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THE “QUEST OF SETH” IN OLD ICELANDIC LITERATURE

Sethskvæði and Its Antecedents

Introduction

THE FALL OF MAN is the foundational story in the Christian worldview. Yet, despite Adam and Eve’s importance for the Christian understanding of the existence of humankind as well as good and evil, they “play almost no role in the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, and certainly the legendary aspects of their doings are not developed in any way in its writings.”¹ The problem with the story of the fall of the protoplasts for the inquiring reader, then, is that it is simply too short.² This lack of information has led to the creation of texts that extend the story, further explicating what might have happened after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. These ‘pseudepigraphal’³ texts were written as early as the first century and became wildly popular in the Middle Ages via reworkings and vernacular translations. Amongst these is a story that has garnered little scholarly interest, which concerns what happened to the first human couple and their children (especially Seth) after the expulsion from

- 1 Michael E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1.
- 2 Brian Murdoch, *Adam’s Grace. Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 21.
- 3 Frans van Liere, “The Medieval Canon,” *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 65. Scholars have pointed out that the terms “apocryphal” and “pseudepigraphal” are not always used in the same way. The somewhat standard use of the terms is “apocryphal” for extra-canonical texts of the New Testament, and “pseudepigraphal” for extra-canonical texts related to the Old Testament. However, this usage is not always consistent. For a discussion on the terms used for extra-biblical Adamic literature, see Brian Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the Vita Adae et Evae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–12.

Paradise, a text Esther Quinn calls “The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life” (hereafter *Quest*).⁴ The Old Icelandic rendition of this story is extant in more than ninety manuscripts dating from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, some of which were edited by Marianne Overgaard in *The History of the Cross Tree down to Christ’s Passion* in which she treats the *Quest* as a part of the legend of the True Cross, both in prose and poetry.⁵

In the only in-depth study of the *Quest*, Esther Quinn presents the very problem at hand: that the legend of the True Cross “is not one, but two: first, the journey of Seth to Paradise, and, second, the experiences of the wood which later became the cross.”⁶ She is inferring that there is a pre-history of the *Quest* before it was combined with the Legend of the Wood of the Cross (hereafter, *Cross*), when it was an independent tale in Jewish and, eventually, early Christian literature. Because the joining of the *Quest* and *Cross* happened around the twelfth century, it is standard practice to treat the *Quest* in its medieval Christian form as a part of the Legend of the True Cross material.⁷ The manner in which the *Quest* was preserved in Old Icelandic manuscripts, however, shows that the *Quest* was separated from its medieval partner, the *Cross*, as early as the thirteenth century and treated as its own individual tale, a phenomenon that has not been observed elsewhere in Adamic literature.

The present study examines the prose *Quest* and its poetic counterpart, *Sethskvæði* in Old Icelandic manuscripts, in order to identify – for the first time – an individual transmission history of the *Quest* in thirteenth- to nineteenth-century Iceland. The implications of this newly revealed transmission are substantial, for the *Quest*, in its Christian medieval form, has

4 Esther Casier Quinn, *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Quinn’s monograph, which focuses on both Latin and vernacular texts (excluding Icelandic) is the only study of the *Quest* to date.

5 Mariane Overgaard (ed.), *The History of the Cross-Tree down to Christ’s Passion: Icelandic Legend Versions*, Editiones Arnarnænar, series B, 26 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1968). Overgaard edits twenty-three manuscripts containing prose accounts and twenty-two manuscripts containing poetry but acknowledges in her introduction that there are several texts (albeit mostly poetry) not included in her study. Of those not included are sixty-one known manuscripts of *Sethskvæði* and two additional manuscripts that include the *Quest*.

6 Quinn, *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life*, 8.

7 In addition to Overgaard, Unger edits the *Quest* in Carl R. Unger (ed.), *Heilagra Manna Sögur. Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder*, vol. I (Copenhagen: B. M. Bentzen, 1877), 298–301.

not been identified as an independent text in any other tradition. In other languages, the *Quest* has only been shown to exist in combination with the *Cross* material. This independent transmission illuminates a unique instance in a medieval vernacular when the *Quest* is afforded an afterlife entirely separate from the *Cross* narrative. This study therefore contributes not only to Old Icelandic studies, but also has implications for the study of Adamic pseudepigrapha. A transcription of two texts of the otherwise unedited *Sethsvkæði* is included in the appendix below.

The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life

The *Quest* is a modern title given to the story in question by Esther Quinn.⁸ Carl Unger edits the Old Icelandic *Quest* portion of AM 544 4to (hereafter Hauksbók)⁹ and gives it the Latin title *Origo Crucis*.¹⁰ Theodor Möbius also edits the *Quest* from Hauksbók but gives it the title *Seths för i Paradisum*.¹¹ As such, there has been no common practice for titling the *Quest*. Within medieval Scandinavia, there is a tradition of two circulating versions of the *Quest*: one in which Seth is given a twig from the tree in Paradise, which can be found in Danish church paintings, and the one in question, in which Seth is given seeds from the infamous apple, which is found in Icelandic literature.

The prose *Quest* as is found in medieval Icelandic manuscripts can be summarized as follows. After Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise, Adam, who is now 932 years old¹² and on his death bed, asks their youngest son, Seth, to go on a quest to Paradise to fetch the Oil of Life

8 Quinn does not address her name-giving and why she settled on The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life. She also refers to the tale as The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Mercy and The Seth Legend throughout her 1962 study. For simplicity, I have chosen to use the title which is also the title of her book-length study, *The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life* (abr. *Quest*).

9 Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 544 4to.

10 Unger, I: 298.

11 Theodor Möbius, *Analecta Norrænna. Auswahl aus der isländischen und norwegischen Litteratur des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichsische Buchhandlung, 1877), 204–7.

12 Traditionally Adam is 930 years old when he dies, but he appears as 932 years old in Hauksbók as well as AM 727 II 4to (text E in Overgaard), and AM 65a 8vo (text B1 in Overgaard). Brian Murdoch notes that Adam also dies 932 years old in a medieval English version of the *Quest*, in Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the Vita Adae et Evae*, 78.

(also called the Oil of Mercy) in order that he may live longer. Seth agrees to go as he asks and bids his father to tell him the way. Adam tells Seth to go eastward, where he will find a set of black and grassless footsteps (a result of their sin), which are tracks left from when he and Eve walked out of Paradise. Seth finds the way and comes to the gates of Paradise, where he meets an angel, who tells him to look inside and describe what he sees. He looks in and sees beautiful flowers and fruits and, in the middle of Paradise, their irrigative source, a spring from which four rivers flow: the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates.

