

MÁLSTOFA

CARL PHELPSTEAD

A NEW EDITION OF BISKUPA SÖGUR¹

1

The one thousandth anniversary of the conversion of Iceland to Christianity is being marked by the publication of a new edition of sagas, *þættir* and other short texts dealing with the history of the church in medieval Iceland. The texts are being included in the *Íslensk fornrit* series published by Hið íslenska fornritafélag and constitute a welcome extension of that series beyond the genres of *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*. Three volumes have so far appeared, with editions of the sagas of Bishop Guðmundr Arason still to come.

The new edition is entitled *Biskupa sögur*, but the contents of the volumes are more diverse than this title might suggest. Alongside a history of the first five bishops of Skálholt there are hagiographic lives of Iceland's two saint-bishops, and *samtíðarsögur* of two later bishops. The new edition also includes collections of miracle stories, fragments of the Latin life of St Þorlákur, a saga about the Conversion of Iceland, and several short narratives (not all involving a bishop) extracted from larger texts. A common aim of all the texts, however, is to ensure, as the author of *Hungrvaka* puts it, that readers may know 'hvernig eða með hverjum hætti at hér hefir magnazk kristnin ok byskupsstólar settir verit hér á Íslandi, ok vita síðan hverir merkismenn þeir hafa verit byskuparnir er hér hafa verit' (*ÍF* XVI:4).

¹ Biskupa sögur I–III. 1998–2003. General editor Jónas Kristjánsson. *Íslensk fornrit* XV–XVII. Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík.

Kristni saga, Kristni þættir, Jóns saga helga, Gísls þáttir Illugasonar, Sæmundar þáttir. 2003. Ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote. *Íslensk fornrit* XV. Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík.

Hungrvaka, Þorláks sögur helga, Jarleinabækr Þorláks helga, Páls saga byskups, Ísleifs þáttir byskups, Latínubrot um Þorlák byskup. 2002. Ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir *Íslensk fornrit* XVI. Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík.

Árna saga byskups, Lárentíus saga byskups, Söguþáttir Jóns Halldórssonar byskups, Biskupa ættir. 1998. Ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir. *Íslensk fornrit* XVII. Hið íslenska fornritafélag, Reykjavík.

The first volume of the new edition (published most recently of those that have appeared) comprises two separate parts, one containing introductory material, and the other the texts themselves. The first part begins with two general essays introducing the edition as a whole. Ásdís Egilsdóttir puts the bishops' sagas into a literary historical context, relating them to European hagiography and to the *gesta episcoporum*. She uses an Icelandic version of a martyr's *passio* (*Lárentíus saga píslarvotts*) and Snorri Sturluson's saga of St Óláfr in *Heimskringla* to illustrate the conventions of hagiography for a non-specialist audience and then proceeds to discussion of the rise of confessors' cults, noting that the Icelandic bishops who became saints belong to a subgroup of 'holy bishops', many of whose *vitae* were translated into Icelandic (p. xvii). Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir contributes an essay which puts the conversion and Christianisation of Iceland into a broader European historical perspective. She also provides a brief overview of some aspects of Icelandic ecclesiastical history, drawing on material other than the bishops' sagas (annals, diplomas and the *máldagar*).

These essays are followed by introductions to the texts which occupy the second part of *ÍF* XV, beginning with *Kristni saga*, which is edited and introduced by Sigurgeir Steingrímsson. This saga, which spans the period 981–1121, can be dated to between c.1237–50 on the basis of comparison with other texts (*ÍF* XV:cliv). A fragment of the text is preserved in Hauksbók (AM 371 4to; copied c.1300) and a complete copy in a seventeenth-century manuscript, AM 105 fol. Sturla Þórðarson has been suggested as a possible author of the saga, but although many saga editors in the past have given the impression that hunting down named individuals as authors of anonymous texts was some kind of obligatory sport, Sigurgeir Steingrímsson seems happy to accept that '[h]öfundur sögunnar er óþekktur' (*ÍF* XV:clv).

The writer of *Kristni saga* provides a fuller (though not necessarily trustworthy) account of events reported in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*. The saga begins with Þorvaldr Koðránsson raiding abroad and encountering and being baptized by a bishop Friðrekr. At Þorvaldr's invitation the bishop comes to Iceland to evangelise, with Þorvaldr acting as interpreter. The activities of the bishop and his assistant open them to ridicule, however, and Þorvaldr takes revenge for some scurrilous verses accusing him of having fathered nine children on Friðrekr. The bishop refuses to remain in his company after this and they go their separate ways. After the failure of a further mission to Iceland by an Icelander called Stefnir, Óláfr Tryggvason sends his priest Pang-

