins; great bitterness belongs to it. The colour of fire signifies the forgiveness of sins in martyrdom for the sake of God; great terror and great radiance belong to it. This threefold terror and wrath of God betokens the rainbow. It was not seen before Noah's flood; since then it is seen in memory and as a bearing witness of the divine covenant and of that peacefulness which God promised to Noah there would be between God and mankind when the rainbow is seen and in any time since, that never again would a flood come to lay the world waste like the one which had been in his day.

Differences between the Arnamagnæan fragment and the *Hauksbók* recension point to a simplifying vs. expanding process pertaining our text's tradition, evident in a number of single word or phrase omissions vs. insertions (cf. the repetition of *lítr* in the opening list of rainbow colours [three times]; the adjective *heilagr* as an attribute to *skírn* [twice]; the

redundant numeral *iii* referring to the same colours of the rainbow;²¹ the verbal phrase *ok komet hefir* adjoined to the present form *kemr*, in order to precise the recurrent coming of God's punishment in the history of man; the noun phrases *...vitnisburðar guðligs sáttmáls ok friðsemdar þeirar* in place of a concise *...heits þess*²²), and also in whole clauses (cf. *...líflát þeira er þíndir eru*) or complex sentences, like in the last section of the text (cf. *...at vera skyldi millim guðs ok mannkynsins meðan regnboginn seist ok nokkur misseri síðan*). It is possible that the *Hauksbók* recension represents an expanded and better refined adaptation of an original text substantially similar to our rainbow sermon, but the converse, i.e. the hypothesis that it is our copy which offers a slightly shortened version of a common original instead, must be taken into account here as a point of departure as well. The date (first decade of the fourteenth century) and circumstances of the copying of the 'Book of Haukr' vs. date and context of the '*Physiologus* manuscript' copy may be of little or no relevance here, unless some new indications about the preacher's use of specific exegetical sources result from my investigation, since the *Hauksbók* recension is certainly a copy from an older manuscript.

Various other examples of textual variation are found in the *Hauksbók* version, which are also of some interest, such as the occasional altering of syntactic arrangement (cf. the inversion of fire and sulphur-flame in the opening list of colours, while the proper, traditional order is respected later in the text), or the careful slightly adversative use of conj. *en* in combination with adv. *ei* 'not (ever)' (*...því fylgir bliðleikr mikill en ei torveldi*; cf. *ok eigi* in our text) in order to offer the contrastive point of what is found (great mildness) and what is not (difficulty, troubles) in the baptism and – metaphorically – in the colour of water.

21 The reading of the numeral, written over the line with a downward stroke marking insertion, is not at all certain. See *Hauksbók*, 174, note 3: "taltegnene er ikke ganske regelmæssig skrevne, og de to første streger ligner et *n*, den tredje et *z*; der er dog næppe grund til f. eks. at lese *-boganz*."

22 It may be worth noting here that the sequence from '*vítnis*' to '*oc*' is written in the margin of the page, with a cross as a reference mark both within the text and in the margin (cf. *Hauksbók*, 175, note 1). The scribe must have left out part of a line, which is clear evidence that he was copying from another manuscript.

The rainbow allegory in the *Rímbegla* version reveals a more substantial consistency with our sermon fragment, in that it is basically the same text with very few occasional variant forms and only one evident mistake on the part of the scribe, who first left out the last sentence of the second section (cf. § 26) and then copied it at the very end of the text (cf. § 27).²³ Here are the three relevant sections (§§ 25–27) of part III, chapter VII of *Rymbegla* according to Stephanus Björnson's 1780 edition, followed by my English translation. Textual variant forms and changes of place are underlined for the reader's convenience.

[*Rymbegla*, III. Historiski Partur, VII. Cap. 'Um regnboga', 336] 25. §. Í Regnboga eru þrýr liter, vatns og brennefteinsloga og ellds. Það minner ofs á að ottast þrefallda reide Guds, þá er kemur yfer heimen; Vatn kom í Noa flode, brennefteins logie kom yfer Sodomam og Gomorram, Elldur mun koma yfer allan heim fyrir domsdag. 26. §. Þefser enu fömu liter í regnboga merkia þrefallda fyrergefning fyndanna. Ein er í Skyrn, onnur er í Iðran fynda, þridia er í lyfláte fyrir Guds faker, Vatnslitur merker fyrergefning fynda í Skyrn, því filger blydleiki mikell og eingi Torvellda. Brennefteins logie merker Yðran fynda, því fylger beifkleikur mikell. 27. §. Og þefsa þrefallda reidi Guðs táknar Regnbogie. hann var ei sien fyrir Noa flod, fydan er hann fyndur í minning fyrerheits þefs er Gud hiet Noa að eyfkyllde optar flod koma það er heim kefde, svo fem á hanns dögum hefde vorded, Elldslitur merker fyrergefning fynda í lyfláte, fyrir Guds faker, þar filger Ogn mikel og biartleikur mikell.

[*Rymbegla*, Part III, Ch. 7: 'About the Rainbow'] § 25. In the rainbow there are three colours: of water and of sulphur-flame and of fire. This reminds us to fear the threefold wrath of God, which comes upon the world. Water came in Noah's flood; sulphur-flame came upon Sodom and Gomorrah; fire will come over the whole world before Judgement Day. § 26. These same colours in the rainbow signify the threefold forgiveness of sins: one is in baptism, the second is in repentance of sins, the third is in losing one's life

²³ Such misplacement is found in both AM 730, 4to, pp. 81–82, and AM 731, 4to, f. 19^r. In this last case, the scribal error is clearly marked by a reference cross, inserted in the line by the same hand and then repeated before the last sentence.

for the sake of God. The colour of water signifies the forgiveness of sins in the baptism; great mildness and no difficulty belong to it. Sulphur-flame signifies the repentance of sins; great bitterness belongs to it. § 27. And this threefold wrath of God betokens the rainbow. It was not seen before Noah's flood; since then it is seen in memory of that promise which God made to Noah, that never again would a flood come to put the world under water like the one which had been in his day. The colour of fire signifies the forgiveness of sins in martyrdom for the sake of God; great terror and great radiance belong there.

It is evident that, apart from some differences pertaining mainly to linguistic features and chronology (AM 730, 4to, which the *Rymbegla* main text is based on, dates from 1700–1725), this redaction of the rainbow allegory is closer to our text than the *Hauksbók's* version. Slightly variant forms may be considered, for instance morphological alternatives like *blyðleiki* (OI *bliðleiki*; cf. *bliðleikr*) and *torvellða* (OI *torvelda*; cf. *torveldi*), or the occasional use of the enclitic article in *syndanna*. The opening phrase *i regnboga* – repeated also within the text (beginning of § 26: *i regnboga*) – has already been discussed earlier as a possible alternative to *á regnboga* in the defective opening passage of our Arnamagnæan sermon fragment.²⁴ In a similar way, the second sentence of § 26 *Vatnslitur merker fyrergefning synda í Skyrn...* presents the verb form OI *merkir*, which we have considered earlier as an alternative conjectural restoration of the long gap at the beginning of l. 10 of the manuscript page.²⁵

More interesting from the point of view of textual comparison are some differences in the choice of words, for example the repetition of the verb *koma* in the triple parallel construction of asyndetic paratactical clauses in § 25 (*Vatn kom í Noa flode, brennesteins logie kom yfer Sodomam og Gomorram, Elldur mun koma yfer allan heim fyrer domsdag*), where the last clause also has *mun koma*, while the Physiologus manuscript and the *Hauksbók* lesson is *mun* (respectively *man*) *ganga*. The compound *fyrerheits* (OI *fyrirheits* [sg. gen.], for the simple noun *heits* [sg. gen.] attested both in our text and in *Hauksbók*), seems to point to a more specifically Christian

²⁴ Cf. above, the relevant item in the textual notes, and note 18.

²⁵ Cf. above, the relevant item in the textual notes.

sense of ‘sacred promise’, as a great number of occurrences in Old Icelandic religious literature (for instance in *Stjórn*, in various *heilagramanna sögur* and in the homiletic tradition) show.²⁶ The choice of a verb like OI *kefja* ‘to dip, to drown, to put under water’ (... *ad ey skyllde optar flod koma þad er heim kefde...*) in place of OI *eyða* ‘to lay waste, to destroy’ (cf. our text and *Hauksbók*) is also worth noting, in that it seems better qualified to describe the natural effects of the Flood than the effective but generic action of devastation evoked by the second verb, which is of course much more frequently employed in Old Icelandic prose;²⁷ but it is of some relevance here to point out that the biblical verses in Genesis, which are the ultimate source of our homily (*Gen* 9, 8–17),²⁸ express the consequence of the Flood for mankind and the world in God’s words through verbs meaning ‘destroy, lay waste’ (cf. lat. *interficio, dissipo, deleo*), so that the Old Icelandic verb *eyða* in our text and the *Hauksbók* recension (as well as, for instance, in the vernacular version of Genesis in *Stjórn*)²⁹ proves to be much more faithful to its textual authority than the verb *kefja*, and this last verb may be taken in turn as an attempt at a slightly original ‘re-telling’ of the story of Noah’s flood. Again, the omission of the noun *ógn* in conjunction with *reiði* in the two other versions (cf. *ogn oc reiði* in *Hauksbók*, *ogn reiði* in our text) is to be pointed out, the clause *Og þessa þrefallda reidi Guðs táknar Regnbogie* echoing plainly the very start of the allegorical interpretation of the colours of the rainbow in § 25 (*Þad minner oss á ad ottast þrefallda reide Guds...*). The most striking feature of the *Rymbegla* version – noted by Kålund, too³⁰ – lies obviously in the misplacing of a whole sentence (*Elldslitur merker fyrergefning synda í lyfláte, fyrer Guds saker, þar filger Ogn mikel og biartleikur mikell*) at the end of the text, it having been left out from its proper place in § 26. Here again, minor textual variation can be found in the use of the adverb *þar* ‘there’ instead of the dative of the demonstrative pronoun *því*,

26 Cf. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, published by Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission, København Universitet, s.v. *fyrir-heit*, now available on-line at the web page <http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/index.html> (access: February 2011). Occurrences of OI *heit* are more varied in sense and context; cf. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, s.v.

27 Cf. *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, s.v.

28 See below, the beginning of § IV, and especially note 32.

29 Cf. *Stjorn. Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra verdens skabelse til det babiloniske fangenskab*, ed. by C.R. Unger (Christiania: Feilberg & Landmarks Forlag, 1862), 62.

30 See the following note.

regularly employed in parallel sentences within this section of the sermon, with no alternative in the case of both our and *Hauksbók's* text.³¹

Whether these textual differences among the various testimonies of the Old Icelandic allegorical sermon on the colours of the rainbow may be relevant to our investigation of its sources and cultural background is something I intend to verify later on; only a few related hints have been accommodated till now.