Next to the spring is an apple tree, which is black and without bark, reminding Seth of his parents' footsteps out of Paradise.¹³ Seth tells the angel what he saw, and the angel asks him to look in a second time. This time Seth sees a snake twisted around the trunk of the same tree. Seth describes what he sees, and the angel asks Seth to look in a third time. This time, the apple tree is incredibly tall, reaching up to the heavens, and on top of it sits a baby in swaddling clothes. Seth looks down and sees the roots of the tree reach deep into hell, where he sees the soul of his brother Abel. He tells the angel a third time what he has seen. The angel explains to Seth that the baby he saw is Christ, who will be the Oil of Life for all humankind, indicating that he will not receive the oil that day for his father, for it will come later in the form of Christ. Before Seth leaves Paradise, the angel gives him three seeds from the apple of which Adam and Eve ate. The angel tells Seth to put them in the mouth of his father Adam after he dies, for from them will grow three great trees: one cypress, one pine, and one cedar, which represent the trinity, three unique species stemming from the same source. Adam dies, Seth does as he was asked, and three trees grow from Adam's corpse.

In some texts, the *Cross* follows after this portion of the legend. This material that has been amalgamated with the *Quest* tends to vary greatly. Generally, it tells of the finding of the three trees (sometimes one tree,

13 This image is often tied to "the dry tree" motif. For an overview, see M. R. Bennett, "The Legend of the Green Tree and the Dry," *Archaeological Journal* 83.1 (1926): 21–32; Rose Jeffries Peebles, "The Dry Tree: Symbol of Death," *Vassar Medieval Studies*, ed. by C. F. Fiske (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923) 57–79; Rosanne Gasse, "The Dry Tree Legend in Medieval Literature," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 38 (2013): 65–96; and Eleanor Simmons Greenhill, "The Child in the Tree: A Study of the Cosmological Tree in Christian Tradition," *Traditio* 10 (1954): 323–71.

sometimes branches) by Moses and/or David, and how they were used up until the time of Christ, often including a story of Solomon, who attempts to use the wood to build his temple, albeit unsuccessfully. Lastly, the story tells of how the wood of the tree(s) was used to make the cross on which Christ was crucified.¹⁴

The Roots of the *Quest*

This seemingly short story has a rather long history, one that is worthwhile reviewing in order to appreciate the complexity that has led to its appearance in Old Icelandic manuscripts. Tracing the precursors of the *Quest*, however, leads us through a tangled web of transmission. From the medieval period, stories of the protoplasts' post-Eden exile and their children's adventures are found in several vernaculars as well as in Latin. The *Quest* had a former life, considerably antedating Christianity, before it was integrated into the medieval True Cross material (see figure 1).¹⁵ Legends of Seth are found in Talmudic and Midrashic lore that can be traced back to Egypt because there was a Jewish sect in Egypt around the first to fourth centuries CE, the Sethians, whose Seth was an amalgamation of the biblical Seth and the Egyptian god Seth (Set).¹⁶ The Sethians authored several Gnostic texts and might have been responsible for the earliest forms of the *Quest*.¹⁷ The Sethians believed that Seth was the Christ; it follows that Christians would have wanted to amalgamate the story of the *Quest* into the orthodox Christian belief structure via the additions of the three glimpses into Paradise, culminating with the vision of Christ in the tree, who would be the savior. This,

14 For a more detailed summary of this material, see Mariane Overgaard (ed.), *The History of the Cross Tree*, XXXX.

15 Quinn, *Quest*, 8.

16 Barbara Baert, *Heritage of the Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 315; Christian Onasch, "Der ägyptische und der biblische Seth," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 27 (1980): 99–119; Barbara Baert offers an extensive discussion on the Gnostic roots of Seth as a character in, "Revisiting Seth in the Legend of the Wood of the Cross: Interdisciplinary Perspectives between Text and Image," *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 144.

17 Quinn, *Quest*, 29; A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 6.

and of course the combination of the *Quest* with the *Cross*, would erase the heretical aspect of Sethianism and put the focus on Christ as the redeemer.¹⁸

While the roots of these legends can be traced to pre-Christian Judaic literature, the extant material evidence dates to the Christian period.¹⁹ The earliest extant version of the *Quest* (albeit quite different from the one summarized above) is found in the Jewish pseudepigraphal text *The Apocalypse of Moses*, written in Greek but thought to be a translation of an Aramaic text from the first century CE.²⁰ The earliest Christian adaptation of the *Quest* is found in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which includes only a passing mention of Seth going to Paradise for the Oil of Life. This mention is also found in the Old Norse-Icelandic adaptation of the text, *Niðrstigningsarsaga*.²¹ The *Apocalypse* is thought to have been adapted into Latin, with much modification, in the form of the *Vita Adae et Evae*, probably around the fourth century CE.²² In both the *Apocalypse* and the *Vita*,

18 For an overview of the history of Sethianism and the texts connected to the Gnostic group, see Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, 81–117.

19 Murdoch, *Hanz Folz and the Adam-Legends: Texts and Studies*, 3.

20 Quinn, *Quest*, 15–16. For a summary of this text, see Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, 18–19. An updated edition can be found in D. A. Bertrand, *La vie grecque d'Adam et Eve*, *Recherches Inter testamentaires* 1 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1987).

21 Dario Bullitta, *Niðrstigningar Saga. Sources, Transmission, and Theology in the Old Norse "Descent into Hell,"* Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Series 11 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). English translation found on 135–36; Old Norse-Icelandic edition found on 159–60.

22 Quinn, *Quest*, 31; D. S. Russel, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London: SCM, 1987), 14–16. For a summary of this text, see Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, 16–18. The establishing of a single *vita* is not possible, as the texts are fluid. Meyer nevertheless printed an edition and separated the known manuscripts into three classes, mostly based on German exemplars. His class III, the *vita* material with the *Cross* material, is what is found in Old Icelandic literature. Mozley makes a new edition, this time based mostly on English manuscripts, and shows that there is even more variation than was evident in Meyer's work, noting that some *Cross* material was expanded to include the legend of the eight parts of Adam. More details of this classification can be found in Murdoch, *Hanz Folz and the Adam-Legends: Texts and Studies*, 4; J. H. Mozley, "The 'Vita Adae,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1929): 121–47. For a potential connection between the eight parts of Adam and Norse mythology, see Grant Macaskill, "The Adam Traditions and the Destruction of Ymir in the Eddas," *The Embroidered Bible: Studies in Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in Honour of Michael E. Stone*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 653–669. Murdoch notes that, "Most important of all, however: the Adamic narrative represented by the Latin *vita* continues to change and develop when it moves into the vernacular. The Latin tradition provides the basis for an equally complex

Seth and his mother, Eve, go to Paradise in search of the Oil of Life, whereas in the True Cross material, Seth goes alone.