brandr to Iceland. He achieves a notable success by converting Sifðu-Hallr, but also faces powerful opposition, surviving the loss of his horse when the ground opens under him, and the wreck of his ship (attributed by the poet Steinunn to the action of Þórr). When Pangbrandr returns to Norway and reports on his reception the king's anger is assuaged only by two Icelandic Christians, Hjalti Skeggjason and Gizurr hvíti, who promise to go back to Iceland to secure its conversion. When the Christians and pagans meet at the Alþingi, the pagan law-speaker Þorgeirr emerges from under his cloak to declare that all Icelanders are to become Christian. At this point the saga returns to Þorvaldr Koðráðsson and Stefnir Þorgilsson who are both said to have gone to Jerusalem, Constantinople and Kiev, with Þorvaldr dying at Polotsk 'ok kalla þeir hann helgan' (ÍF XV:37). Stefnir is later killed in Denmark. The final part of the saga recounts the role of Gizurr hvíti and his family in the establishment of the church in Iceland.

The longest section of Sigurgeir Steingrímsson's introduction to *Kristni saga* (pp. lxii–cxxix) is a painstaking comparison of the contents of the text with other accounts of the conversion and early ecclesiastical history of Iceland (the relevant texts are helpfully listed on p. lxii). This discussion begins with a summary of the views of the five scholars (only) who have dealt in detail with the question of *Kristni saga's* relations with other texts, from the important and influential work of Björn M. Ólsen published in 1893 to a recent article by Siân Duke which appeared in 2001. Sigurgeir endeavours to keep his presentation of the evidence separate from his interpretation of it. He argues against Ólsen's view that there was a *Þorvalds þáttur* in Gunnlaugr Leifsson's life of Óláfr Tryggvason and in favour of the idea that *Kristni saga* itself was a source for the *Kristni þættir* preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (p. cxxix). Where so much depends on speculation about the contents (or even existence) of lost source texts a variety of views is, however, always likely to remain: Sigurgeir's conclusions contrast remarkably with those of Ólafur Halldórsson later in the volume.

Several short episodes concerning the conversion of Iceland are preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and Ólafur Halldórsson, who was responsible for the recently completed edition of that text, has edited these *þættir* for inclusion here. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* was put together in the first part of the fourteenth century from a variety of sources and Ólafur suggests its compiler intended to produce a comprehensive account of the king's reign comparable to the *Separate Saga of St Óláfr* by Snorri Sturluson

(p. clxi). The base text of the saga used for this edition of the þættir is AM 61 fol, a manuscript from the second half of the fourteenth century. This is the first time the conversion episodes from the saga have been extracted in this way and printed as a corpus, and some readers may question whether there are substantial advantages to be gained from thus detaching them from their context in the larger work.

Porvalds þáttur víðförla provides a fuller, more eventful, and more entertaining version of the life of Porvaldr Koðránsson than that in *Kristni saga*, notably featuring an amusing encounter between Bishop Friðrekr and Koðrán's *spámaðr*. The *þáttur* survives in three versions: A and D are found in texts of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and the third (O version) only in a late paper manuscript (AM 552 k α 4to). The A and O redactions are here printed one above the other, with the very short D version printed separately afterwards. In opposition to Sigurgeir Steingrímsson's introduction to *Kristni saga*, Ólafur Halldórsson argues that this material appeared in Gunnlaugr's Latin life of Óláfr Tryggvason and was translated into Icelandic, providing a source for accounts in *Kristni saga* and in the A and O versions of *Porvalds þáttur* (p. clxxiv).

Stefnis þáttur Þorgilssonar and *Af Pangbrandi* have both been assembled from several sections of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and do not really form entirely independent narratives. *Stefnis þáttur* provides more detail on the background to Stefnir's Icelandic mission and on events after its failure than is found in *Kristni saga*. *Af Pangbrandi* briefly covers Pangbrandr's life before he is sent to Iceland, and his story is continued in the *þáttur* here entitled *Kristniboð Pangbrands*. Ólafur Halldórsson argues that the compiler of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* and the writer of *Kristni saga* must have used the same source for these episodes and suggests this is likely to have been an Icelandic translation of Gunnlaugr's Life of Óláfr Tryggvason (p. clxxxi). *Stefnis þáttur* also has connections with *Laxdæla saga* which Ólafur Halldórsson examines at some length.

Af Piðranda ok dísunum is an often translated and much discussed *þáttur*, telling of Piðrandi Síðu-Hallsson's death at the hands of *dísir*. Ólafur Halldórsson suggests that the reference to this story in *Njáls saga* could support Björn M. Ólsen's view that the episode functioned in Gunnlaugr's account to introduce Pangbrandr's mission, since Pangbrandr later stayed with Piðrandi's father, Síðu-Hallr (*ÍF* XV:cxc).

Svaða þáttur provides an exemplary story of what happens if one attempts

to oppose the followers of Christianity. It and *Arnórs þáttur kerlingarnefs* may be thought of as fables, although in the former case the character appears to be an invention on the basis of a place name and in the latter he is known to have existed. *Þórhalls þáttur knapps* portrays one Icелander's conversion and the prophetic dream which preceded it.