IV

The Old Icelandic preacher's allegorical background for his treatment of the rainbow lies fundamentally in exegetical literature related to the Bible. If the ultimate source of any symbolic Christian interpretation of the rainbow is the Old Testament (namely *Gen.* 9, 13–17; *Ez.* 1, 28; *Eccli.* 43, 12 and 50, 8), with the addition of the vision of the divine throne in *Apoc.* 4, 3, our text is specifically based on that passage in the Genesis where the *arcus* appears in the sky after the Flood as a sign of the new covenant between God and mankind.³²

31 Kålund's quotation from the *Rímbegla* collection of texts in AM 731, 4to, only gives the title 'Um regnboga' plus the first and last sentences (*Í regnboga eru þrír litir — sem á hans dögum hafði orðit*), followed by a brief note reminding that the text answers to *Hauksbók's* standard edition pp. 174, l. 30–175, l. 11 (the passage discussed earlier), and that in the *Rýmbegla* edition "er síðste sætning omstillt" (*Alfræði islenzk* III, 9).

32 Cf. *Gen* 9, 8–17, but especially 13–16: *...arcum meum ponam in nubibus, et erit signum foederis inter me et inter terram. Cumque obduxero nubibus caelum, apparebit arcus meus in nubibus, et recordabor foederis mei vobiscum et cum omni anima vivente, quae carnem vegetat; et non erunt ultra aquae diluvii ad delendum universam carnem. Eritque arcus in nubibus, et videbo illum et recordabor foederis sempiterni, quod pactum est inter Deum et omnem animam viventem universae carnis, quae est super terram.* "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings. As the bow appears in the clouds, I will see it and recall the everlasting covenant that I have established between God and all living beings — all mortal creatures that are on earth." Cf. *Nova Vulgata. Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio*, on-line text at the web page http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_vt_genesis_lt.html#9 (access: February 2011); English translation from *The New American Bible*, on-line text at the web page http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENGo839/___PB.HTM (access: February 2011).

Most Christian references to the rainbow in the Old Icelandic literary corpus other than our allegorical sermon fragment are also more or less directly connected to these verses in Genesis. A case in point is *Veraldar saga*, where the rainbow episode is mentioned in a very abridged version of Noah's story (*þa var síðan senn regnbogi sva sem friðar mark a medal guds ok mana en eigi fyrir flóðit* "After that the rainbow was seen, as a sign of the covenant between God and man, that there would never be a flood again")³³; and where the allegorical explanation of the passage, preserved in one of the B class manuscripts³⁴, reads:

Flodit merker skirnar vatnit. er svo þvær alla kristnina sem flodit þvo orkina. Kyqvendi þav ok mannkyn þat er forst j flodinv. merker synder þær er af oss deya j skirninne. Regnbogin er bædi hefer a sier sævar lit og elldz. min[ner o]ss [a ogn] þa tvenna er onnvr lystist j flodinv. Enn onnvr mvn lysazt j elldi þeim er ganga mvn yfir þenn[a heim] aa doms deigi.

"The flood signifies the water of baptism, which so washes all Christians as the flood washed the ark. The beasts and mankind that perished in the flood signify our sins which die in the baptism. The rainbow, which has in itself both the colour of the sea and [the colour] of fire, reminds us of the terror of the second of the two different things that are shown in the flood. And this second one will be shown in the fire which will go upon the world at doomsday."³⁵

The wider penitential context is particularly interesting here, and we are going to discuss this trend of allegorical interpretation later in this section and in sections V and VI, especially with reference to the easy narrative and symbolic connections between Noah as a figure of Christ and the sea voyage – of the ark during the Flood, but of any Christian vessel in the tempest of this life as well – as an allegory of salvation through baptism and repentance. This is relevant for our argument at first sight, since the sermon fragment on the rainbow immediately follows two fully developed

33 Cf. *Veraldar saga*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 61 (København: Luno, 1944), 13 (A text, from manuscript AM 625, 4to, c. 1300–1325).

34 Namely the so-called B³, i.e. Holm perg 9, 4to, c. 1600–1650.

35 Cf. *Veraldar saga*, 80. The English translation is mine.

ship allegories in the Physiologus manuscript, our Old Icelandic preacher's matter being obviously organized along the Noah/Christ – ark/Church exegetic tradition.

Occurrences of the rainbow in the Old Icelandic *Elucidarius* (*EN fra aðams ęve til noa flops com eige regn aiorþ. oc vas eige regnboge sęn* “And from the time of Adam till Noah's flood no rain came upon the earth, and no rainbow was seen”)³⁶ and in *Blásiuss saga* (*...þu guþ, er [...] gefr regn á iorþ oc synir regnboga þinn i scyiom til sattarmarcs viþ oss...* “...you God, who [...] give rain on the earth and show your rainbow in the clouds as a mark of peace with us...”)³⁷ both refer to the Genesis tradition, too. The same tradition is also suggested within a genealogical section on the world's ages (*Heimsaldrar*) in AM 194, 8vo, where all that is said about the Flood is precisely that most people perished in it (*Þau syskin foruzt öll i Noa flodi* “These brothers and sisters all died in Noah's flood”) and that after the Flood God sent the rainbow (*Eptir flodit gaf gud regnboga a himin* “After the flood God gave the rainbow in the sky”).³⁸ A short reference to the rainbow is also found within the biblical account of Noah's flood preserved in AM 764, 4to, ff. 2^v–3^r (*þa mælti gud uid noa boga minn | mun ek fetia ifkyum sua fem mark fætmaľ midil min ok þin ok iardar þad kallaz regnbogi* “Then God said to Noah: ‘I will set my bow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between me and you and the earth; that shall be called rainbow’”).³⁹

The exegetical comment on *Gen 9* in *Stjórn* deserves special attention here. The passage, derived from the ‘scolastica hystoria’ (i.e. Petrus Comestor's [ca. 1100–1179] *Historia scholastica*), is worth quoting, because the meaning of the rainbow and its colours is debated in some detail:

36 Cf. *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*, ed. by Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1989), 54 (with normalization of long s [ſ]). The Latin text reads: *Volo etiam te scire quod a tempore Adae usque ad Noe non pluit et iris non fuit...* (ibid.).

37 Cf. *Heilagra manna sögur. Fortællinger og legender om hellige mænd og kvinder I*, ed. by C. R. Unger (Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877), 268.

38 Cf. *Cod. mbr. AM. 194, 8vo. Alfræði íslensk I*, 47.

39 Cf. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, *Universal History in Fourteenth Century Iceland. Studies in AM 764 4to* (London: University College, 2000), 247 (f. 3^r, ll. 1–2). On f. 2^v of the same manuscript (cf. also GkS 2087, 4to, f. 7^v), a detailed account of Noah's building of the ark is also given, with a ‘visual’ arrangement of items in the shape of a vessel; but no allegorical point of any kind is made in the text, so the passage will not be taken into account here when dealing with Noah's ark as a figure of Christ (see especially section V).

Hefir þetta sáttmaals mark milli guds ok mannkynsins. sem uer kallum regnboga. i séér teikn ok mark tueggia hinna mestu guds doma her i uerolldinni. annars fyrir uatnit þess sem umlidinn er. at enginn þurfi þann hedan af ottaz. þess annars sem um elldinn kemr. þa er uerolldin skal brigdaz. Ok þo at hann syniz hafa .vi. litu i ser. þa hefir hann allt at eins .ii. skyrakta af þeim aullum. þat er dökkgrænn litr næst hinum yzta kompasinum. til marks um þann dominn er uatnit geck yfir uerolldina. ok fyrir þann skylld er hann utarr meirr skipadr at hann er umlidinn. ok raudan er innarr meirr stendr. til marks um þann dominn sem at sidurstunni kemr um elldinn aa iardriki. Finnz ok sua i heilagra manna bokum ok fra-saugnum. at hann man .xl. daga fyrir domsdagh alldregi seenn verða. hvat er aungum mun sidr synir eptir loptzins natturu þurkanina þa þegar til hafa tekit.

“Here is that sign of the covenant between God and mankind, which we call rainbow. In that you see the token and sign of both God’s supreme judgements here in the world, the first by water, which is past and nobody has ever to fear it again; the second that comes through fire, when the world shall burn. And though it is shown that it has six colours in itself, it appears that only two are the most evident of them all. The dark green colour is the nearest to the external side of the arch, as a sign of the judgement when the water went upon the world, and for this sake it is arranged more at the outer side, because it is past. And red is placed more at the inner side, as a sign of the judgement which is going to come at last through fire on the kingdom of earth. It is also found in books and narratives, that it will never be seen during the forty years preceding Doomsday; and this will not be a common sight for anyone after the natural drying of air that will take to next.”⁴⁰

Now, Peter Comestor’s Latin text is much more concise and does not mention, for instance, the six colour tradition at all;⁴¹ so, this elaboration

⁴⁰ Cf. *Stjorn. Gammelnorsk Bibelfhistorie*, 62. Here and below, any English translation from Old Icelandic, Latin and Old German texts is my own.

⁴¹ Cf. Petrus Comestor, *Historia scholastica. Liber Genesis*, in PL 198, col. 1086 D: *Et est signum duorum iudiciorum. Iudicii per aquam praeteriti, ne timeatur, et futuri per ignem, ut expectetur.*

of the topic of the rainbow in *Stjórn* is a good starting point for our investigation on the possible sources or models for the Old Icelandic sermon fragment. On the other hand, what Peter Comestor writes about the only two colours – ‘aquaues’ or *coeruleus* and ‘igneus’ or *rubeus* – of the rainbow represents one side of the standard medieval interpretation, which we have also found, for instance, in the late allegorical explanatory text added to *Veraldar saga* (cf. *sævar lit og elldz* “the colour of the sea and [the colour] of fire”).⁴²

In fact, the Patristic tradition on the rainbow can be best summarized by the two exegetical trends repeated and elaborated by Isidore of Seville (560–636) in his *De rerum natura*, the first pertaining to a four-colour symbolism, the other to a two-colour symbolism.

Also in his *Etymologiae*, which can be considered a sort of basic school-book throughout the Middle Ages, Isidore often comments on the possible significance of colours in general, and his colour-imagery is mostly referred to as tetrads, elaborating on the older, classical and traditional views rooted in the four seasons of the year and in the four elements of the natural world.⁴³ For example, these colour-tetrads based on seasonal (white for winter and red for summer, later integrated by green for spring and blue for autumn)⁴⁴ and elemental (red for fire, white for air, green for earth, blue for sea) divisions are the basis for Isidore’s discussion of the colours of horses in the section about war and games (Book 18 ‘De bello et ludis’);⁴⁵ it is interesting to notice that in this case he also adds two further colours, each with a meaning related to a natural element and a god alike,

Inde est quod duos habet colores, coeruleum, qui est aqueus, et est exterior, quia praeteriit, et rubeum, qui est igneus, qui est interior; quia futurus est ignis. Et tradunt sancti, quod quadraginta annis ante iudicium non videbitur arcus, quod etiam naturaliter ostendet desiccationem aeris jam incoeptam. “And it is the sign of two judgements. Of the past judgement by water, not to be feared, and of the future judgement by fire, to be expected. This is why it has two colours, blue, which is of water, and is external, because it is past; and red, which is of fire, that is internal; because fire is to come. And holy men say that for forty years before judgement the rainbow will not be seen, and this also from the point of view of nature demonstrates that the air will be starting drying up at that moment.”

⁴² Cf. above, note 35 and its context.

⁴³ For what follows here, I am in debt to the careful analysis by Peter Dronke, “Tradition and Innovation in Medieval Western Colour-Imagery”: 63–72, but especially 68–72.