The legend of the True Cross first appears in Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²³ The earliest extant text of the combined *Quest* and *Cross* is found in a manuscript from c. 1170 of the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* by Johannes Belet, but in this version Seth brings back twigs instead of seeds.²⁴ The twig version appears in several medieval church vault paintings in Denmark, most dating to the fourteenth century.²⁵ The seed version, which appears in Old Icelandic literature, eventually becomes more popular than the twig version and in due course triumphs as the most common version found in vernacular offshoots.²⁶ The pairing of Seth with the seeds had an allegorical underpinning: in Gnostic texts, Seth is seen as the "seed" of his great generation, with the Coptic word for "seed" and "Seth" looking very similar.²⁷ Jerome and John Cassian recognized Seth as Abel's replacement and thus a "new progenitor," which allowed him to become the originator of the Holy Cross.²⁸ In this sense, it is possible to see the story of Seth receiving seeds to be planted in his father's corpse as a more orthodox version of the Gnostic idea, connecting Seth to Christ and again distancing the text from the heretical Sethian idea of Seth as the saviour. Another element to consider is Augustine's interpretation of Seth's name as "resurrection" (*resurrectio*),²⁹ which adds further allegorical

series of vernacular adaptations, with differences of genre and context causing further variations." Murdoch, *Adam's Grace. Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature*, 30.

23 Quinn, *Quest*, 50

24 Quinn, *Quest*, 11; 88; 103.

25 See Barbara Baert, "The Figure of Seth in the Vault-Paintings in the Parish Church in Östofta," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 66.2 (1997): 97–111. The same author gives an overview of medieval church art concerning the *Legenda* in a wider geographical area in "Adam, Seth and Jerusalem. The Legend of the Wood of the Cross in Medieval Literature and Iconography," *Adam, le premier homme*, Micrologus' Library 45 (Venice: SISMEL, 2012) 69–99.

26 This version, in which Seth receives three glimpses into Paradise, the last glimpse culminating in the vision of a child in the branches of a dry tree, and lastly receiving seeds which grow from Adam's corpse into the cross, is classified as "Class III" of the four classes of the *Vita*. Murdoch, *Adam's Grace. Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature*, 28–29.

27 Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, 92.

28 Baert, "Revisiting Seth in the Legend of the Wood of the Cross," 143–44.

29 Barbara Baert, "Seth of De Terugkeer Naar Het Paradijs," *Bijdragen Tot Het Kruishoutmotief in De Middeleeuwen* 56.3 (1995): 316; Baert, *Heritage of the Holy Wood*, 314.

meaning to Seth's role in planting the seeds which are to become the cross on which Christ will die and thereafter be resurrected.

The combining of the *Quest* with the *Cross* material – which Barbara Baert calls “The Seth-Wood of the Cross Motif”³⁰ – came about undoubtedly because of a desire to typologically connect the Fall of Man with the redemption. That is, to link the tree of knowledge from which Adam and Eve ate with the wood of the cross-tree and the subsequent crucifixion of Christ on that same tree, completing the circle of corruption–redemption.³¹ This widespread typology was rooted in third-century glosses of Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 which connected the tree of knowledge with the cross, for which a longer explicit narrative lacked in canonical scripture.³² The seed version of the *Quest* combined with the *Cross* material fills this gap while also strengthening the typology that is alluded to in the canonical Bible. The seed version of the *Quest*–*Cross* combination can be traced to a thirteenth-century Latin text, which Meyer terms the *Legenda*.³³ It is this *Legenda* material that Overgaard is most concerned with in her 1968 edition and is also the material that forms the source of the only version of the *Quest* known in Icelandic. It is thus the *Legenda* from which the *Quest* is separated in Old Icelandic literature when it eventually becomes a standalone tale in *Sethskvæði*. Material that appears solely in this version of the *Quest* is the seared footsteps and the three glimpses into Paradise.³⁴ The development is simplified in Figure 1.

The editing practices of Mariane Overgaard give a false impression that there is one “Legend of the True Cross” (*Legenda*) in Icelandic manuscripts, divided into subsections, as well as a number of poems which treat the same homogenous material. This, however, is not the case, as there is indeed much striking variation amongst the prose texts, even within

30 Baert, *Heritage of the Holy Wood*, 321.

31 An overview of this typology in art, both in Scandinavia and wider Europe, and its connection to Norse mythology is given in Annette Lassen, “The God on the Tree,” *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009), 234–40.

32 Delbert W. Russell and Tony Hunt, “Two Anglo-Norman Inedita from MS Douce d.6,” *Florilegium: The Journal of the Canadian Society of Medievalists/La revue de la Société Canadienne des Médiévistes* 24 (2008): 64.

33 W. Meyer, “Vita Adae et Evae,” *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Klasse der königlichen bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 14.3 (1878): 185–250.

34 Both Quinn and Baert claim that the seared footsteps and three glimpses into Paradise cannot be found elsewhere. Quinn, *Quest*, 108–10; Baert, *Heritage of the Holy Wood*, 322.

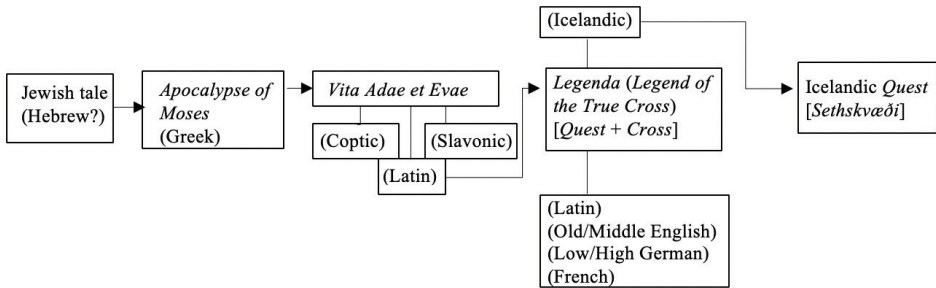


Figure 1: *The Quest as a standalone text in Icelandic literature.*

Overgaard’s subsections. Upon a closer evaluation of the manuscripts containing the *Quest*, it becomes apparent that there are three main developments to be traced which indicate preferential bias towards the *Quest* as a standalone text. The extant evidence does not make clear whether these three trends happened simultaneously or chronologically, eventually culminating in the creation of *Sethskvæði*.

Abbreviation

Firstly, there is a practice of shortening the second part of the *Legenda*, the *Cross* narrative. Of the known Icelandic manuscripts containing the *Legenda*, there are three examples that display this practice. The earliest instance of this abbreviation of material is found in Hauksbók³⁵ from the late thirteenth century. The *Quest* appears on folio 17r with the rubric *H[ua]ðan kominn er drottinn[ns]*. Overgaard edits this manuscript as text A, comparing it side by side with a seventeenth-century manuscript, AM 65 a 8vo.³⁶ In comparison with this early modern example, which includes the full story of the *Cross*, the Hauksbók version includes the *Quest* in the expected detail, followed by an abbreviated story of the *Cross* on folio 18v, which begins with *en svo segist*. Overgaard has found no comparable summary in other manuscripts.³⁷ This might indicate that the *Cross* material was not viewed as being as important as the *Quest* material, which

35 Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, AM 544 4to.