Events at the Alþingi that resulted in Iceland officially becoming a Christian country are recounted in *Kristnitakan*, which corresponds to two chapters of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Although arguing that this episode is based on a source also used in *Kristni saga*, Ólafur Halldórsson suggests that stylistic differences imply that this was added by Gunnlaugr's translator from another text (p. ccix).

The reader of the conversion narratives in *ÍF* XV is also provided with extracts from a number of other texts, providing a comprehensive view of medieval sources for the conversion of Iceland. The relevant extract from Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* is printed and translated on pp. lvii–lviii, and an appendix provides excerpts from Ari's *Íslendingabók*, Theodoricus's Latin history of the kings of Norway, the Icelandic translation of Oddr Snorrason's Life of Óláfr Tryggvason, and the so-called *Kristni þáttur* from *Njáls saga* (chapters 100–105). With these extracts we have moved a considerable distance from the *Biskupa sögur* of the edition's title, and more might have been said about the significance of generic differences between the texts.

The first volume of this new edition also includes *Jóns saga helga*, the life of the first bishop of Hólar and the second Icелander to be recognised as a saint by his compatriots. The editor of this text, Peter Foote is the first non-Icelandic editor to contribute to the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, and this is a fitting recognition of his distinguished contribution to Old Icelandic literary studies, especially in the areas of ecclesiastical and hagiographic literature. His introduction to *Jóns saga helga* is translated by Ólafur Halldórsson and his notes by Jónas Kristjánsson and Guðrún Nordal.

Jón Ögmundarson was recognised as a saint by the Alþingi in the year 1200, seventy-nine years after his death. *Jóns saga helga* appears to have been composed soon after this event, but survives only in three later redactions. Here those versions are designated S, L and H, but they have previously been known as A, B and C, and in volume III of this edition of the *Biskupa sögur*, which appeared five years before volume I, the older nomenclature is still used (see e.g. the reference to the A redaction of *Jóns saga helga* in *ÍF* XVII:

219 fn. 1). This edition of *Jóns saga*, based on Foote's recent edition for the Editiones Arnarnagæana series, uses the S version as a basis, but also includes all material from the L or H versions which might witness to the contents of the lost original version of the saga.

The S version is found in manuscripts associated with Skálholt, the oldest of which (AM 221 fol) is a fragment from c.1300. The whole saga was copied c. 1340 in AM 234 fol, the best preserved text of this version, from which all other surviving manuscripts descend. The L version survives in incomplete form, ending with chapter 25, in Sth perg fol nr 5 from shortly after 1360, and four leaves in AM 219 fol date from around 1400; paper manuscripts from the seventeenth century descend from Sth perg fol nr 5. This redaction is distinguished by its Latinate style, which has been compared with that of Berg Sokkason. Peter Foote concludes his discussion of the evidence for the dating of this version (which includes its intertextual relations with other bishops' sagas and with *Dunstanus saga*) by suggesting that it was produced c.1320 or a little later (p. ccxxxiii). The two surviving manuscripts of the H version (both connected with Hólar) are from the seventeenth century (Sth perg 4to nr 4 and AM 392 4to). This version is closer in style to the S than the L version, but shares one reference to Gunnlaugr Leifsson with the L version and also agrees with L (and some other texts in this collection) in following the chronology of the French or Lotharingian computist Gerland, which is seven years behind our calendar.

Jón is appointed the first bishop of Hólar when Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson is asked to establish an additional see in the north. Jón is said to have been a great preacher and — what is rarer — someone who practised what he preached. He also encourages private devotions among his flock: attendance at the offices, recitation of the Creed on waking, learning the Pater Noster and Creed by heart (chapter 8; the L version adds the Ave Maria, an indication of its later date and the influence of European Marian devotion). Miracles are performed by Jón during his lifetime, but the saga notes that people were reluctant to call them miracles while he was alive, and cites biblical precedent for this (chapter 9). Jón dies on 23 April 1121 and is buried outside the church at Hólar for a little less than eighty years, after which Bishop Brandr has the relics exhumed and brought inside: this edition prints accounts of this event from all three versions of the saga (pp. 271–74).

The rest of *Jóns saga helga* — most of the text — consists of an extensive collection of posthumous miracles, including many healings. A remarkably

large number of the miracles involve women; several others involve priests, and some involve animals: a deacon's horse is cured (twice!) in chapter 45; a cow in chapter 49 and another in chapter 64J; in chapter 64E a horse that fell into deep icy water is miraculously preserved. St Jón also helps a woman find a church key that had been lost six years before (ch. 52). The saga ends by encouraging the reader to call on St Jón when in need and by expressing the hope that Jón may lead us to Paradise at the end of our lives.