⁴⁴ Cf. Tertullian, *Spect.* 9, in *PL* 1, cols. 715–716.

⁴⁵ Cf. Isidore, *Etym.* XVIII, LXI, 1, in *PL* 82, col. 657.

that is, yellow (like red) for fire and the Sun-god, and purple for Iris, “quem arcum dicimus, quod Iris plurimos colores habeat” (“which we call rainbow, because Iris has many colours”).⁴⁶ In the works of the Fathers, the relevant colours may vary as to their elemental connection – for instance in one of the epistles by Jerome (ca. 350–420), a symbolic description of a colour-tetrad is given, which points to a different explanation: treating on the colours of *specialia Pontificis vestimenta*, Jerome maintains that white belongs to earth (like the flax that linen is made of), purple to water (due to the sea-snails it comes from), hyacinth to air (because of the likeness of colour), and scarlet to fire.⁴⁷ But, with all possible various arrangements and symbolic applications, this four-colour pattern with elemental significance remained the most widespread model for many Christian writers of the Latin Middle Ages, as we will also see relating to Bede’s (672/3–735) and Honorius’ (ca. 1080–ca. 1137) treatment of the rainbow.

When we come expressly to the rainbow and medieval allegorical interpretations of its colours, we find that the prevalent view of the *pluvialis arcus* regards it being multi-coloured, and that, if its colours are mentioned, quality and number vary greatly from one to four. The quoted passage of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, where the rainbow is said to be of many colours but is also associated especially with purple, is a good, clear-cut example of this.

With reference to that double exegetical trend I have mentioned earlier, it is in discussing the rainbow in his *De rerum natura* that Isidore gives two different explanations of its colours, one rooted in the elemental tetrad of archaic origin we have already seen at work in his writings; the other referring to a simpler binary opposition of meanings based on allegorical interpretation of the Bible. This is what Isidore writes in chapter 31 ‘De arcu’:

Quadricolor enim est, et ex omnibus elementis in se rapit species. De coelo enim trahit igneum colorem, de aquis purpureum, de aere album, de terris colligit nigrum. [...] Alii ex duobus coloribus ejus, id est aquoso et igneo, duo judicia significari dixerunt. Unum per quod

⁴⁶ Ibid., § 2.

⁴⁷ Cf. Jerome, *Epistola* 64 *Ad Fabiolam*. *De veste sacerdotali*, 18, in *PL* 22, cols. 617–618 (*Quatuor colores et quatuor elementa referuntur, ex quibus universa subsistunt. Byssus terrae deputatur, quia ex terra gignitur. Purpura mari, quia ex ejus cochleolis tingitur. Hyacinthus aeri, propter coloris similitudinem. Coccus igni et aetheri...*; col. 617).

dudum impii perierunt in diluvio; alterum, per quod postmodum peccatores cremandi sunt in inferno.⁴⁸

“(The rainbow) is four-coloured, and takes its appearance from all the elements. It derives its fiery-red colour from the sky, purple from the waters, white from air, and draws its dark colour from earth. [...] Others have spoken of its two colours, that is a watery and a fiery, which betoken two judgements. The one through which long ago wicked people perished in the flood; the other, through which afterwards sinners will have to be burnt in hell.”

This last bichromatic interpretation of the rainbow, elaborating on the two divine judgements narrated in the Bible (Noah’s flood and Doomsday), represents an exegetical tradition we have already met in Peter Comestor’s *Historia scholastica* and, on the Icelandic side, in *Veraldar saga* and, obviously, in *Stjórn*. This was a very widespread tradition, as proved by a great number of influential commentaries and expositions on the matter of the Genesis, for instance by Bede’s *Hexaameron*. Here, in Book 2, it is told that the rainbow appears in the sky as a sign reminiscent of the divine covenant with us that never again will the earth be destroyed by a flood, but also as a clear indication before our eyes of the judgement to come through fire⁴⁹; then Bede goes on, first describing the two colours relating to the two judgements, then introducing a naturalistic note in referring to the atmospheric conditions generating the rainbow:

Neque enim frustra caeruleo simul et rubicundo colore resplendet, nisi quia caeruleo colore aquarum quae praeterierunt, rubicundo flammarum quae venturae sunt nobis testimonium perhibet. Apte autem arcus coelestis, quem Irim vocant, in signum divinae propitiationis ponitur, arcus quippe ille resplendere solet in nubibus, et radiis solis quo roscida illustratur obscuritas...⁵⁰

48 Cf. Isidore, *De natura rerum*, XXXI, 2, in *PL* 83, col. 1004.

49 Cf. Bede, *Hexaameron*, II, in *PL* 91, col. 110 B: *Arcus in coelo usque hodie quoties videtur, signum nobis divini foederis quod non sit ultra terra diluvio perdenda in memoriam reducit; sed et futuri iudicii quod per ignem est mundo futurum, si bene consideretur, signum nobis ante oculos praetendit.*

50 *Ibid.*, col. 110 BC.

“And it does not shine in vain of blue and red colours together, because it gives us evidence of the blue colour of the waters which went before, of the red colour of the flames which will come. The rainbow, they call Iris, is properly placed as a sign of the divine favour, and usually it shines in the clouds, because the wet darkness is illuminated by the sun rays...”

Also in book 9, ch. 20 ‘De arcu coelesti’ of Rabanus Maurus’ (780–856) *De universo*, a didactic compilation mostly derived from Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, we read about the rainbow in the same two-colour pattern terms as we have now been discussing, corresponding incidentally almost word for word to no. 135 of Alcuin’s (ca. 730–804) *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesim* (*Inter*. ‘Cur signum illud diversi coloris datur hominibus? – *Resp*. Propter securitatem et timorem: unde et in arcu idem color aquae et ignis [simul] ostenditur, quia ex parte est caeruleus et ex parte rubicundus. Ergo utriusque iudicii testis est...’)⁵¹, and also repeated verbatim by Rabanus elsewhere:⁵²

Nam quod in eodem arcu color aquae et ignis simul ostenditur, quia ex parte caeruleus est et ex parte rubicundus, apparet, quod utriusque iudicii testis sit: unius videlicet faciendi, et alterius facti, id est, quia mundus iudicii igne cremabitur, non aqua diluvii ultra delebitur. Iris, id est, arcus, duorum iudiciorum Dei figuram habere dicitur: hoc est, primi, quod per diluvium; secundi, quod per ignem...⁵³

“As a matter of fact, in this rainbow the colours of water and of fire are shown together, since it appears blue at one side and red at the other, because it is a witness of both judgements: one certainly to come, and the other past, that is, because the world will be burnt by the fire of judgement, and will not be destroyed by the water of the flood any longer. Iris, that is the rainbow, is said to be the symbol of God’s two judgements: the first, the one through flood; the second, the one through fire...”

51 Cf. PL 100, cols. 531 D–532 A.

52 Cf. Rabanus Maurus, *Comment. in Genesim*, II, 9, in PL 107, col. 524 D: *Unde et in arcu eodem, color aquae et ignis simul ostenditur, quia ex parte est caeruleus, et ex parte rubicundus etc.*

53 Cf. Rabanus Maurus, *De universo*, IX, 20, in PL 111, col. 278 B.

Again, the quoted passage is preceded by an interesting introduction about the causes of the natural phenomenon,⁵⁴ which proves that medieval men had derived from the Ancients the right connections among clouds, water droplets, and reflection and refraction of light rays. It can be easily suggested that the rainbow has attracted so many writers since Aristotle's (384–322 B.C.) influential theories about atmospheric physics gathered in his *Meteorologica*⁵⁵ (I am going to return later to Aristotle's triad of primary colours as illustrated by the rainbow); so it is not surprising that, among the most relevant pre-scientific achievements of the Middle Ages, we can count some treatises on the rainbow (by Robert Grosseteste [ca. 1168–1253] and by Theodoric of Freiberg [ca. 1250–after 1310], for example), which have caused great scholarly interest.⁵⁶ But, even if a vast critical literature exists on the subject of the rainbow as a natural phenomenon in ancient and medieval times, which may be stimulating, it proves to be of no or very slight relevance for our Christian allegorical investigation, and I can easily leave it out here.⁵⁷

54 Ibid., col. 278 A.

55 See in particular A. Sayili, "The Aristotelian Explanation of the Rainbow," *Isis* 30 (1939): 65–83.

56 For an assessment of the true achievement of Theodoric of Freiberg's treaty *De iride*, see especially Carl B. Boyer, "The Theory of the Rainbow: Medieval Triumph and Failure," *Isis* 49 (1958): 378–390. By the same author, see also the more comprehensive historical excursus on the explanations of the rainbow in *The Rainbow: From Myth to Mathematics* (New York and London: Sagamore, 1959; repr. Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), while for a general, extensive account of specifically medieval work on the rainbow, cf. A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science, 1100–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

57 It may be of some relevance to bring up here what Rudolf Simek (*Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages: The Physical World before Columbus* [Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1996], 111) writes about how medieval authors made use of their knowledge about the rainbow: "Despite the dominance of the allegory, the rainbow example shows that in this case both meteorological knowledge about the storage of water in the clouds in the form of smallest drops, as well as optical awareness (the refraction of light through water drops) were available, even if little usage was made of this knowledge". Any physical explanation, for instance about the colours of the spectrum, "hardly played little more than an allegorical role" (*ibid.*); for example the kind of interpretation of colour-imagery we are dealing with "corresponds to the treatment of the animals in the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries where the physical aspect was dealt with only briefly (mostly limited to the appearance and eating habits). It also reflects the authors' primary interest which was in the symbolism" (*ibid.*). Given our Old Icelandic fragment's manuscript context, this parallel between the rainbow colour-imagery and the animal symbolism in the *Physiologus* tradition is particularly interesting, of course.

A further example, from Remigius of Auxerre's (ca. 841–ca. 908) *Commentarius in Genesim*, shows very well what use medieval Christian authors actually made of their knowledge of the physical world. Remigius' rainbow is again of the two-colour allegorical type:

*Arcus duos habet colores, ex parte caeruleum et ex parte igneum; per hoc designantur duo diluvia: unum aquae, quod jam praeteriit, aliud ignis, quod in fine saeculi venturum creditur. Unde caeruleus color extrinsecus cernitur, igneus vero intrinsecus. Mystice arcus, qui fit sole nube illustrata, significat eum a diluvio, id est, ab aeterna damnatione posse salvari qui verum solem Christum nube conspexerit, hoc est, qui ejus passionem et resurrectionem per prophetas praedictam crediderit.*⁵⁸

"The rainbow has two colours, blue on one side and fiery on the other; by this, two floods are meant: one of water, which is already past; the other of fire, which is believed to come at the end of the world: for this reason, the blue colour is placed externally, while the fiery-red internally. In a mystic sense, the rainbow, which is formed by a cloud enlightened by the sun, signifies that men, who will have seen the true sun Christ in the cloud, that is, who will have believed in His passion and resurrection as foretold by prophets, can be saved from the flood, i.e., from eternal damnation."