36 Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree*, 1; Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 65 a 8vo.

37 Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree*, XL–XLIII.

is copied more faithfully. Within the summary of the story of the cross, the tree is dropped into a bog (OIce. *fen*) instead of the usual lake, adapting the landscape to a more Nordic one. Taking into consideration that the oldest form of this *Legenda* version can be found in a thirteenth-century Latin text, we should acknowledge the voguish scholarship of Haukr and his scribes. It has been claimed that Haukr and his copyists consciously condensed the texts in Hauksbók and that this abridgement was due to his interest in historical content rather than artistic narrative.³⁸ With this in mind, we could interpret the shortening of the *Cross* material as a nod to the contemporaneous historical importance of Seth's travel narrative, not least the medieval credence that Paradise was a literal place on earth.

Similar to – yet more succinct than – the text found in Hauksbók, the seventeenth-century AM 727 II 4to³⁹ written by Jón Guðmundsson lærði (edited as text E in Overgaard) includes the full text of the *Quest* and then a noteworthy summary of the *Cross* material. We are told on folio 12v that Jón will include in the following a part of *Setz reysu*, even though it is known throughout the land and in *Adamz bók*:

Læt eg hier med fylgia nockud af Setz reysu þott hun sie hier all-vijda j landinu. Og j Adamz bók.⁴⁰

After Jón is finished with *Setz reysa*, we find a scribal interjection once he reaches the *Cross* material, explicating the fate of the three tree sprouts:

So stödu þeir þar fra Adam til Noa. F[ra] Noa til Abrahamz. fra Abraham allt til Moyses. etc. Hier skrifa Jeg ecki meira af. þuiad so vijda er umm þetta efni og fleira bædi i Jslenskum bokum og Hollenshum [*sic*] annalum.⁴¹

38 See Sverrir Jakobsson, "Hauksbók and the Construction of an Icelandic World View," *Saga-Book* 31 (2007): 24, 29; *Hauksbók: The Arna-Magnaean Manuscripts*, 371, 4to, 544, 4to, and 675, 4to., ed. by Jón Helgason, Manuscripta Islandica 5 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), x, xii, xviii.

39 Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 727 II 4to.

40 Ibid., 12v, lines 26–27.

41 Ibid., 13v, lines 17–19.

Jón continues by listing other texts in which similar information about Paradise can be found. He cites several saints’ lives in Old Icelandic, such as *Mattheus saga postula*, as well as *Nichodemi guðspjöll* (*Niðrstignings saga*). In this way, Jón’s commentary acts as a reference guide to the reader, informing them where they can find the same and similar themes elsewhere. In this instance, scribal interjection can clarify the coeval attitude towards the text in question. Not only does Jón’s gloss tell us that by 1644 the story of the *Cross* was widely known in Icelandic books, but it also shows that Jón found it more worthwhile to copy or write out the *Quest* to a greater degree than the *Cross* material. This is the first extant instance of the *Quest* being copied alone without at least a summary of the *Cross* material at the end of the *Quest*.

In a nineteenth-century example, ÍBR 113 8vo⁴² (edited as text G in Overgaard), the *Quest* is followed by a short summary of the *Cross* material, similar to that found in Hauksbók. This example, however, was compiled from the poems *Sethskvæði* and *Krosskvæði* and supplemented by the *Legenda* material; it is therefore a new creation using old(er) material.⁴³ The rubric of this re-worked material shows favour towards the *Quest* material: *Hier skriffast æfenntíjr af Adam og Set sjne hanns*. The text is exactly what the rubric indicates, for the summary of the *Cross* material is so short, roughly one-sixth of the text as a whole, that the preponderance of the text is the *Quest*.⁴⁴ The practice of using pointed rubrics that favour the *Quest* material is representative of a larger trend, which will be discussed further in the following section.

42 Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, ÍBR 113 8vo, 197r-202v.

43 Overgaard, CXL.

44 The abbreviation of the Holy Cross material in the manuscript is as follows: “Allt til þess Salomon kongur liet smýða það mustere drottens og þá var þetta trie upp hogguid og skilde hafast til musterezinz biggingar enn það var imist óf lant edur óf skamt og var þui þá og burt kastad ut á völlenn. enn þá mustered war algjört þá kóm drottningenn af Zaba af Austurrýkium ad sköda þá dýrdarmætu bigging musterezinz og dýrd Salomoniz. og sá það sama trie á vellenum liggja. og sagde það trie ecke gött vere þui a þui mun verda drepinn og deyddur hialparenn allra manna. enn Salomon villed eida þessare spá drottningarennar og liet taka það trie og sockua þui j diupa leirtiörn. og birgia það rammliga med tórfe lep og gríote. og so lá þar þetta trie j leirnum tuo heimz aldra og vmm þann týma er drottinn vor Jesus Christur var fæddur þa þornade leirtiörnenn upp. sast þetta trie og var so vr leirnum teked litlu fyrrer hannz pýnu og var drottin vor Jesus a þui sáma trie króssfestur til enderlausnar og hialpar ollumm mōnnum annarz fórtapader. Fines.” ÍBR 113 8vo, 201v, line 11–202v.

Rubrics

The second development is the use of rubrics for *Legenda* material that only refer to the *Quest* and not the *Cross*. In these six manuscripts, the story of the cross is not abbreviated, but instead the *Legenda* is found in full, further exemplifying the remarkable use of rubrics that ignore the role of the *Cross* in the story. Our first example is found in AM 65 a 8vo, dated to the seventeenth century. That the *Quest* was the most important part of the text to the scribe copying or recording it is demonstrated by the title, which draws special attention to the beginning of the *Legenda* (i.e., the *Quest*) through the rubric *Eitt æfintir af Adam*.⁴⁵

For the medieval audience, rubrics “gloss the text and cue ‘sedimented reading habits’ which in turn determine the context for the texts’ interpretation. For the modern reader, the rubrics serve as written records of the reading experience and allow us to filter through the ‘sedimented layers’ of [...] reading habits and interpretive patterns.”⁴⁶ The text itself tells us a lot about what was interesting or important to readers in the time period in which the manuscript was produced, but the rubrics give us a further look into how these texts were classified and read. AM 65 a 8vo offers a first glimpse at the trend of rubricating the *Legenda* material with titles that label the ensuing story as that of Adam and Seth rather than that of the story of the True Cross.