Foote's introduction includes a section on the lost Latin *vita* of St Jón by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, a text probably written c.1202–10, and employed in the production of the L version of *Jóns saga*. There is also an overview of the development of Jón's cult in Iceland, especially the observance of his feast days, with detailed reference to legal and liturgical texts. A full discussion of the relation of the original version of the saga to its sources and to other Icelandic texts is also included. Two episodes found only in the L version are printed separately after the text of *Jóns saga* as *Gísels þáttir Illugasonar* and *Sæmundar þáttir*.

The second volume of this new edition includes texts covering the history of the see of Skálholt from its first bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson (consecrated 1056) to the death of Bishop Páll Jónsson in 1211. All the texts in this volume are based on the editions by Jón Helgason (1938–78), normalised, introduced and annotated by Ásdís Egilsdóttir (some deviation from the usual orthography of *Íslensk fornrit* editions is made in order to reflect the older spellings in *Jarteinabók I*, and the more modern spellings in *Þorláks saga C* and *Jarteinabók II*).

Hungrvaka briefly recounts the lives and deeds of the first five bishops of Skálholt, and as a history of a series of bishops' lives it has much in common with the *gesta episcoporum* composed in Europe between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Information is provided on the family background of the bishops, their appearance and personality, election, consecration, period as bishop, and daily life, but the main focus is on each bishop's consecration and death. The final chapter of *Hungrvaka* notes Bishop Klængur Þorsteinsson's choice of Þorlákr Þorhallsson to succeed him and the text ends with a link to the saga of St Þorlákr, suggesting it was intended to be followed by that text.

We are reliant on seventeenth-century manuscripts for the text of *Hungrvaka*, but Ásdís Egilsdóttir's summary of research on the date of the text suggests it was written probably soon after 1206. The author is unknown, though he must clearly have been associated in some way with Skálholt, and

some have argued for common authorship of the series of texts covering the history of the Skálholt see: *Hungrvaka*, *Þorláks saga helga* and *Páls saga*.

The cult of Iceland's first acknowledged saint, Þorlákr Þorhallsson, was recognised in 1198 and the observance of his feast day made law in 1199. The earliest surviving version of the vernacular *Þorláks saga helga* ('A') was probably composed around 1200; the main surviving manuscript is Sth perg fol nr 5 (dated to c.1360). The saga follows the conventions of lives of confessor saints in covering Þorlákr's birth and precocious childhood, his election, his journey abroad to be consecrated, his time as bishop, his death, his later exhumation, and his posthumous miracles. The saga very frequently quotes the Bible, and in her introduction Ásdís Egilsdóttir draws attention to the influence of ideas developed in Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis* and St Augustine's schematisation of the life of man and of the world into six ages (*ÍF* XVI:lxiii–lxiv, lxxii–lxxiii).

Þorlákr is presented as an exemplary bishop, caring for his priests and diocese, keeping long vigils, fasting, reading holy books, and acting as a kind of marriage counsellor trying to keep couples together. It is said that he was unable to live in communion with some chieftains and great men of whose manner of living he disapproved (*ÍF* XVI:75), but the A version of the saga gives no details about his conflict with the chieftain Jón Loptsson. In Þorlákr's final illness Gizurr Hallsson entertains him with exemplary stories and saints' lives. The saint dies on 23 December 1186 (= 1193), thirsting at his death as Christ did (*ÍF* XVI:82).

Þorláks saga byskups yngri (*Þorláks saga B*) is printed here in smaller type. This version is badly preserved in AM 382 4to, from the first half of the fourteenth century, but also survives in a later copy (BLAdd. 11242). A reference to the death of Sæmundr, Jón Loptsson's son, suggests a dating for this version after 1222 (cf. *ÍF* XVI:xxxviii). This redaction is of particular interest for the addition of the so-called *Oddaverja þáttur* detailing events in the conflict between Þorlákr and Jón Loptsson.

The sagas of St Þorlákr conclude with collections of miracle stories (that in the A redaction begins with chapter 20). In addition there are two separate collections of miracles, *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in forna* (*Jarteinabók I*) and *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups in önnur* (*Jarteinabók II*). These various collections overlap to some extent, with most miracles appearing in more than one version. The oldest miracle book, surviving in AM 645 4to (c.1220), was probably composed for reading aloud at the Alþingi when Þorlákr's cult

was promulgated. The second book recounts miracles from the episcopate of Bishop Páll Jónsson. The C version of *Þorláks saga* is preserved with the second miracle collection and/or a younger collection, which covers the years 1300–1325 (this edition prints only chapters 57–70 and 107–32 of the C text in full, as the remaining chapters are close in form to other texts printed here). Two surviving leaves of AM 383 4to II (here designated *Þorláks saga E*) include further posthumous miracles. As in *Jóns saga helga*, most of Þorlákr's many recorded miracles are healings, but there are also several involving the weather. Women are again prominent in the miracle stories and several animals are healed by the saint's intervention. Miracles in the oldest collection all occurred in the Skálholt diocese, as did almost all of those in *Þorláks saga A* and most in *Þorláks saga B*. More miracles that took place abroad (Norway, Shetland, England, Byzantium) are preserved in the C version.