The same two-colour allegory of the rainbow – with no mystic interpretation, though – is also found in the so-called *Glossa ordinaria*, which was extensively appreciated as a school text in the Middle Ages;⁵⁹ as well as in Bruno of Segni's (between 1045 and 1049–1123) *Expositio in Genesim*, where first the rainbow's consolatory function for men is underlined,⁶⁰ and then it is stated that "because the world first was judged by water, and

58 Cf. Remigius Antissiodorensis, *Commentarius in Genesim*, 9, in *PL* 131, col. 78 BC.

59 Cf. *PL* 113, col. 111 D: *Arcus duos habet colores, caeruleum et igneum, qui duo iudicia exprimunt: unum aquae quod praeteriit; aliud ignis, quod venturum creditur in fine saeculi: unde caeruleus color extrinsecus, igneus vero intrinsecus.* "The rainbow has two colours, blue and fiery-red, which signify two judgements: one of water, which is past; the other of fire, which is believed to come at the end of the world: for this reason, the blue colour is external, while the fiery-red internal".

60 Cf. Bruno Astensis, *Expositio in Genesim*, IX, in *PL* 164, cols. 184 D–185 A.

then is to be judged again by fire, two main colours appear in the rainbow, that is green (*viridis*) and red (*rubeus*); and green signifies water, while red fire.”⁶¹

Now, if both the two-coloured and the four-coloured rainbows enjoyed a great fortune in the Middle Ages – regularly opposing fiery-red to blue (or occasionally green) the first, more varied as related to chromatic solutions the second –, Isidore’s tetrad model based on the natural elements, in particular, formed the core of the rainbow colour-imagery in some of the most influential Latin treatises, like Bede’s *De natura rerum*, and Honorius Augustodunensis’ *Imago mundi*.

Bede’s exposition in chapter 31 (‘De arcu coeli’) of *De natura rerum* starts as a natural description, focusing on the reflection and refraction of the sun’s rays through hollow clouds back towards the sun, and then goes on to the elemental tetrad according to the Isidorian model, but introducing a different colour for air (*hyacinthinum*, i.e., hyacinth or amethyst-blue), where Isidore had white (*album*), as well as for the earth (*gramineus*, i.e. grassy colour), where Isidore had dark or black (*niger*):⁶²

Arcus in aere quadricolor, ex sole adverso nubibusque formatur, dum radius solis immissus cavae nubi, repulsa acie in solem refringitur, instar cerae imaginem annuli reddentis: qui de coelo igneum, de aquis purpureum, de aere hyacinthinum, de terra gramineum trahit colorem...⁶³

“The four-coloured rainbow is formed in the air by the sun against the clouds, when the sun’s ray gets into a hollow cloud and, driven back towards the sun, is broken and refracts, just like the wax gives back the image of the seal ring: it [i.e., the rainbow] takes the fiery-red colour from the sky, the purple from the waters [i.e., from the sea], the hyacinth-blue [i.e., the colour of amethyst] from the air, the grassy colour from the earth...”

61 Ibid., col. 185 A: ... quia prius per aquam iudicatus est mundus, iterum autem per ignem est iudicandus; ideo duo principales colores in arcu apparent, viridis scilicet, et rubeus; et viridis quidem aquam, rubeus vero ignem praetendit.

62 Cf. above, the opening of the passage quoted as context of note 48.

63 Cf. Bede, *De natura rerum*, 31, in PL 90, col. 252 A.

The same description, the only difference being the simile employed to make the sense of the natural explication clearer, occurs in Honorius, *De imagine mundi*, Book I, chapter 58 'De iride. Iris quomodo fiat':

Arcus in aere quadricolor ex sole et nubibus formatur dum radius solis cavae nubi immissus repulsa acie in solem refringitur. Sicut dum sol in vas aqua plenum fulget, splendor in tecto redditur. De coelo igneum, de aqua purpureum, de aere hyacinthinum, de terra colorem gramineum trahit.⁶⁴

"The four-coloured rainbow is formed in the air by the sun and the clouds, when the sun's ray gets into a hollow cloud and, driven back towards the sun, is broken and refracts. Just in the same way, as long as the sun shines in a vase full of water, the brightness is sent back onto the ceiling. From the sky it takes the fiery-red colour, from water the purple, from air the hyacinth-blue, from the earth the grassy colour."

The many examples selected show how the allegorical interpretation of the colours of the rainbow was part of a common stock of images, passing on from one author to the other. When we come to the Old Icelandic sermon fragment, though, we see another pattern at work, based on a chromatic triad.

The tradition of the three-coloured rainbow is old indeed: this had been described by Aristotle in his *Meteorologica* (*Meteor.* III, 2–4), where the principal colours are said to be red, green, and purple (or blue),⁶⁵ even if it is to be maintained that Aristotle's account "was forgotten in the West until the twelfth century, and even then it was not invested with hidden meanings."⁶⁶ This trichromatic view, however, which had promoters among the Greeks even before Aristotle, may be rooted in the very old belief – pre-Christian, of course – that three was a sacred number.⁶⁷ The description of the rainbow in Snorri's (1178/9–1241) *Edda* agrees with this view: here, the chromatic information is limited to the fiery-red

64 Cf. Honorius Augustodunensis, *De imagine mundi*, I, 58, in PL 172, col. 137 AB.

65 Cf. Wolf, "The Colors of the Rainbow": 55.

66 Cf. Dronke, "Tradition and Innovation": 72.

67 Cf. Boyer, *The Rainbow*, 48.

colour, that is red as the visual effect of real burning flames,⁶⁸ with two other colours only implied.⁶⁹ As I said, in my investigation I am leaving out any analysis of the Bifrǫst/Bilrǫst rainbow/bridge as it is found in Old Norse mythological sources; but it is well known that Snorri's account in *Gylfaginning*⁷⁰ presents the rainbow exactly as it is thought of in the Judaic-Christian tradition, that is, as a physical projection of a link between two different worlds, an ideal 'bridge', a way joining heaven to earth (*leið til himins af jǫrðu*, in Snorri's words)⁷¹ as a sign of the divine attention and/or benevolence towards men; a token which will no more be seen, as the bridge will collapse, at the end of time, when Doomsday comes and, in pagan terms, Muspell's sons attack.⁷² It is possible that this cultural (pagan vs. Christian) connection works two ways, of course; but I would tentatively suggest that it may be Snorri's Christian background that leads him in his narrative about Bifrǫst; which is, I must admit, quite an original point of view of the matter.

In the works of the Fathers, there was another possible allegorical model for the description of the rainbow, based on a triad of colours. Bede himself, apart from the biblical binary model, and also apart from the elemental tetrad he combined with far more realistic and plausible colours than his source Isidore, knew about this triadic tradition as well, since he inserted it as a possible alternative interpretation of the rainbow while commenting again on Genesis in his *In Pentateuchum commentarii*. The passage is very interesting for the present inquiry, indeed, because of its focus on the doctrine of baptism and repentance. After telling about God's giving the two-coloured rainbow as a reassuring sign to men that never

68 Cf. *Gylf.* 15: *Þat er þú sér rautt í boganum er eldr brennandi* "The red you see in the rainbow is burning fire." Cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*. Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 18, l. 8; for the English translation see Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, translated from the Icelandic and introduced by Anthony Faulkes (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1987), 18.

69 Cf. *Gylf.* 13: *Hon [i.e. brú] er með þrim litum...* "It [i.e., the bridge] has three colours..." (see Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*. Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, 15, ll. 7–8). According to Kirsten Wolf, the two unidentified colours in the *Edda* are probably green and blue (cf. "The Colors of the Rainbow": 57–58).

70 A good summary of Snorri's account of the rainbow bridge (*Gylf.* 13 and 15) can be found in Wolf, "The Colors of the Rainbow": 51–52.

71 Cf. *Gylf.* 13 (see Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*. Prologue and *Gylfaginning*, 15, l. 4).

72 Cf. *Gylf.* 13 (see *ibid.*, ll. 9–11).

again would a flood come to destroy the world, Bede goes on linking the *aqueus* and the *igneus* colours to the baptism rite, where water and the Holy Ghost's fire represent the means to salvation for Christians:

Arcus autem duos colores habet, id est aquae et ignis, quae isto significantur. Arcus vero ante diluvium non fuit, sed post diluvium Noe filiisque illius in signum securitatis a diluvio a Domino datur; sic baptismum, signum securitatis est Ecclesiae Christi a vindicta. Etenim homines in baptismum per aquam et ignem Spiritus sancti salvantur.⁷³

"The rainbow has two colours, that is of water and of fire, which signify this. There was no rainbow, indeed, before the flood, but after the flood it is given by the Lord to Noah and to his sons as a sign of protection from the flood; in the same way, baptism is a sign of the protection of the Church of Christ from punishment. As a matter of fact, in the baptism men are saved through water and the Holy Ghost's fire."

On the other hand, Bede continues, the rainbow is also said to have three colours:

Aliter arcus tres colores habere dicitur, id est, hyacinthinum, et onidis, et puhinum,⁷⁴ id est, scandalum poenitentiae, et vita actualis, et ardor spiritualis in ratione baptismi.⁷⁵

"On the other hand, the rainbow is said to have three colours, that is of hyacinth, and of onyx, and of purple, that is penitential scandal, and active life, and spiritual ardor in the doctrine of baptism."

The colour-imagery Bede is elaborating here is probably inspired by the twelve precious stones of the heavenly Jerusalem in *Apoc.* 21, about which he offered his own interpretation according to the various colours and qualities of each stone in Book 3 of his *Explanatio Apocalypsis*.⁷⁶ Here he places hyacinthus, 'caeruleum colorem habens', as a sign of the soul's

⁷³ Cf. Bede, *In Pentateuchum commentarii. Genesis*, 9, in *PL* 91, col. 227 A.

⁷⁴ To be intended as *puniceum*.

⁷⁵ Bede, *In Pentateuchum commentarii. Genesis*, 9, *ibid*.