Further examples include the late seventeenth-century Lbs 457 4to, which titles the *Legenda* material *Fróðleg frásaga af Adam og Seth hans syni*, assigning no importance to the material that follows the *Quest*.⁴⁷ The rubric appears on the last line of 154v, but 155r is blank, and text begins on the first line of 155v.⁴⁸ Similarly, ÍBR 74 4to, which is dated to 1782, includes the *Legenda* which is titled *Hier skrifast Eitt Æfinntyr af Seth*.⁴⁹ This specification that the text is about Seth is entirely the doing of the scribe, as ÍBR 74 4to is a transcript of Lbs 1228 8vo, which entitles the

45 Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 65 a 8vo, 59r.

46 Benjamin C. Withers, “Unfulfilled Promise: The Rubrics of the Old English Prose Genesis,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 28 (1999): 112.

47 Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 457 4to.

48 This is a rather strange occurrence, being the only blank page in the manuscript, and it is not at the beginning or end of a quire.

49 Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, ÍBR 74 4to, 99v, line 1.

Legenda material *Hier skrifast eitt Æfinntýr*.⁵⁰ A transcript of the already-discussed AM 65 a 8vo, the eighteenth-century NKS 1140 fol. entitles the *Legenda* with *Æfentýr af Adam*; however, the table of contents calls the text *Seths-Reisa*.⁵¹ Our fifth example, Lbs 791 8vo, dated to 1888–89, uses the rubric *hier skrifast dálítill saga af Adam*.⁵² In a final example, SÁM 157, dated to 1880–95, includes a title of the *Legenda* seven lines long: *Dálítill saga af Adam þegar hann var rekin ur paradís og þegar hann sendi Seth son sinn i aldin garðin og um upp komu þess tres sem Kristur var kross festur á og fleira sem á er vikið*.⁵³ The *Legenda* texts in Lbs 791 8vo and SÁM 157 are clearly related. The two examples belong to Overgaard's *Legenda* version C, which is a *Legenda* text that is extensively padded with historical and biblical details, such as the story of Cain and Abel and the story of the flood. As such, the *Quest* takes up only roughly 15 per cent of the text, accentuating the curiosity of the choice in titles.

In his study of religious romance, Keith Busby shows that rubrics, "by their subject and placement [...] can even suggest an interpretation" of the text in which they occur. His study shows that the rubrics secularize the otherwise religious story in question and, in a way, even "re-write" it.⁵⁴ The rubrics in our study function similarly as Busby's example; the use of the terms *æfintýr* and (*frá*)*saga* guides the reader towards *exemplum* rather than a strictly biblical story, steering away from the Holy Cross as the centre of the tale and instead focusing on the trials of Adam and Seth, the rubric "re-writing" the tale's main point.

Separation

The third main development is the eventual existence of the *Quest* as a standalone text without the *Cross*. The previously discussed AM 727 II 4to can be seen as an example of this third development, as it does not include any part of the *Cross*. Still, Jón lærði writes specifically that he

50 Overgaard, XLVIII; Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 1228 8vo, 128r, lines 1–2.

51 Copenhagen, The Royal Library, Ny kgl. sml. 1140 fol., pp. 39–57. This manuscript is a transcript of the last part of AM 65 a 8vo.

52 Reykjavík, Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Lbs 791 8vo, p. 61, lines 1–2.

53 Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, SÁM 157, 42v.

54 Keith Busby, "Rubrics and the Reception of Romance," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, 53.2 (1999): 140.

chooses not to include this material, so I have chosen accordingly to nest this manuscript's evidence under the first development, 'abbreviation.' The most striking example of the *Quest* as a standalone text is the more than sixty unedited manuscripts of the poem *Sethskvæði*.⁵⁵ The poem includes exclusively the *Quest*, its earliest witness dating to 1676–77 in AM 148 8vo, *Kvæðabók úr Vigur*. It is a dramatic retelling of the *Quest* with much more emotion added to the story. The poet, Jón Pétursson from the farm Saurar in Álftafjörður, begins and ends the poetic *Quest* with language that turns the poem into a personal prayer, in thankful meditation on the possibility of receiving redemption from Adam's sins, through the cross. Yet, the connection between the *Quest* and the Holy Cross is limited to two of fifty verses, making only the necessary mention that the three pips became the cross, which brought salvation from Adam's transgressions. My transcription of verses 45 and 46 come from the first of the two *Sethskvæði* that appear in AM 100 8vo; the poem is transcribed in full in the appendix. Verse numbers and placement vary according to manuscript:

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| 12r | 45. | Af þeim kornum ur hannz munn
eirn spratt þirne runnur
þesse sǫgn er þíóðum kunn
þidur elsku brunnur
djrstur drottenn minn
þar vaxande þuj á trie
þolde daudann sinn |
| 12v | 46. | Adam firre át af trie
Øllum kom j dauda
enn vor Jesus ætla eg sie
ending sárra nauda
á krosse kualldest hann
ad endur lausn oss orkad fieck
og óvin sigra vann |

55 Natalie M. Van Deusen and Kirsten Wolf, *The Saints in Old Norse and Early Modern Icelandic Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 75–76. The only printed form of the poem is a facsimile of a manuscript in which it appears, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 148 8vo (*Kvæðabók úr Vigur*), in Jón Helgason (ed.), *Kvæðabók úr Vigur. AM 148, 8vo. Ljósprentaður texti* (Copenhagen: Hinu íslenska fræðafélagi í Kaupmannahöfn, 1955), 116v–121v.

Overgaard chooses not to edit *Sethskvæði* because she posits it contains the same *Quest* material from the *Legenda*:

This poem, which is probably from about 1600, has never been edited and has not been included in the present edition, partly because it does not contain any independent material of significance but first and foremost because it survives in a great number of MSS with varying texts, apparently being recorded from oral tradition on more than one occasion. If an edition of the poem were to be anywhere near exhaustive, it would take up a disproportionate amount of space and fall outside the scope of this book.⁵⁶

Naturally, the wording and content have been reworked to fit the poetic form, so despite Overgaard's assertion that it does not contain "independent material," the poetic *Quest* does contain unique imagery and vocabulary, as is made evident in the transcriptions below. She notes herself that the poem "contains a number of details which are not found in any Icelandic or Latin prose texts, but these details are for the most part merely descriptive and they are probably to be ascribed to the poet."⁵⁷ Beyond enriching our knowledge of Icelandic literature, the details found in *Sethskvæði* illuminate new directions in pseudepigraphal literature of the Middle Ages. That there are a large number of manuscripts which contain great variation reveals that there is a wealth of unique elements waiting within the *Sethskvæði* manuscripts.⁵⁸

The afterlife of the *Quest* as its own text in Icelandic literature is in line with the structural history of the *Legenda* material, for the *Quest* portion – although it was extensively altered from its beginning until the medieval period – was copied more faithfully than the cross material, exhibiting "stylistic and structural superiority" over the story of the *Cross*.⁵⁹ That readers appear to have been interested mainly in the *Quest* portion of the

56 Overgaard, *The History of the Cross-Tree*, XX.

57 Ibid., CXLI.

58 One notable variation found between texts is the number of verses. Both Kälund and Páll Eggert Ólason claim that the poem has 44 verses; the below transcriptions prove that to be not true, as poem one contains 50 verses and poem two, 40. See Páll Eggert Ólason, *Menn og menntir siðskiptaaldarinnar á Íslandi*, vol. IV (Reykjavík: Bókaverzlun Ársæls Árnasonar, 1926), 623.