Like *Hungrvaka*, *Páls saga byskups* is preserved only in post-medieval manuscripts, all from the seventeenth century. In her account of research on the date of this text Ásdís Egilsdóttir explains that whereas Magnús Már Lárusson and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson thought the saga was written before 1216, Sveinbjörn Rafnsson has more recently argued that it is younger than *Hungrvaka* and dates from between 1229–35. He also thinks the author could be Loptr Pálsson, the bishop's son (see *ÍF* XVI:cxxx–cxxxii). For understandable reasons, the saga makes much of Páll's connections with his uncle, St Þorlákr. After Páll has become bishop he plays a key role in establishing the cult of Þorlákr; chapter 8, for example, describes the shrine Páll has constructed for the new pilgrimage centre at Skálholt. The saga-writer also pays much attention to Páll's family life, praising his wife Herdís for her domestic accomplishments.

Volume II of this edition also includes *Ísleifs þáttr byskups*, a text preserved in *Flateyjarbók* in the saga of St Óláfr and in incomplete form in a fifteenth-century manuscript, AM 75 e fol 5 (copied when complete in Sth papp 4:o nr 4). It concerns Ísleifr, the son of Gizurr inn hvíti, and tells of his reception by king Óláfr in Norway, and then of his wooing of Dalla Þorvaldsdóttir back in Iceland.

The third volume of this edition includes two fourteenth-century sagas of bishops, *Árna saga biskups* and *Lárentíus saga biskups*. The later date of these texts has been taken account of in their normalisation, with the middle voice inflections and certain other features reflecting fourteenth-century norms.

Árni Þorláksson was born in 1237, consecrated bishop of Skálholt in 1269,

and died in Norway in 1298. His saga, however, ends in the winter of 1290–91. This edition of *Árna saga biskups* is a normalised text based on the diplomatic edition by Þorleifur Hauksson (1972), with a selection from the textual variants he prints. Five vellum leaves survive, two in AM 220 VI fol, mid-fourteenth-century, and three in AM 122 b fol (Reykjarfjarðarbók), not later than 1375. All the many surviving paper copies descend from Reykjarfjarðarbók.

In her introduction Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir provides helpful orientation in the historical and church historical contexts which are vital to an understanding of *Árna saga*. Árni's life spanned a crucial turning point of Icelandic history, during which the island submitted to Norwegian rule and new laws were introduced; this saga is an invaluable historical source for the period with which it is concerned. Árni's support is enlisted by King Magnús when he sends Iceland a new law book, *Járnsíða* (chapter 18), and later in the saga Árni is involved in the implementation of another new law code, *Jónsbók* (chapter 57). Much of the saga chronicles Árni's involvement in the *staðamál*, the dispute over ownership of church property. The narrative is very detailed, often providing an almost day by day account of events. By the end of the saga, when Árni is in Norway in 1290–91, the dispute remains unresolved, but this edition helpfully provides an appendix containing annal entries which outline the remainder of Árni's life and the resolution of the conflicts in which he was involved.

Árna saga's content and style indicate that the author was a cleric, well-informed about canon law and acquainted with Árni's contemporaries, clerical and lay, in Iceland and Norway. The saga seems to have been composed after the conclusion of the dispute over church property which figures so prominently in the text (i.e. after 1297) and before 1309, so during the episcopate of Árni's namesake and nephew, Árni Helgason, and possibly by him (*ÍF* XVII:xxii–xxvii).

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir examines the saga's intertextual relations with the Icelandic annals, letters, *Jónsbók*, *Sturlunga saga*, and *Oddaverja þátr*. Especially in relation to the annals and letters, she acknowledges the importance of the work of the text's earlier editor, Þorleifur Hauksson, whose views she largely follows. Letters are ubiquitous in this saga: though not always quoted verbatim, they are constantly said to be going back and forth between Iceland and Norway and copies of the letters must have been an important source for the saga-writer.

Two vellum manuscripts of *Lárentíus saga biskups* survive: AM 406 a I 4to, from c. 1530, and AM 180 b fol, an abbreviated version from c. 1500. The end is missing in both manuscripts, but other lacunae can be filled from the paper manuscript AM 404 4to. This edition, based on that of Árni Björnsson published in 1969 and collated with the manuscripts by the present editor, prints the two versions one above the other. Laurentius Kálfsson was born in 1267, consecrated bishop of Hólar in 1324 and died there in 1331, although the saga breaks off during Laurentius's final illness and before his death. *Lárentíus saga* is the most important surviving source for the period it covers, but is also a well written and readable text of more than purely historical interest.