⁷⁶ Cf. Bede, *Explanatio Apocalypsis* III, 21, in *PL* 93, cols. 197–203.

tension towards heavenly life;⁷⁷ bi- or tri-chromatic sardonyx (white/red vs. dark/white/red [to brownish-red]) as a sign both of the human complexity, made up of body, soul, and mind (*corpus – spiritus – mens*), and of earthly life, where passion (red) and chastity (white) are balanced successfully through humility;⁷⁸ amethystus, which is of purple, as a sign of the humble and precious death of the holy men,⁷⁹ and also sarnius, which is bloody red, as a sign of martyrdom.⁸⁰

The colours of the trichromatic rainbow – hyacinth-blue; dark (brown or black), but possibly brownish-yellow, as *onyx calcedonium* was for the Romans; and purple-red – signify here three stages or events on the way to individual redemption, Bede overtly places *in ratione baptismi*. Baptism within the Church is in fact the only possibility for men to be saved (as within Noah's ark during the flood), given that in penitential terms it represents the so-called *poenitentia prima* (God's forgiveness of Adam's sin), a protection against the everlasting infernal flames in Tertullian's (ca. 150/170-ca. 230) view.⁸¹ The *scandalum poenitentiae*, then, may allude directly to baptism via that public and solemn rite of penance that in Bede's lifetime was still strongly linked to baptism itself, having been in use since the first centuries as the only possible repetition of the baptismal cleansing of sins.⁸² What converts will do after baptism in their lifetime is to be cautiously guarded, and atonement for one's own sins through penance is in fact a second opportunity offered by God (what the early Christian writers called *poenitentia secunda*), not to be missed;⁸³ what exactly Bede means by *actualis vita* or 'active life' is impossible to say in this context,

77 Ibid., col. 201 D: *Indicat autem animas coelesti semper intentioni deditas, atque angelicae quodammodo, quantum mortalibus fas est, conversationi propinquant.*

78 Ibid., col. 199 C: *Sunt autem genera ejus plurima. Alius enim terrae rubrae similitudinem tenet. Alius, quasi per humanum unguem sanguis eniteat, bicolor apparet. Alius tribus coloribus, subterius nigro, medio candido, superius minio, consistit. Cui comparantur homines, corporis passione rubicundi, spiritus puritate candidi, sed mentis sibi met humilitate despecti...*

79 Ibid., col. 202 B: *Amethystus purpureus est permisto violaceo colore, et quasi rosae nitore, quaedamque leniter flammulas fundens, sed et quiddam in purpura illius non ex toto igneum, sed quasi vinum rubens, apparet. Purpureus ergo decor coelestis regni habitum, [...] humilem sanctorum verecundiam pretiosamque mortem designat.*

80 Ibid., col. 199 D: *Sardius, qui ex integro sanguinei coloris est, martyrum gloriam significat...*

81 Cf. Tertullian, *De poenitentia*, 12, in PL 1, col. 1358 B.

82 See also below, notes 84, 104–105 and related contexts.

83 See again Tertullian, *ibid.*: *Igitur cum scias adversus gehennam post prima illa intinctionis Dominica munimenta, esse adhuc in exomologesi secunda subsidia, cur salutem tuam descris?*

but probably he refers in general to the enduring efforts each man makes to live according to Christian precepts, and in particular to all the various performances of penance the sinner has to accept in case of misbehaviour, according to the private penance system of Irish origin, which very soon entered both the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental world, and was already currently practiced at the time of Bede.⁸⁴ The third step in Bede's account of the three-coloured rainbow is that *ardor spiritualis*, ultimately leading to the hardest form of penance, that is death for God's sake, martyrdom. It is my opinion that, setting chromatic differences aside, these three stages may be held to correspond exactly to the three spiritual interpretations given in the Old Icelandic sermon fragment: water for baptism, brimstone flame for repentance of sins, fiery-red for martyrdom.

A tri-chromatic description and allegorical interpretation of the rainbow is also found within Isidore's *De natura rerum* manuscript tradition, arranged as a long note appended to the chapter 31, which I quoted and discussed earlier.⁸⁵ It may have been the Isidorian tradition again to inspire Bede in this point, then; but this allegorical note shows indeed some very close connections with our Old Icelandic homily's first section.⁸⁶ Here is what is found about the rainbow, among various other interesting clues for preaching, in this detailed excursus of stock images with allegorical explanation:

Arcus autem qui in nubibus apparet, posuit eum Deus in testamentum inter se et nos [...]. Tres autem colores manifeste habet arcus, id est, purpureum, sulphureum et igneum. Per hos tres colores tres sententias significat: duas, quae transierunt, praeteritas; tertiam, quae ventura est. Per purpureum colorem significat diluvium; per sulphureum significat ignem qui venit super Sodomam; per igneum colorem significat ignem qui venturus est in die iudicii.⁸⁷

"The rainbow, which appears in the clouds, was placed by God as a covenant between Himself and us [...]. The rainbow clearly has

84 See especially Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 61–93. Cf. further below, notes 104–105 and relative context.

85 Cf. above, note 48 and its context.

86 The passage had already been noted by Marchand, "Two notes": 505.

87 Cf. *PL* 93, col. 1003 D (ch. XXXI, note 2).

three colours, that is of purple, of sulphur and of fire. By these three colours it signifies three meanings: two past, which have gone by; the third, which is to come. By purple colour it signifies the flood; by sulphur-colour it signifies the fire which came upon Sodom; by fiery-colour it signifies the fire which is to come on Judgement Day.”

The colour description of the rainbow is here very close to the one preserved in Old Icelandic homiletic tradition. The three colours are the same, given that *color purpureum* is usually assigned to the water element in Patristic writings (so in Isidore and Honorius of Autun, as we have seen). The anagogical interpretation of the trichromatic rainbow is also the same, with the two past biblical events (Noah’s flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) and the single, focal event to come in Christian history, that is, Doomsday.

In the Old Icelandic text, relevance is given to God’s terrible wrath as the direct cause of the punishment inflicted on or in store for men because of their evil-doing, and this homiletic explanation is missing in the Latin text. But both elaborations of the theme must be evidently drawn from a common tradition, which joined the rainbow colour-imagery to the basic elemental opposition water/fire, easily used by the Church Fathers with regards to the doctrine of baptism. Of course, no point is made here about any hypothesis of direct derivation of the Old Icelandic sermon fragment from one or more of the Latin passages I have selected; rather, I would suggest that any medieval Christian preacher could have access to this common tradition also in the North. That Iceland represented no exception, being well in tune with the Western exegetical tradition, has been already demonstrated for other homiletic topics,⁸⁸ and this was also the case with penitential discipline, as I have proved elsewhere.⁸⁹

This last point is, in my opinion, especially relevant for setting our sermon fragment against its proper cultural background, the most striking feature of the Old Icelandic rainbow allegory lying in its prominent penitential implications. Bede’s last quoted passage from his comment on

88 Cf. above, note 1 and its context.

89 Cf. Carla Cucina, “Il pellegrinaggio nelle saghe dell’Islanda medievale,” *Rendiconti dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. 9, vol. 9: 1 (1998): 83–155. See also below, note 105 and its context.

Genesis in his *In Pentateuchum commentarii* represents a useful and close parallel in this sense; which again does not mean that Bede's elaboration of a rainbow colour-imagery based on penitential doctrine and practice needs to be considered the specific source of the Old Icelandic preacher. But certainly the exegetical connection of the rainbow imagery with the vast symbolic treatment of the ship/Noah's ark as an allegory of Christ's Church and *figura* of the baptism – which derives naturally from the biblical narrative in the Genesis – is very strong in the works of the Fathers (see Bede, Rabanus Maurus, etc.), and this must be considered our preacher's train of thoughts, too; it is not surprising, in fact, that in the Old Icelandic Physiologus manuscript our sermon fragment was copied after a double homiletic allegory of the ship. The insertion of the same text in encyclopedic miscellanies like the *Hauksbók*⁹⁰ or pseudo-scientific treatises like *Rimbegla* is not in contrast with the issue, of course; on the other hand, it is worth pointing out that no 'natural' or atmospheric description of the rainbow enters this Old Icelandic manualistic production, and that strictly biblical exegesis forms the sole basis for rainbow inquirers in medieval Iceland.

Before drawing any conclusion, it may be convenient to examine briefly some occasional occurrences of the *topos* and/or of colour-imagery in other vernacular literatures possibly relevant to the Icelandic cultural milieu, with special reference both to the Early Middle High German biblical poetry on Genesis (*Altdeutsche Genesis*) and to Irish homiletic tradition.

V

Within the literary tradition of the rest of the Germanic-speaking (i.e., Anglo-Saxon and German) area, the topic of the rainbow occurs wherever the narrative of Genesis is found. But it does not necessarily bring with it the allegorical interpretation based on colour-imagery we have seen productively at work in the Old Icelandic sermon fragment. Thus, the biblical episode of God's promise to Noah after the flood, sealed by the token of

90 Rudolf Simek has suggested that the arrangement of texts in this section of the *Hauksbók* derives from Lambertus Audomarensis' *Liber floridus*. Cf. Rudolf Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie. Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert*, *Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 382.

the rainbow, is properly recalled in the Old English epic poem on Genesis preserved in the Junius manuscript (*Genesis A* 1535b-42),⁹¹ but no exegetical hint is given there of an allegorical treatment of the matter. This can be easily attributed to the poem's general setting out, but it is worth pointing out that no rainbow allegory is found within the Anglo-Saxon homiletic production, one would expect more inclined towards elaborations of biblical items in a figurative sense. The only occurrence of the appearance of the rainbow after the flood within the corpus is actually found in one of Ælfric's (ca. 950–ca. 1010) Catholic Homilies, namely Sermon I, 1 *De initio creaturae*, where almost one-third of the whole recollection of the Noah's flood episode is in fact dedicated to the rainbow topic, but where, as I said, no exegetical addition occurs.⁹²

On the other hand, some allegorical interpretations of the rainbow can be found in the Early Middle High German religious poetry, for instance in *Himelriche* (composed around 1160 in the monastic milieu of Windberg, Bayer),⁹³ which in this respect has been mentioned by Wolfgang Lange among the possible relevant analogues of our Old Icelandic text,⁹⁴ but which in fact proves to be an excursus elaborating on the vision of God in *Apoc.* 4, 3, based on standard school learning. Here, the rainbow is said to be composed of the four elements, and its name (Iris) is given an etymological explanation, while the two elements of water and fire lead the poet to the familiar view of the two forms of world destruction, one past and by water, that is, Noah's flood, the other still to come and through fire, that

91 Cf. *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by George Philip Krapp, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A collective edition 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 47–48. The 'Junius Codex' is properly manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11 (sc 5123); it is dated to the tenth–eleventh century.

92 Cf. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series. Text*, ed. by Peter Clemoes, *Early English Text Society, S.S. 17* (Oxford–New York–Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 185, ll. 195–200. We have to wait until the Middle English poem on Genesis and Exodus to find some such exegetical hints, but these are based on Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (cf. above, note 41 and its context), so no special treatment of the topos is to be expected.

93 Cf. Helmuth de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur von Karl dem Grossen bis zum Beginn der höfischen Dichtung, 770–1170*. Mit einem bibliographischen Anhang von Dieter Haacke (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964⁶), 192. The relevant passage in *Himelriche* is 4, 12–6, 28, part. 6, 1–16; for the edition of the text, cf. Friedrich Maurer, *Die religiösen Dichtungen des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts. Nach ihren Formen besprochen und herausgegeben I* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1964), 365–395.

94 Cf. Lange, *Studien zur christlichen Dichtung*, 257, note 1.

is, Judgement Day.⁹⁵ An easy elaboration on the rainbow occurs also, for example, in the roughly contemporary *Anegenge*, vv. 1982–1999, this time deriving from *Gen.* 9, 12 ff., but it is actually little more than a versified biblical citation, which only touches briefly in a homiletic tone on the *arcus* as a token of peace, since God will never again send such a flood upon the earth.⁹⁶

A more interesting parallel treatment of the colours of the rainbow is found in the so-called *Wiener Genesis*, a long epic poem on the matter of the biblical book, enriched by allegorical and homiletic reflections from various sources. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the structure, style and verse form of this poetic narrative; suffice it to say that its composition is placed around 1060–80, and that the Vienna manuscript anthology in which it is preserved (Wien, Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek nr. 2721) is dated to the second half of the twelfth century; a younger version of the same poem, the *Millstätter Genesis* (cf. Millstatt-Klagenfurt manuscript, Kärntner Landesarchiv, Geschichtsverein Hs. 6/19, also from the second half of the twelfth century), is also dependant on the same older unknown manuscript which the Vienna text was copied from.