59 Quinn, *Quest*, 105.

Old Icelandic *Legenda*, presents an interesting development in the long history of the evolution of the *Quest*. This phenomenon was also present in medieval Denmark in the form of iconography and probably precedes the separation of the *Quest* and *Cross* that occurred in Iceland. Images of the story of Seth appear separately from images of the *Cross* both in manuscript illuminations and in medieval Danish church vault paintings, likely stemming from German influence.⁶⁰

Pondering Genre in the *Quest*

The Adamic literature describing the life of the protoplasts and their family after they are expelled from Paradise “constitute[s] one of the most widely-known legend-cycles of the Middle Ages.”⁶¹ This accounts for the almost one hundred manuscripts containing the *Quest* in Icelandic. This popularity was likely escalated because the *Quest* fits easily into several secular and religious genres. Further, distinction in the Middle Ages between pseudepigraphal and canonical texts was not as strict in practice as one might think, and Brian Murdoch goes as far as suggesting that medieval readers of vernacular stories containing biblical materials and characters would not have distinguished between them at all.⁶² In short, despite clear doctrine having been put in place at the Council of Rome in 382 CE determining a biblical canon, there was still not a clear vision of what an extra-biblical text was in the Middle Ages. This ambiguity lends to apocrypha and pseudepigrapha texts as hybrid texts – functioning as theology, history, and secular literature.⁶³ As pseudepigrapha, the *Quest* should be seen as a genre-crossing story that functioned in several ways for its readers.

The individual use of the *Quest* is testament to the richness and creati-

60 “Around 1400 thus, Seth and the wood of the Cross also operate iconographically outside the tradition of the legend of the Cross, as an illustration for Genesis passages in world chronicles and verse Bibles. These German manuscripts could have reached Denmark along trading routes.” Baert, “The Figure of Seth in the Vault-Paintings in the Parish Church in Östofte,” 102.

61 Brian Murdoch, *Hanz Folz and the Adam-Legends: Texts and Studies*, Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 28 (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1977), 3.

62 Brian Murdoch, *The Medieval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 49.

63 Murdoch, *Adam's Grace. Fall and Redemption in Medieval Literature*, 49.

vity of the literary tradition in medieval and post-Reformation Iceland. A tale such as Seth's is appealing for several reasons. In comparison with the *Cross*, the *Quest* is straightforward: one main character (Seth), one main goal (to fetch the Oil of Life), and one destination (Paradise). In contrast, the content of the *Cross* varies widely, frequently an amalgamation that juggles different, often varying stories of biblical characters over a vast period of time – between the death of Adam and the Crucifixion. The themes of the *Quest* resonate with enthusiasts of various genres, including romance, itineraries, travel narratives such as the *viðförla* sagas, and biblical or theological material.

In English and continental traditions, the *Quest* has been linked with Arthurian romances. Esther Quinn connects Seth's quest for the oil with the quest for the grail. She posits that Malory's fifteenth-century Middle English reworking of *Le Morte d'Arthur* includes an episode that is influenced by the *Quest*.⁶⁴ Similarly, Barbara Baert connects Seth's vision of the infant Christ in the tree with a scene in the twelfth-century Old French continuation of the *Perceval* romance, noting that the imagery in *Perceval* precedes the extant witnesses of the *Quest* as found in the *Legenda*.⁶⁵ Seth's journey is not unlike that of a knight's; both go on a quest to complete a task or goal, during which they must venture out into unknown lands. The main facets of chivalric romance such as court culture are naturally lacking, due to the setting and intended time period, but the theme of love is deeply embedded in the narrative. Seth goes on his quest first and foremost because of love for his father and the desire to have him longer on earth. The narrative takes a turn when he is unable to retrieve the oil to lengthen his father's life; his quest then shifts to his duty as progenitor of the wood of the Holy Cross, which, as is already known by the reader, culminates in the ultimate act of love and sacrifice, the Crucifixion.

Probably the most perennial aspect of the story, however, is the journey to Paradise. Travelling to Paradise was a popular theme in medieval literature, not least in Old Icelandic.⁶⁶ In AM 727 II 4to, the scribe Jón

64 Esther Casier Quinn, "The Quest of Seth, Solomon's Ship and the Grail," *Traditio* 21 (1965): 185–222. Quinn claims that a part of the *Tale of the Sankgreál*, which tells of a ship built by Solomon that includes three spindles whose origins stem from a branch Eve brought from Paradise, was directly influenced by the *Quest* in the *Legenda*.

65 Baert, *Heritage of the Holy Wood*, 329–33.

66 For discussion on the manifestation of this theme in Old Icelandic literature, see David

Guðmundsson lærði mentions *Óddáinsakur* in connection with the *Quest*. He titles the very beginning of the *Quest* with *Odains akur Eða oþolnandi Ferð*,⁶⁷ followed by the sentence, *Eigi hef eg af oðru odains akur lesið Enn Paradíjs sem Adam var i settur*.⁶⁸ In this sense, we could see the *Quest* on par with stories such as *Eiríks saga víðförla*, in which the saga's namesake travels to Paradise (also referred to in the saga as *Óddáinsakr*). This short tale was very popular, evidenced by the more than sixty extant manuscripts from the fourteenth to twentieth centuries.⁶⁹ Additionally, the themes of the two texts are intricately linked in that they discuss theological matters important to salvation.

In her study of the thirteenth-century Picard-French Andrius manuscript (Bibliothèque Nationale Fr. 95), Esther Quinn notes that its contents are largely Arthurian, the *Quest* and the *Cross* legends placed at the end of the codex.⁷⁰ She uses this codicological evidence to speculate about the medieval French perspective on the genre of the *Quest*. That is a valid conclusion when working with manuscripts in their original state; however, Old Icelandic manuscripts have been separated and rebound extensively, for a large part by Árni Magnússon himself, indicating that the extant bindings are often not reflective of original practices of categorizing texts according to theme or other factors.⁷¹ However, these “unstable codicological boundaries”⁷² in the Icelandic corpus tell us a variety of other useful things about the history of a text. For example, the manuscript ÍBR

Ashurst, “Imagining Paradise,” *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature. Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th–12th August, 2006*, ed. by John McKinnel, David Ashurst, et al., vol. I (Durham: The Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 71–80; Rosemary Power, “Journeys to the Otherworld in the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur*,” *Folklore* 96.2 (1985): 156–75; Sverrir Tómasson, “Ferðir þessa heims og annars. Paradís-Óddáinsakur-Vínland í íslenskum ferðalýsingum miðalda,” *Gripla* 12 (2001): 23–40.