The prologue to the saga states that its author was in the bishop's service and drew on both the bishop's own words and on the Icelandic annals in the composition of his text. Although the author does not name himself he has long been thought to be Einarr Hafliðason (1307–93), and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir summarizes both the arguments in favour of this position and what is known of Einarr (of which there is a comparatively large amount (*ÍF* XVII: lxiv–lxxv)). She also details the saga's intertextual relations with annals, letters, and other bishops' sagas and compares the two surviving versions of the saga, providing lists of material in only one or other of the two versions.

Two further very brief texts conclude volume III. *Söguþáttur af Jóni biskupi Halldórsyni* is a brief account of a bishop who studied in Paris and Bologna as a young man, but was a canon in Bergen from 1310 until appointed bishop of Skálholt in 1322; he died on a visit to Bergen in 1339. The *þáttur* includes examples of the kind of anecdote he was renowned for employing in his preaching. It is edited from the oldest surviving manuscript, AM 657 a–b 4to from c.1350. *Biskupa ættir* consists of fragments of genealogies of bishops from AM 162 m fol.

2

The overall title of this new edition (*Biskupa sögur*), suggesting as it does that the texts collected here form a clearly defined group, is more problematic than may at first appear, and the essay by Ásdís Egilsdóttir in volume I of this edition raises important and interesting questions about literary genre. She points out that nineteenth-century scholars treated the bishops' sagas and conversion narratives primarily as historical sources (*ÍF* XV:viii), and this approach has continued to dominate research on the texts. It results in a tend-

ency to divide the *biskupa sögur* into two kinds: sagas of saints and sagas of contemporary church history (p. xxiv). But if some of these texts are *samtíðarsögur* and others are *heilagra manna sögur*, what justification is there for grouping them all together as *biskupa sögur*? Especially, one might add, when in *Kristni saga* and the conversion þættir from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* the central character is not always actually a bishop. Guðni Jónsson included *Kristni saga* in the first volume of his edition of *Íslendinga sögur*, not in the volumes devoted to bishops' sagas. It can, however, be valuable to read these diverse texts about the early history of the Icelandic church as a group, precisely because of, rather than in spite of, their differences of approach and subject matter.

In producing normalised 'reading editions' of the *biskupa sögur* the editors have been mindful not only of the requirements of native Icelandic readers but also of the international body of scholars who use the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. One innovation here that will be particularly welcome to scholars is the provision of proper bibliographies and references. Other features of value to both general readers and scholars — genealogies and maps — have appeared in earlier *Íslenzk fornrit* volumes but have not always been as copious or as handsomely presented as here. When the introductory and other editorial material in these volumes is taken together it constitutes a very considerable contribution to the study of the *biskupa sögur*: the introductions alone provide nearly 700 pages of well-informed scholarship. The reader is also supplied with extensive notes, and lists of popes, bishops and kings with regnal dates. Some, but not all, the texts are helpfully provided with marginal dates for the events recounted.

The production values informing these volumes are of the very highest: each book comes in an attractive colour dust jacket, employs a large, easily readable type for the main texts, and is adorned with a series of sometimes stunningly beautiful and always immaculately reproduced colour plates. These illustrations are a vast improvement on some of those provided in earlier *Íslenzk fornrit* volumes and they provide a valuable visual context for reading the texts. Great care has evidently gone into the selection of appropriate images, which include photographs of medieval Icelandic manuscripts, ecclesiastical furnishings, Lincoln cathedral, and many Icelandic saga-sites. One of the most arresting images is a monochrome photograph of Bishop Páll Jónsson's skeleton in his stone coffin, taken during archaeological excavations in 1954 that powerfully confirmed the saga's account of his burial. High pro-

duction values are also evident in the accuracy of the text (two tiny typographic slips I noticed are highly uncharacteristic: ‘Vauches’ for ‘Vachez’ on *ÍF* XV:cccliii, and the spelling ‘Gurevitsj’ in *ÍF* XV: xiii n. 3 and in the bibliography to that volume: the work referred to was published with the author’s name spelled Gurevich (as it is in *ÍF* XVI)).

Although considerable scholarly interest was shown in these texts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the *biskupa sögur*, with other ‘religious’ literature, have received relatively little attention in recent decades, especially outside Iceland. There is, for example, no chapter on, indeed little mention of, these texts in Clover and Lindow’s *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, and although some of these texts receive attention in the more recent book *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, it is not as a group, but rather insofar as they relate to the contents of chapters on historical writing or saints’ sagas. Icelandic scholars have not neglected the *biskupa sögur* to the same extent (see, for example, the coverage given to the genre in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* I), and these volumes should draw attention to recent work that has perhaps not had the readership it might have had outside Iceland. One hopes very much that this new edition will whet the appetite of scholars — and translators — for further work on the *biskupa sögur* so that they will figure more prominently in Old Norse-Icelandic studies in the future.