In vv. 721 (1441) ff. of the Vienna text, the biblical episode of God giving Noah and mankind the rainbow as a token in memory of the covenant preserving the world from any further flood is narrated. As is usual in exegetic and homiletic tradition, and as also occurs in our Old Icelandic text, the event in the Bible serves as a starting point for allegorical, in this case also tropological, interpretation. What is especially interesting from our point of view is that in the Old German poem we can trace the same standard layout belonging to the exegetical sources we have been examining in the previous paragraph (mainly Bede on the two-coloured rainbow as a symbol of baptism), but also significant differences and a clear identification – typical within the general allegory of the ark as a figure of the Church – of water and blood with the person of Christ as the

95 Cf. de Boor, *Die deutsche Literatur*, 192–193. See also Hartmut Freytag, *Die Theorie der allegorischen Schriftdeutung und die Allegorie in deutschen Texten besonders des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts*, Bibliotheca Germanica 24 (Bern-München: Franke Verlag, 1982), 64 and esp. 223, note 38.

96 Cf. the edition of the text by Dietrich Neuschäfer, *Das Anegenge. Textkritische Studien, Diplomatischer Abdruck, Kritische Ausgabe, Anmerkungen zum Text*, Medium Aevum 8 (München: Fink, 1966); see also Freytag, *Die Theorie der allegorischen Schriftdeutung*, 223, note 38.

means of salvation. After paraphrasing the episode in Genesis, with the insertion in traditionally poetic terms of the idea that the rainbow is not going to be seen for thirty years before Judgement Day (v. 727 [1453–54]: *ouch hōrt ich sagen daz man sîn nieht insehe drīzzich jâr vor deme suontage* “moreover, I heard that man will not see it at all for thirty years before Doomsday”),⁹⁷ the Continental poet goes on explaining the meaning of the colours of the rainbow:

Daz zeichen ist alsô lusam, daz stât alsô unverborgen,
 daz ist gruone unde rôt, daz bezeichent wazzere unde bluot
 dei Christe ûz der sîte fluzzen dô si ime mit spere wart durchstochen.
 von diu sculen wir miskan zuo dem wazzere den wîn
 swenne man die misse singet unde der gotes martere gedenchet:
 daz wirt ze wâre ze bluote ûf dem altâre.

Mit deme selben bluote gewinnen wir widere die touffe,
 die wir sô dikche vliessen sô wir uns mit sunden bewellen.
 die riuwigen zahire, gebent uns die touffe widere,
 daz si daz helleviur erleskent, von sunden uns waschent.⁹⁸

“So beautiful is this token, and so visible,
 which is green and red that betoken water and blood
 which flowed out from Christ’s side, when he was stabbed with a spear.
 Because of this, we have to mix wine with water,
 whenever we sing the mass and think of God’s martyrs:
 so it is truly changed into blood upon the altar.

With this same blood we further intend the baptism,
 which flows upon us so dense because we sway with sins.
 the grieved drops give us the baptism again,
 and extinguish the fire of hell, wash away our sins.”

97 Traditional poetic features are the opening formula (*hōrt ich sagen...*), and the standard time span of ‘thirty years’ – where related Latin exegetical literature usually has forty (cf. for instance the passage from Petrus Comestor’s *Historia scholastica* quoted earlier, note 41).

98 The text is quoted from the edition by Kathryn Smits, *Die frühmittelhochdeutsche Wiener Genesis. Kritische Ausgabe mit einem einleitenden Kommentar zur Überlieferung*, Philologische Studien und Quellen 59 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1972), 141 and 143.

There is a clear, substantial difference, relating to the allegorical interpretation of the red colour, between the Old German poem and the main trend of Latin exegetical writings about the rainbow, which has passed on to the Old Icelandic preaching tradition. There, red was usually linked with fire as one of the four natural elements and also as specifically tied to the purgation of the final judgement; here it is connected with blood, namely Christ's blood, as a powerful and direct image of human redemption attained through Christ's passion and death. This connection is also found in a passage from the glosses to chapter 31 of Bede's *De natura rerum*, from which I have quoted earlier:⁹⁹

In arcu vero duo sunt colores principales, viridis scilicet, id est aquosus et rubeus: in quibus nimirum designatur aperte aqua baptismatis, et sanguis redemptionis, vel gratia Spiritus sancti. Per haec duo ab omnibus emundamur peccatis. De quibus duobus mysteriis tota Ecclesia cingitur, et per haec in novitatem gratiae Dei renovatur. Vel per duos colores possumus intelligere duo iudicia: unum, quod factum est per aquam: atque aliud, quod faciendum est per ignem.¹⁰⁰

"Truly in the rainbow two are the main colours, namely green, i.e., watery, and red: by these certainly the water of baptism, and the blood of redemption, and also the Holy Ghost's grace, are suggested. Through these two we are cleansed from all sins. By these two mysteries the whole Church is encompassed, and through them it is made anew in God's grace. On the other hand, by the two colours we can understand two judgements: one which was carried out by water; and the other which is to be carried out by fire."

The explanation here is clear enough, just as it is self-evident that the allegorical interpretation of the two-coloured rainbow points directly to a general symbolic view of the Church as a cyclical pattern of sin and

⁹⁹ Cf. above, the context of note 63.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Glossae et scholia* to Bede, *De natura rerum* 31, in *PL* 90, col. 252 C. The relevance of this passage for the Vienna allegory had been suggested before, both by Alfred Weller, *Die frühmittelhochdeutsche Wiener Genesis*, Palaestra 123 (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1914), 57 (but here the passage is erroneously ascribed to Bede), and by Freytag, *Die Theorie der allegorischen Schriftdeutung*, 64.

redemption, which is also what, in tropological terms, the Old German poet has in mind.

To sum up the Vienna verse passage: the green and red of the rainbow betoken the water and blood which flowed from Christ's side. These correspond in turn – allegorically – to the mixing of water and wine in Mass. The tropological interpretation offered next refers to the remission of sins, which are washed away by baptism and by tears of repentance. In point of fact, water and blood are also mixed in relation to baptism and purification from sins, as they were in the spring pouring from the wound in Christ's side: according to the Fathers, this water and this blood together mean the Church's sacraments, which lead the faithfuls towards Truth, and of course cleanse from sins; moreover, they came to be expressly employed in connection with the ark, where a door was opened in one side to let in all the creatures destined to survive.¹⁰¹ Brian Murdoch, commenting briefly on this passage in *Wiener Genesis*, rightly points out that “the whole story of the flood is rounded off with the standard exegetical reference to baptism”.¹⁰² But it may be worth suggesting that, exactly as in our Old Icelandic text, baptism is here enclosed in the larger doctrinal frame of penance, as the touching image of v. 736 (1472–73) makes clear (cf. *die riuwigen zahire gebent uns die touffe widere* “the grieved drops give us the baptism again”). This is – apart from the variation in colour-imagery – a converging point for such apparently different traditions as the *Wiener Genesis* and the Icelandic sermon fragment.

Baptism, for entering the Church community; then repentance of sins through confession and penance, for remaining in the Church; and eventually martyrdom, the supreme form of penance in a full *imitatio Christi*, for directly attaining eternal bliss, all together represent an easy abridged version of every individual *historia salutis*, i.e. of how it is possible for

101 Cf. for example Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* 15, 26, in CSEL 40, 2, p. 117, ll. 11–14; Id., *Tractatus in Ioannem* 120, 2, in PL 35, col. 1935 AB; Bede, *Hexaemeron* 2, in PL 91, col. 90 A; Remigius of Auxerre, *Comment. in Genesim* 6, 16, in PL 131, col. 75 BC. Cf. also Freytag, *Die Theorie der allegorischen Schriftdeutung*, 64 (especially the passage from Haymo of Halberstadt's *Homilia* 68 *De tempore* quoted in note 42 [223–224]). For this and for a more general approach to the symbolic interpretations of Noah's ark in Patristic writings, see the whole chapter 8 in Hugo Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche. Die Ekklesiologie der Väter* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1964).

102 Cf. Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge-Rochester, N.Y.: D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2003), 120.

Christians to be saved. The interpretation of the flood as a symbol of baptism which washes away all sins, of Noah as a figure of Christ, and of the ark as an allegory of the Church, which is in fact the sole opportunity for men to be safe in this world and in the life to come, are common features of exegetical literature about the Genesis, of course. The three-coloured rainbow of the Icelandic homily – and also the two-coloured rainbow of the Vienna poem – can in a way be considered almost a condensed image of the wider symbolic implications of the whole biblical event of the flood: the Icelandic explanation, more traditionally linked to the elemental and eschatological fire – the allegorical and tropological interpretation of blood as the explication of the colour red in the *Wiener Genesis* more original – but at the same time well integrated in patristic tradition about the flood, which also treated Noah's ark (cf. the doorway opened in its side) as identical with Christ's body (cf. the wound opened in His side, from which water and blood flowed). Besides, both texts explicitly refer to martyrdom (cf. *Wiener Genesis* v. 732b [1465] *unde der gotes martere gedenchet* "and think of God's martyrs"; Old Icelandic sermon *í lífláti fyrir Guðs sakar* lit. "in losing one's life for the sake of God"), and this leads us to our investigation's last point.

VI

The relevance of the doctrine of penance for the Old Icelandic rainbow allegory has been underlined extensively in this paper. The text is quite clear in this respect, and the triadic structure is self-explaining both in form and subject-matter.¹⁰³ Now, as far as medieval penitential doctrine and discipline are concerned, especially in the Germanic milieu, it is well-known that a leading role was played by the Irish. It was Irish monks' work to gradually change the practice of penance from the public canonical trial system to the so-called 'tariff' system, which, in short, led to private forms of confession and penance and to the elaboration of the so-called Penitentials or handbooks of penance, guidebooks of a sort for confessors containing tariffs, namely, a catalogue of sins and proportionate penances.¹⁰⁴ This is not the place for a thorough survey of Irish penitential prac-

¹⁰³ See also below.

¹⁰⁴ It is worthwhile remembering, however, that the two penitential systems remained complementary rather than mutually exclusive throughout the medieval period.

tices and literature, which soon after the fifth century spread everywhere in Europe; but it is worth recalling that even in medieval Iceland such practices were in use, and such literature was known, to the point of leaving clear-cut traces in the sagas.¹⁰⁵

If the Irish influence regarding the private penitential system in the eighth century had become so widespread among the Anglo-Saxons and on the Continent that it is often difficult to determine any direct Irish dependance in the sources,¹⁰⁶ there are some forms of monastic ascetic and penitential discipline which can be counted as peculiar to the Irish culture and milieu. It may occasionally be that such forms work the other way, i.e., are mostly derived from continental sources but are then developed by the Irish in their own 'typical' way;¹⁰⁷ and in this new, idiosyncratic shape they may also happen to return overseas again. This may be the case with the idea of a threefold martyrdom, that is, of three different kinds of suffering qualifying someone as a martyr, to which a triad of colours is associated.

The *locus classicus* for this three-coloured classification of martyrdom is the *Cambrai Homily*, an early Old Irish sermon fragment (interspersed with Latin excerpts)¹⁰⁸ dated to the second half of the seventh century, and copied by a Carolingian scribe – probably from a piece of parchment slipped in between the leaves of the model exemplar – in the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis* preserved in Cambrai, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 679 (formerly 619), fols. 37^v–38^v.¹⁰⁹ Due to the scribe's ignorance of Irish,

105 Cf. Cucina, "Il pellegrinaggio nelle saghe": 132–155. For an essential introduction to the evolution of the discipline of penance in the Middle Ages, with a rich bibliographical survey, see especially *ibid.*, 132–136; for the relevance of the Irish forms and literature of penance in the Scandinavian regions, and particularly in the Icelandic milieu, see especially *ibid.*, 136–138.