67 Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 727 II 4to, 12v, line 25.

68 Ibid, 12v, lines 25–26.

69 Kolbrún Haraldsdóttir, “*Eiríks saga víðförla* í miðaldahandritum,” *Gripla* 30 (2019): 49.

70 Esther Casier Quinn, *The Penitence of Adam: A Study of the Andrius MS. (Bibliothèque Nationale Fr. 95 folios 380r–394v)* (University, Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 1980).

71 For a detailed study on Árni Magnússon's practices in rearrangement, see Beeke Stegmann, “Árni Magnússon's Rearrangement of Paper Manuscripts,” (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2016).

72 Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, “Manuscripts and Codicology,” *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. by Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Rikhardsdóttir (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 100.

113 8vo has a cover page that dates the collection of items to 1844. The *Legenda* appears on 197r–202v. The outer-facing leaves of the *Legenda*, 197r and 202v, are significantly darker than the inner leaves, as well as the surrounding leaves, 196v and 203r.⁷³ The text is contained in its own quire. This likely indicates that the *Legenda* in this manuscript was previously circulated as a standalone text before it was integrated into the collection, which would mean that it is older than the date of binding and/or compilation, 1844.

While the instances in other vernacular traditions of the *Quest's* connections with certain genres might not always be applicable to the Old Icelandic exemplars, they do testify to the *Quest's* hybridity as a text. It is not fully pseudepigraphal but also biblical; not only about biblical happenings but also about adventure into the unknown; not only about a son attempting to save his father but also about the son of God redeeming humankind. The *Quest* can mould to the reader's needs, and therein lies its charisma.

Concluding Remarks

Unlike Adam, not all texts are created in the image of the divine. Some receive an overwhelming amount of critical attention despite their relatively few extant manuscripts; others fall out of vogue, or never even make their debut, despite their profuse attestations. Luckily for Seth, the winds of scholarship are continuously shifting directions. His once popular story, reporting to the reader of the very seeds from which salvation sprung, will no longer indulge in lying dormant within the pages. Forty to fifty verses later – depending on the text – the reader (or hearer) of *Sethskvaði* is filled with hope for the future, for in Seth's journey to Paradise, the murkiness of the biblical narrative is made clearer, offering up a detailed account of how Adam and Eve's transgressions are to be redeemed through the joining of the forbidden fruit with Adam's corrupted corpse. Adventure, supernatural visions, death, and rebirth: a medieval or modern reader could ask for nothing more in a short story.

73 I am indebted to Beeke Stegmann for this point.

Appendix: A Transcription of the Two *Sethskvæði* in AM 100 8vo

An example of a codicological unit that was altered by Árni Magnússon can be found in the manuscript used for the following transcriptions of *Sethskvæði*, AM 100 8vo.⁷⁴ The manuscript includes two *Sethskvæði*, followed by a fragment of *Krossdrápa*. The first poem 1r–13v, was taken from a larger manuscript that belonged to Jón Vídalín, which is indicated on the flyleaf just inside AM 100 8vo, written in Árni Magnússon's hand. It is tempting to speculate that Árni assembled these three poems together because they share a similar theme, but in practice it is impossible to know his reasoning. The two *Sethskvæði* poems are in different hands and scripts, but are dated to the same period, c. 1700–25.⁷⁵ Beyond their differences in appearance and origin, the contents also deviate from one another. The first poem, 1r–13v, includes fifty stanzas, while the second, 15r–21r, contains only forty. There is some variation amongst the order of the verses, as well as their contents. Below, I have transcribed both poems using the first, longer poem as a foundation and lining up the verses of the second poem side by side with the first for comparison. For the most part, the second poem follows the verse order of the first, although several verses are skipped along the way. A notable exception is found in the second poem's verse 6, which is only preserved in part and corresponds to verse 26 in the first poem. Additionally, verse 4 in poem two does not correspond to any verses in poem one. *Sethskvæði* has never been published in full; what follows is but a snippet of the great variation found within the poem in the extant sixty-one manuscripts.

Emendations

This is a semi-diplomatic transcription, as I have chosen to expand all abbreviations. The first poem does not include numbering of verses; I have added them for ease of reading. I have kept the scribe's method of marking vowels.

74 In older literature, this manuscript is often referred to as AM 99 c 8vo.

75 Kristian Kålund (ed.), *Katalog over Den Arnemagnæanske Håndskriftsamling*, vol. II (Copenhagen: Kommissionen for det Arnemagnæanske Legat & Gyldendal, 1894), 390–91.

Two Sethskvæði in AM 100 8vo

1r	Þetta kallast Seths kvæde	15r	Eitt kvæde Vel=gamallt
	1. Otte drottins upphaf er allra vitsku greina hann hinn same hialpe mier huggun allra meina bæde liöst og leint alldrei mun mier epter það af jllum lōstum meint		1. Otte drottins upphaf er allra viskugreina hann hinn samj hialpe mier huggun allra meina bædj liöst og leint alldrej mun mier epter það af illum vītum meint.
	2. Draps hōfðinginn daudenn jnn drōst j edlid manna riett sem vottar Ritninginn rædu efnid sanna O Jesu sigur sōl		2. Drāps hofðingen daudin inn drōst i edlid ¹ manna riett sem vottar ritning inn og rædu efnid sanna og Jesus sigur sōl
1v	firer drejra dropana þjn mig dragdu j nādar skiōl		fýrer dreira dropana þin mig dragdu i nādarskiōl.
	3. Gud doms miukre glæde vm mic Geislar Jesu blidu þjn velldis maktinn veg samlig vatn og blōd af sidu þide þrotann minn sifellt med mier sid og ār sinda eg Jōkul finn		
	4. Skōpunar frā eg skire bōk skada sem Adam hrepte Eva þa bannad eplid tōk ōllum giædum slepte þuj eitrud ofundar kind		3. Skopunar frā eg skire bōk skadan sem Adam hrepte þegar hun Eva eplid tōk og ollum giædum sleppte þvj eijtrud ofundar kind ad þeim drō þan illa prett Orms i vondre mind.
2r	ad þeim drō þann jlla prett Orms j vondre mind	15v	4. Hofudid ormsins herran kvad hijrlegt kvennmanns sæde mola skal sundur i margann stad þvj munud þid frelsast bædj. Þvj miskunar Oleum mætt ýckur vid mig aptur skal j eijlifa koma sætt.