There are many reasons why these texts deserve more attention. Firstly, of course, because of the importance of Christianity and of Christian bishops in medieval Iceland. Old Icelandic prose literature begins with a text, Ari Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók*, that devotes a high proportion of its content to the conversion and the first bishops and was submitted by its author for episcopal approval. In the 1070s Adam of Bremen wrote of the Icelanders that ‘episcopum suum habent pro rege’ (*Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* IV:xxxvi (35); ‘they have their bishop for king’) and *Hungrvaka* says of Bishop Gizurr Ísleifsson that ‘var rétt at segja at hann var bæði konungr ok byskup yfir landinu meðan hann lifði’ (*ÍF* XVI:16).

Related to this is the importance of the *biskupa sögur* as sources for political, legal and ecclesiastical history. Many of these texts chronicle conflict between the clergy and those with secular power, Iceland’s own version of a quarrel taking place across Europe in the central Middle Ages. *Hungrvaka* records that the third bishop of Skálholt, Þorlákr Runólfsson, had difficulties with the chieftains (*ÍF* XVI:27–28). In the *Oddaverja þáttur* in *Þorláks saga*

byskups yngri (*Þorláks saga B*) the saint attempts to take control of property that powerful chieftains see as belonging to them: Sigurður Ormsson says of the archbishop on whose instructions Þorlákr is proceeding that 'norðenir menn eða útlendir megu eigi játta undan oss várum réttendum' (*ÍF* XVI:165). Þorlákr faces similar difficulties with the chieftain Jón Loptsson and in that dispute there is an added dimension: sexual ethics. In chapter 23 Þorlákr intervenes in a marriage contracted within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity and in Chapter 25 he excommunicates a man for going to bed with a near kinswoman of his wife. Jón Loptsson is married with a legitimate son, but also has sons by various other women, including Ragnheiður, Þorlákr's sister. Þorlákr charges Jón Loptsson with adultery and with cohabiting with Ragnheiður while his lawful wife is still alive (chapter 26). The conflict culminates in a tense confrontation between Þorlákr and Jón in which Þorlákr's chaplain persuades him not to risk his life by excommunicating Jón. A few months later Jón separates from Ragnheiður and obtains Þorlákr's absolution.

Þorlákr's successor, Páll Jónsson is not able to escape entirely from the conflict between clergy and powerful lay men as he is commanded by his archbishop to support Bishop Guðmundr Arason of Hólar in his conflict with Kolbeinn Tumason (*Páls saga* chapter 15). In the late thirteenth century Bishop Árni Þorláksson is still engaged in a struggle over church property rights which dominates his saga. However, whereas his predecessors had clashed with powerful laymen, Laurentius Kálffsson finds his opponents among the senior clergy. Early in his career, while he is staying in Niðaróss, he becomes involved in the dispute there between Archbishop Jörundr and the cathedral chapter, an involvement which leads to his being attacked and later imprisoned and which affects his relations with other senior clergy throughout his career.

The *biskupa sögur* are also valuable sources for the history of those who are powerless or marginalised. Especially (but not only) in the numerous miracle stories associated with the two saint bishops we see the struggles of ordinary men and, especially, women against the ordinary hazards of a difficult life: accidents, diseases (human and animal), severe weather. *Jóns saga helga* also provides evidence of more unusual female activities: the L version tells of a woman called Ingunn, a learned teacher of *grammatica*, who had Latin books including lives of saints read aloud to her while she was at her needlework (*ÍF* XV:219–20) and in the H version of the saga mention is made of a nun who taught the psalter to a boy called Þórólfr (chapter 20F).

There is much of interest in these texts for the cultural historian, too. The differing attitudes of the bishops to music and poetry is fascinating, for example. While on his foreign travels in Denmark St Jón has a dream in which he sees King David playing the harp, music he subsequently recreates on a harp for King Sveinn (*ÍF* XV:186–87). When he returns to Denmark for his consecration he impresses with the beauty of his singing, which is said to sound more like an angel's than a man's (*ÍF* XV:197). Less endearing, but no doubt saintly, is Jón's refusal to listen to love poetry and his forbidding the young Klængr Þorsteinsson to read Ovid after overhearing him doing so (*ÍF* XV:211–12). *Hungrvaka*, however, describes Bishop Klængr as 'it mesta skáld' (*ÍF* XVI:34) and St Þorlákr appears to have been highly appreciative of the finer things in life: he drank strong drink without it ever being seen to take hold of him and is said to have enjoyed stories, songs, poems, wise conversation, and dreams — but not plays (*Þorláks saga A*, chapter 16). His nephew, Páll Jónsson, returns to Iceland from England an accomplished and learned poet and musician (*ÍF* XVI:298). In Norway, on the other hand, Laurentius is told to stop composing verse and to study canon law instead 'eðr veiztu ei quod versificatura nihil est nisi falsa figura?' (*ÍF* XVII:240) When he takes up his office as bishop he forbids the singing of polyphony on the grounds that it is *leikaraskap* (*ÍF* XVII:375–76).