106 See the long, exhaustive survey, more general in scope than the title would suggest, offered by Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 61–150.

107 Cf. Clare Stancliffe, "Red, white and blue martyrdom," *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe. Studies in memory of Kathleen Hughes*, eds. Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick and David Dumville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 21. Charles D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; repr. 2006), 19, rightly speaks of "an Irish learned tradition at once derivative and idiosyncratic."

108 *Cambrai Homily's* bilingual nature is especially underlined in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland 400–1200* (Harlow, England: Longman, 1995), 193 and 203.

109 As the manuscript was made for Alberic, bishop of Cambrai and Arras, it is securely dated to 763–790.

this mechanical copy is a poor one, with a number of evident mistakes in word division etc.; but the text is very well-known and long investigated by scholars because of both its archaic language and its explicit definition of the *trechenelē martre* or „threefold martyrdom“ categorized by colours.¹¹⁰

The fundamental study of this last topic remains the article by Clare Stancliffe on the “Red, white and blue martyrdom”, published in 1982:¹¹¹ here the scholar examines the relevant passage of the homily in the light of some up to that point unpublished Latin texts, of Continental provenance but with strong Irish connections.

To begin with, I print here the *Cambrai* excursus on the subject of martyrdom in the English translation by Stokes and Strachan, but with the acceptance of Clare Stancliffe’s suggestion for translating *glasmarthe* as ‘blue martyrdom’ (instead of ‘green martyrdom’), and of Próinséas Ní Chatháin’s reading of manuscript f. 38^r, l. 17, as *cení césa* ‘although he does not endure’ (instead of ‘although he suffer’):

Now there are three kinds of martyrdom which are counted as a cross to man,¹¹² that is to say, white martyrdom, and blue martyrdom, and red martyrdom. This is the white martyrdom to man, when he separates for sake of God from everything he loves, although he does not endure fasting or labour thereby. This is the blue martyrdom to him, when by means of them [i.e. fasting and

110 The text of the *Cambrai Homily* is edited by Whitley Stokes and John Strachan, *Thesaurus paleohibernicus: A Collection of Old-Irish Glosses Scholias Prose and Verse II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903; repr. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987), 244–247. See also Rudolf Thurneysen, *Old Irish Reader* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1949; repr. 1981), 35–36.

111 Cf. above, note 107. A careful study of the *Cambrai Homily*’s structure and sources, which shows that it was skillfully constructed, and that its author drew especially on a couple of Gregory the Great’s *Homiliae in Evangelia* (namely Homily 32 and 37) achieving very effective results, is Pádraig P. Ó Néill, “The Background to the *Cambrai Homily*,” *Ériu* 32 (1981): 137–147. See also Próinséas Ní Chatháin, “A Reading in the *Cambrai Homily*,” *Celtica* 21 (1990): 417, for a reassessment of a textual emendation in the passage discussed here (cf. below). For a summary account giving all the chief points, see Westley Follett, *Céli Dé in Ireland. Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 54–56.

112 The preacher is elaborating on *Matthew* 16, 24: *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me* “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”; cf. also *Luke* 9, 23 (...*et tollat crucem suam cotidie et sequatur me* “...and take up his cross daily and follow me”).

labour] he separates from his desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. This is red martyrdom to him, endurance of a cross or destruction for Christ's sake, as happened to the apostles in the persecution of the wicked and in teaching the law of God. These three kinds of martyrdom are comprised in the carnal ones who resort to good repentance, who separate from their desires, who pour forth their blood in fasting and in labour for Christ's sake.¹¹³

Old Irish *báanmartre ocus glasmartre ocus dercmartre* identify possible forms of martyrdom as white (*bán*, especially in the non-literal sense of 'bloodless', Lat. *ex[s]anguis*), blue (*glas*, corresponding to Lat. *hyacinthinus*, as Stancliffe has convincingly demonstrated, in particular with the symbolic sense of 'pale, livid, discoloured [for instance, in abstinence]'), and red (*derg*, fundamentally 'red with blood', hence 'bloody').¹¹⁴ True, neither the idea of bloodless and lifelong types of martyrdom nor the link with colour-imagery were new, occurring for example in the works of Jerome and Sulpicius Severus (ca. 400 A.D.), both particularly influential on early Irish monasticism; in fact, Sulpicius' distinction between a 'sine cruore martyrium' and its opposite, the 'palma sanguinis', may be reflected in the meanings of *bán* and *derg* as suggested by Stancliffe.¹¹⁵ But it is in dealing with penitence that the elaboration of the Irish preacher adds something more original to the frame, and shows some point of contact with our Old Icelandic allegorical interpretation of the rainbow.

Among the Latin excerpts selected in Stancliffe's paper as useful parallels to the Cambrai text, one is particularly relevant to our topic of

113 Cf. *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* II, 246–247; Stancliffe, "Red, white and blue martyrdom": 23; Ní Chatháin, "A Reading of the Cambrai Homily": 417. I print here also the Old Irish text from *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* (ibid.), with Ní Chatháin's corrected reading of the *báanmartre* definition: *Filus trechenélae martre daneu adrimiter ar chruich du duiniu. mad esgre báanmartre ocus glasmartre ocus dercmartre. Issi in báanmartre do duiniu intain scaras ar Dea fri cach reet caras cení césa aini na laubir n-oco. Issi ind glasmartre dó intain scaras fria thola leó nó céssas saithor i ppenmit ocus aithrigi. Issi in dercmartre dó foditu chruche ocus diorche ar Christ amail tondecommuccuir dundaib abstolaib oc ingrimmim inna clóen ocuis oc forcetul recto Dé. Congaibetar inna trechenél martre so issnib colnidib tuthégot dagathrigi, scarde fria tola, céste saithu, tuesmot a fuil i n-áini ocuis i laubair ar Christ.*

114 Cf. Stancliffe, "Red, white and blue martyrdom": 27–29.

115 Ibid., 31–32.

interest. It is a brief passage from a Munich commentary on Genesis preserved in fols. 49^r–64^r of the manuscript Clm 6302, which was written at Freising towards the end of the eighth century, and which shows clear Irish associations and features.¹¹⁶ I take the text from Stancliffe's own edition (Clm 6302, fol. 59^r):¹¹⁷

In arco autem iii [sic] colores sunt: albus color, qui martyrium cotidianum indicat; rubicundus color, sanguinis effusionem in martyrio; iacentinus¹¹⁸ penitentiam. Niger mortem significat.

"In the rainbow there are three colours: the white colour, which denotes daily martyrdom; the red colour, shedding of blood in martyrdom; the blue colour, penance. Black signifies death (of the soul)."

In dealing with the story of Noah and the rainbow sent as a sign by God, the exegete combines here the three-coloured rainbow tradition with the three forms of martyrdom, giving a simple and clear definition of what these truly are (the appended fourth colour dark or black is meant as unrelated to the fundamental three-colours pattern [cf. MS iii] in that it is associated with the death of the soul and so it is placed in opposition to all the other colours, which are linked with eternal life's expectation). If we examine this passage against the *Cambrai* excursus on martyrdom, as well as cross-referring it to other related texts, the easy conclusion is that *derc-martre* 'red martyrdom' of course means losing one's life for Christ's sake; *bánmartre* 'white martyrdom' denotes the ascetic life, a voluntary separation from everything one loves in *Cambrai* homiletic terms; *glasmartrae* or 'blue martyrdom' signifies the discipline of penance, all the hardships and fasting the penitent has to endure to be cleansed from his/her own sins. This positive view of the penitents as Christians to be ranked alongside the martyrs and the monks must be rooted in the private penance system I have already recalled, whose effects were certainly softer and less socially

116 Ibid., 23.

117 Ibid., 24.

118 MS *iacentinos* (so Stancliffe); correction is mine.

degrading than those of the public penance, and in this respect it can be said to be peculiarly Irish.¹¹⁹

Now, if we consider baptism – which is, as we have seen, an unchanging item in the patristic rainbow allegory based on Genesis – as a possible non-literal indication for actually entering monastic life, or in other words choosing any form of asceticism as the most direct road to heaven, an easy parallel emerges between the Irish triadic colour-imagery of martyrdom and the Old Icelandic three-coloured rainbow allegory. In this respect, there is another interesting passage from the Hiberno-Latin Continental production, which can also be brought up in this context, namely from a Celtic homily collection preserved in the Vatican manuscript Vat. reg. lat. 49, probably written in Brittany in the later ninth or tenth century. In Homily 4, the preacher comments on the twelve precious stones on the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem by introducing a comparison with the actions of the holy men:

Quibus lapidibus comparantur actus sanctorum, quando per martiria probantur et per plures necessitates: aliis actibus probatis per baptismum, aliis per iacintha martiria, aliis per rubra martiria ensium persecutoris pro amore Dei, vel per sanguinem pudoris dando confessionem ductoribus animarum...¹²⁰

“With these stones the actions of holy men are compared, when they are shown by martyrdom and various hardships: being these actions shown some through baptism, some through blue martyrdom, some through red martyrdom of persecutor’s swords for God’s sake, or else through blood (i.e., blushing of the face) in repentance while performing confession to souls’ rulers (i.e., priests)...”

Here, again, the penitential implications are stressed to the point of equating the red of the shedding of blood in literal martyrdom to the red

119 Cf. Stancliffe, “Red, white and blue martyrdom”: 45–46. The last sentence in the passage from the *Cambrai Homily* is probably to be interpreted as referring to ordinary lay people guilty of murder and fornication (cf. ‘carnal ones’), who having performed their period of penance are ranked with the red, white and blue martyrs (cf. *ibid.*, 44).

120 Cf. Stancliffe, “Red, white and blue martyrdom”: 26, with some correction from the edition by A. Wilmart, “Catéchèses celtiques,” *Analecta Reginensia*, ed. A. Wilmart, Studi e testi 59 (Città del Vaticano, 1933), 56.

of blushing for one's own sins in repentance; particularly relevant for the present topic is the idea that there are three steps in perfect Christian behaviour, that is to say, from baptism through mortification of the body in fasting and other forms of penance ('iacintha martiria') up to the giving up of one's life *pro amore Dei* ('rubra martiria') – which ordinary men can simply attain by truly genuine repentance. This view, in the end, corresponds to the same fundamental tropological triad of our Old Icelandic rainbow allegory regarding the three forms of forgiveness (in baptism, penitence and death for God's sake).

This is not such conclusive evidence, of course, as to prove a direct derivation from an Irish or Irish-dependant textual tradition on the part of our Old Icelandic homilist; but it is enough to suggest, I think, that various exegetical threads found their way to medieval Iceland, and the resulting cloth shows an original pattern where Isidore's and Bede's central motifs combine with a possible Irish touch.

VII

In the end, if we are to draw a conclusion from the present inquiry, this may result in the idea that the Old Icelandic homiletic explanation of the colours of the rainbow is rooted in a widespread tradition, but also that it has its own original features. There are, as we have seen, specific and unfailing connections with the works of the Fathers, above all with Isidore and the biblical commentaries of Bede, both in colour-imagery and in the allegorical (historical and tropological) approach. Moreover, some very interesting points have appeared with regards to the doctrine of penance, which form the core of the Old Icelandic preacher's tropological interpretation, corresponding at the same time to topic occurrences in Continental (German and Hiberno-Latin) and Irish texts of various kind. The possible relevance of the Irish monastic milieu for a triadic and substantially penitential elaboration, that from the concept of 'martyrdom' may have passed on as a more general categorization of the atonement for sins, has also been underlined. But, in the end, no passage from Latin or German or Irish parallel texts can be said to share exactly the same treatment of the colours of the rainbow as it is found in the Old Icelandic allegorical piece. On the other hand, our sermon fragment denotes unusual coherence and some

originality in bringing together the two different traditions, namely the standard approach of biblical exegesis and the issues raised by the doctrine of penance, which were certainly very momentous for Christians' everyday life and for ecclesiastical preaching in the Middle Ages.

This is especially clear on subject-matter grounds. When we come to the formal layout of the Old Icelandic homiletic text, we must admit that it produces the effect of a well-designed structure. Syntax reflects the triadic elaboration of thought with clarity, in dealing first with the 'historical' interpretation:

Vatn kom í Nóaflóði;

"Water came in Noah's flood;"

brennusteinslogi kom yfir Sódómam ok Gómorram;

"sulphur-flame came upon Sodom and Gomorrah;"

eldr mun ganga yfir allan heim fyrir dómsdag.

"fire will go over the whole world before Judgement Day";

then with the tropological interpretation concerning the *þrefalda fyrgefning synda* "the threefold forgiveness of sins":

Vatns litr [merkir] fyrgefning synda í skírn; því fylgir bliðleikr mikill ok engi torveldi.

"The colour of water signifies the forgiveness of sins in the baptism; great mildness and no difficulty belong to it."

Brennusteinslogi merkir iðrun synda; því fylgir beiskleikr mikill.

"Sulphur-flame signifies the repentance of sins; great bitterness belongs to it."

El[dz litr] merkir fyrgefning synda í lífláti fyr Guðs sakar; því fylgir ógn mikil ok bjartleikr mikill.

"The colour of fire signifies the forgiveness of sins in martyrdom for the sake of God; great terror and great radiance belong to it."

In this last long period, three sentences are carefully balanced, and a clear parallelism occurs in clause units division, where each first clause relates to the true tropological meaning (forgiveness of sins in baptism, repentance, and martyrdom), and each second clause refers to the cor-

responding spiritual and emotional implications (great mildness, great bitterness, and great radiance).

This triadic presentation is also apparent at the word level: one can notice, for example, precisely the effective alliterating triad *blíðleikr* / *beiskleikr* / *bjartleikr* ('mildness' / 'bitterness' / 'radiance'), where the shifting of sense relies only upon the first elements of the *-leikr* compound-words, and where alliteration serves the rhetorical purpose of stressing the central idea of the threefold topic of allegorical interest.

The Old Icelandic preacher's insistence on triads, both in formal arrangement and in subject-matter elaboration, on the other hand, strengthens the hypothesis of a possibly Irish-influenced mode, which we have already suggested on purely conceptual grounds; but of course, if Irish love for triads has long been underlined by scholars,¹²¹ we do not necessarily have to turn to Ireland to find threefold cultural patterns.

As to the relationship among the various recensions of the Old Icelandic sermon fragment – namely in AM 673 a II, 4to, *Hauksbók*, and *Rímbegla* – no conclusive evidence regarding the preacher's use of specific exegetical sources has emerged in my investigation, so no new suggestion can be formulated about the original version(s) from which the *Hauksbók* and *Rímbegla* copies – and possibly our text in the 'Physiologus manuscript' – may have been drawn. This results in an impression of clarity, refinement and well-designed synthesis concerning especially the shorter, older text edited and discussed in the present article.

On the Nordic side, one more word can be spent in closing about the trichromatic description of the rainbow having a well-known parallel in Old Icelandic mythology. The old belief in the existence of a 'sky-bridge' linking heaven and earth probably made the Christian, namely biblical, rainbow a recognizable and accepted symbol to be easily employed in preaching. I think this is very true precisely with regards to the general and cosmographic topic of the bridge Bilrøst, as it is hinted in Eddic poetry of possible pre-Christian origin.¹²² But things are probably less simple and

121 I mention here only the classic study by Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland*, Royal Irish Academy. Todd Lecture Series 13 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & co., 1906).

122 Namely, *Grimnismál* 44, *Fáfnismál* 15, and presumably *Helgakviða Hundingsbana önnor* 49. Cf. *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, I. Text, ed. Gustav Neckel, 5th ed. rev. Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 1983), respectively 66, 183, and 160.

clear-cut than what Marchand put in very short terms, suggesting that our homilist simply “was attracted to this particular allegory because the Norsemen thought the rainbow (cf. Bifröst) had three colours”.¹²³ As far as the tripartite colour pattern of the rainbow is concerned, it must be observed that Snorri is our sole authority for such a ‘native’ tradition; and how far Snorri may be said to convey a ‘native’ (that is, pre-Christian) point of view is still an open question and a more complex issue than mythological accounts in school books would let one perceive. I would rather suggest that the trichromatic description of the rainbow in *Gylfaginning* – where only the fiery-red colour is clearly mentioned, being linked both to the real flames protecting the passage from the earth to heaven, and to the general collapsing of the world at the end of time – may derive precisely from the learned tradition concerning the allegorical interpretation of the biblical rainbow. This was a very rich tradition, as we have seen, and our analysis of the sermon fragment in the ‘Physiologus manuscript’ has shown that by Snorri’s lifetime it had certainly entered Iceland’s monastic milieu, and had possibly produced very interesting connections with Continental and Irish exegetical models and ideas.

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123 Cf. Marchand, “Two Notes”: 505.

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SUMMARY

The Rainbow Allegory in the Old Icelandic Physiologus Manuscript

Keywords: Old Icelandic homiletic literature, Hauksbók, Rímbeġla, colour-imagery, Christian allegories, biblical exegesis, doctrine of penance, Old German biblical poetry, Old Irish homilies.

The purpose of this paper is to present a new semi-diplomatic edition with textual notes and an overall analysis of a short allegorical sermon fragment on the rainbow preserved in the 'Physiologus manuscript' AM 673 a II, 4to, fol. 9^v. This homiletic text, which has been almost completely ignored by scholars, concerns a trichromatic description and tropological explanation of the rainbow, based on the biblical episode of Noah's flood (esp. *Gen.* 9, 13–16). Two variant versions of it exist, which are found in *Hauksbók* and in the so-called *Rímbeġla*, and they are also taken into account here, together with Christian references to the rainbow within the whole Old Icelandic literary corpus.

The Old Icelandic rainbow allegory is examined against the Latin-Christian background of exegetical literature concerning both general colour-imagery and specific symbolical interpretations of the rainbow, in order to verify possible sources. Some analogues both in Old German biblical epic poetry and in the Old Irish and Continental Hiberno-Latin homiletic production are also investigated.

It is demonstrated that the Old Icelandic homiletic explanation of the colours of the rainbow is rooted in a widespread tradition, but also that it has its own original features. Specific and unfailing connections with the works of the Fathers, above all with the Isidorian tradition and the biblical commentaries of Bede, both in colour-imagery and in the allegorical (historical and tropological) approach, are shown, and some interesting clues are suggested with regards to the doctrine of penance. The possible relevance of the Irish monastic milieu for a triadic and substantially penitential elaboration, that from the concept of 'martyrdom' may have passed on as a more general categorization of the atonement for sins, is also underlined. But, in the end, no analogue can be said to share exactly the same treatment of the colours of the rainbow as it is found in the Old Icelandic allegorical piece. Both in content and in formal layout, our sermon fragment denotes unusual coherence and some originality in bringing together the two different traditions, namely the standard approach of biblical exegesis and the issues raised by the doctrine of penance, which were certainly very momentous for Christians' everyday life and for ecclesiastical preaching in the Middle Ages. It is also suggested that the well-known three-coloured rainbow in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* may derive precisely from this learned tradition.

EFNISÁGRIP

Regnbogatóknsagan í forníslenska Physiologus-handritinu

Tilgangurinn með þessari grein er að koma á framfæri nýrri hálf-stafréttri útgáfu, ásamt skýringum og greiningu, á handritsbroti sem varðveitt er í 'Physiologus-handritinu' AM 673 a II 4to, fol. 9 og inniheldur stutta allegoríska stólræðu um regnbogann. Þessi hómiliutexti, sem fræðimenn hafa nánast engan gaum gefið, inniheldur þriggja líta lýsingu og notkun líkingamáls við að útskýra regnbogann og byggir á sögunni um Nóaflóðið (einkum 1. Mósebók 9, 13–16). Til eru tvær mismunandi endurgerðir textans og er aðra að finna í *Hauksbók* en hina í *Rímbeolu*. Báðar eru hafðar til hliðsjónar hér en einnig er litið til kristinna vísana í regnbogann í öðrum forníslenskum textum.

Forníslenska regnbogatóknsagan er skoðuð í ljósi kristinna ritskýringarbókmennta á latínu, bæði hvað varðar myndmál líta almennt og tilteknar táknrænar útskýringar á regnboganum, í því skyni að komast nær hugsanlegum uppruna textans. Einnig eru kannaðar ýmsar hliðstæður í fornþýskum bibliúkveðskap og í fornírskum hómilíum, sem og í öðrum hómilíutextum frá meginlandinu sem eru ritaðir á latínu en eiga sér írskar rætur. Færðar eru sönnur á að forníslensku útskýringarnar á litum regnbogans séu spröttar úr ríkri hefð, en jafnframt hafi þær sín eigin upprunalegu sérkenni. Sýnt er fram á sértæk og skýr tengsl við verk lærðra munda á miðöldum, sér í lagi við bibliúskýringar Bedas, bæði hvað varðar myndmál líta og allegoríska aðferð (bæði sögulega og sem snýr að notkun lík-

ingamáls), og nokkur athyglisverð atriði eru nefnd sem varða kennisetninguna um yfirlát. Einnig er dregið fram hvernig sú flokkun á fyrirgefningu synda í þrjá hluta sem kemur fram hjá höfundum íslenska textans sýni hugsanleg áhrif frá hugmyndum írskra munkum um þessu þessu þessu sem einnig tengist skiptingu í þrjá liti. Þegar á heildina er litið er ekki að finna nákvæma hliðstæðu í umfjöllun um liti regnbogans í öðrum verkum við þá sem er að finna í forníslenska textanum. Hvað varðar bæði efnistöð og formlega skipan er þetta stólræðubrot óvenju heildstætt. Jafnframt leiðir það saman á nokkuð frumlegan hátt tvær ólíkar hefðir, þ. e. hefðbundnar biblíuskýringar og atriði sem tengjast kennisetningunni um yfirlát, en hvort tveggja hafði vissulega mikla þýðingu í daglegu lífi kristinna manna og fyrir kirkjulega ræðugerð á miðöldum. Í framhjáhlupi er það einnig lagt til að hinn þekkti þriggja lita regnbogi í Gylfaginningu Snorra eigi rætur að rekja til þessarar sömu lærdómshefðar.

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