With the involvement of foreign missionaries and foreign archbishops in Icelandic affairs these texts illustrate the interaction between European and Icelandic cultural traditions in medieval Iceland. This interaction will have been promoted by the education of so many bishops abroad: Ísleifr Gizurarson in Herford, Germany (*ÍF* XVI:6), Gizurr Ísleifsson in Saxland (*ÍF* XVI:14), St Þorlákr in Paris and Lincoln (*ÍF* XVI:52), and Páll Jónsson in England (*ÍF* XVI:297–98).

A reading of these volumes also highlights the significance of what might be called the 'lost Latin literature' of medieval Iceland. Four Latin fragments witness to a Latin *vita et miracula* of St Þorlákr which probably pre-dates the earliest vernacular version. These fragments are here printed at the end of *ÍF* XVI with a parallel translation into modern Icelandic by Gottskálf Jenson (pp. 341–64). The fragments hint at just how much we do not know about the texts that failed to survive the Icelanders' precocious preference for writing in their vernacular language. Latin texts of which not even fragments now survive also figure prominently in the introductions to these volumes, particularly in discussion of Björn M. Ólsen's views on the contents of Gunnlaugr Leifs-

son's lost Latin biography of King Óláfr Tryggvason and the relationship of that text to *Kristni saga* and the *Kristni þættir* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. The shade of Gunnlaugr Leifsson also stalks the introduction to *Jóns saga helga*, for another of his lost works is his Latin *vita* of St Jón.

While some of these *biskupa sögur* are primarily of historical interest and are never likely to compete with the major *Íslendingasögur* or *konungasögur* for the attention of readers who are not professional historians, other texts have much to offer in terms of vividly realised characterisation, memorable narrative episodes, and even humour. One thinks, for example of Bishop Friðrekr's encounter with Konráð's *spámaðr* in *Þorvalds þáttur víðförla*, or of Pangbrandr's exploits in *Kristni saga* and some of the *Kristni þættir*. *Jóns saga* also contains several appealing anecdotes: it is said, for example, that during rebuilding work at Hólar Jón's builder, Þóroddr Gamlason became an expert in *grammatica* by overhearing Jón's instructing ordinands (*ÍF* XV:204). In *Lárentíus saga* the relationship between Laurentius and his tutor in canon law, Jón *flæmingi*, provides several amusing anecdotes that reveal much about the future bishop's personality. When Jón asks Laurentius to help him obtain the vacant living of Maríukirkja, for example, Laurentius points out Jón cannot speak Norse and so would be unable to preach to his parishioners. Jón claims to be able to and gives a very brief example ending in Latin: 'nonne sufficit, domine?' (*ÍF* XVII:243) Laurentius laughs, pointing out that Jón's use of the word *lentin* for Lent would not be understood by his parishioners. In chapter P15 Laurentius plays a practical joke on the unfortunate Jón, convincing him to greet an Icelander with words that do not mean what the great scholar educated at Paris and Orleans thinks they do. It is not only historians who will derive pleasure from such stories.

There was a real need for a new edition of the *biskupa sögur* that would provide accessible texts along with up-to-date editorial material. This *Íslenzk fornrit* edition is a notable and very welcome achievement which admirably meets this need, and will do so all the more fully when completed by the forthcoming editions of the sagas of Guðmundr Arason. All those who have worked on this edition, the editors and also the many other people they thank in their acknowledgements, have together produced a fitting monument for an important anniversary; the best response to their work would be for others to join them in giving renewed scholarly and critical attention to these texts.

WORKS CITED

- Adam of Bremen. 2000. *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Ed. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner. (Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches, 7th edn, Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnisausgabe XI). Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt.
- Árni Björnsson (ed.). 1969. *Laurentius saga biskups*. Handritastofnun Íslands, Reykjavík.
- Clover, Carol J., and John Lindow (eds). 1985. *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide*. Islandica 45. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.). 2000. *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Duke, Siân. 2001. *Kristni saga* and its Sources. Some Revaluations. *Saga-Book* 25.4: 345–66.
- Foote, Peter (ed.). 2003. *Jóns saga Hólabyskups ens helga*. Editiones Arnarnæ Series A 14. Reitzel, Copenhagen.
- Guðni Jónsson (ed.). 1946. *Íslendinga sögur* I. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Reykjavík.
- Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson, and Vésteinn Ólason. 1992. *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* I. Mál og menning, Reykjavík.
- Jón Helgason (ed.). 1938–1978. *Byskupa sögur* 1–2. Editiones Arnarnæ Series A 13. Reitzel, Copenhagen.
- Ólafur Halldórsson (ed.). 1958–2000. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Editiones Arnarnæ Series A 1–3. Reitzel, Copenhagen.
- Ólsen, Björn M. 1893. Om Are frode. *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 8:207–352.
- Þorleifur Hauksson (ed.). 1972. *Árna saga biskups*. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Reykjavík.

Carl Phelpstead
 School of English
 Cardiff University
 PhelpsteadC@cardiff.ac.uk