1 *edled* is crossed out in the main text and *edlid* written in the margin.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>5. Riettlætess so mistu mekt
miðg voru ber og nakenn
plicktud under sára sekt
suo j burtu hrakenn
vr prudre para ðis
j dalnum Ebron duðldust þau
sem drottinn baud alvís</p> <p>6. Þau vofðust so vm veralldar bigð
vist firer nedan dalinn
mættu ejmdum mædd af hrigð
j marg skins naudum kualinn
það enn er arfur vor</p> <p>2v þuj likt neidar prauta strid
er þvingan holldsins stór</p> <p>7. Adam griet enn alldrei hló
vm af brot giørde þeinkia
Jdran heit j briðste bið
bukinn ried ad kreinkia
marg fallt sotta safn
j kalldre þiarning kost giæfinn
ad kalla a drottins nafn</p> <p>8. Olust þørninn af þeim mörð
efter herrans bode
sialfur drottinn sende biðrg
samt var nærre vode
og aumlegt ættar mein</p> <p>3r loder vid kinslod lönqum slikt
og litt er hun firer það hrein</p> <p>9. Þrenn þriu hundrud þreitte år
þennann heimsins alldur
heidurs madurinn hiartta klår
helldur luenn og kalldur
niu og tuttugu nær
til skogar verka valla vel
var þa leingur fær</p> <p>10. J bakenu kende hann lang giæ/tt lu\
limina fieck það þvingad
so talande sig vid nu
nær sendast mun mier hingad</p> <p>3v það miskunar olium mætt</p> | <p>5. Riettlætis þä minstu megt
miðg svo ber og naken
pligtug under sára sekt
so i burtu hraken
úr prúdre Paradis;
i dalnum Hebron dvöldust þaug
sem drotten baud alvís</p> <p>7. Vofðust þaug umm veralldar býgd
vist fyrer nedan dalenn
mættu eimdum mædd af hrigð
j mörqum söttum kvalin
þadan er arfur vor</p> <p>16r þingist af þvj þrautar strid
og þvingun holldsins stór.</p> <p>8. Þrenn þriu hundrud þriätü år
þennann heimsins alldur
heidurs madurenn hiartaklår
helldur lüenn og kalldur
nüu og túttugu nær
til skögar verka varla vel
var fyrer elle fær.</p> <p>10. J bakenu kiende hann lānggiætt lu
sem limena alla þvingar
so talandj sig vid nu
nær sendast mun mier hingad
það miskunar oleum mætt</p> |
|---|--|

- sem lifande drottinn lofade mier
ad leisa mjna ætt
11. Adam fram á axar skaft
eirn dag stidiast giörde
vm manndomz afl og megniss kraft
margan ellenn skerder
hun för einz med hann
so göfuglegur sem gefenn var
af Gude j veralldar rann
12. Son minn godur Seth hef eg þier
sende för til buna
helldur mun þier hægra enn mier
ad hlaupa spored nuna
þvj þu ert vakur og vis
fagnadar sækia frietter mier
og fara j para dis
13. Eingill ver þann alldingard
eirn med nõktu suerde
sidann ad eg sekur vard
og særleg af brot giörde
fardu og findu hann
frædt mun hann geta fullvel þig
vm Frelsarann Gud og mann
14. Ferdalag mun frestast mitt
þuj feta eg veiginn ecke
vt ad rietta erjnded þitt
þuj øngua bráut eg þecke
minn hiarttanns Faderenn hir
mig of sækia á midre leid
mein søm grimdar dir
15. Suarade Adam son minn kiær
sialfur drottinnz Ande
heil næma þier huggun fær
svo² huerfur allur vande
barn mitt burt frá þier
blessan mina beint med gråt
bæta vil eg til hier
- sem lifandj drottenn lofadj mier
ad leýsa mina ætt.
9. Adam framm á axar skapt
eirn dag stidiast giörde
manndöms afl og megnis kapt
mörgum ellenn skerder
hun för eins med hann
so gierfelegur, sem gefenn var
af Gude i veralldar rann.
11. Sonur minn gödur Seth hef eg þier
sende ferd til büna
helldur er þier hægra | enn mier
ad hlaupa spored núna
þvj þu ert vakur og vis
fagnadar sækia frietter mier
og fara i Paradis.
12. Eingill ver þann alldingard
eirn med nõktu sverde
sidan ad eg sekur vard
og særleg afbrot giörde
fardu og findu hann
frædt mun hann geta fullvel þig
umm frelsarann Gud og mann.
13. Ferdalag mun frestast mitt
þuj feta eg veigen ecke
ut ad rietta erinded þitt
þvj aungva braut eg þecke
minn hiartans fader hijr
mig of sækia á midre³ leid
meinsóm skemdar dýr.
14. Svarade Adam son minn kiær
sialfur Drottinnz Andj
heilnæma þier | huggun fær
hverfur allur vande
barn mitt burt frá mier
blessun minne beint med gråt
býta vil eg þier.

2 *svo* is written in the margin before *huerfur*.

3 *leid* is crossed out here and written again.

16. Þegar við miuklat móður þín
mistum dirdar giæde
5r augliös er su augna sîn
ad við geingum bæde
suört og suidinn spör
siást mun æ vm sagða tíð
su sinda minning vor
17. Alldrei græn enn suidinn og suört
siást þau ockar sporinn
ad við feingum jlla giört
þuj er sâ sjnda sorinn
Eilif a minning
grænkast alldrei get eg þau fir
enn giörest það mikla þing
18. Seth ried iâta sagdre grein
og sidann hiöninn kuadde
5v þannenn dira dandess suein
dagsins liosed gladde
förrinn fann alvis
allann dalinn Ebron rann
og upp ad paradis
19. Hann kende þar Eingil cherubin
kominn með nõktu suerde
Erindinn föðurs og so sin
vt hann skira giörde
og sagdest sende mann
ad frietta vm drottinz firer heit
sem fordum lofade hann
20. Eingill suarade jnn gack þu
vm alldinn gardsins hliðinn
6r helldur drottinn heit og tru
þo heims sie alldur lidinn
og lang giæð lifsins tíð
su mun koma framm sidarmeir
sigur vinninginn blid
21. Jnn gieck Seth og sidann sier
sömann dirra giæða
jlm og änga bestann ber
bilt mun vm ad ræða
vesölum vesling mier
15. Þegar við miuklât möder þín
mistum dýrdar giæde
augliös var su augna sîn
ad við geingum bæde
svört og sviden spör
siást mun æ umm sagða tíð
sýnda minning vor.
16. Alldrej græn enn svidenn og svört
siást þar ockar sporen
ad við feingum illa giört
þvǽ er það, sýnda þarin
eýlif äminning
grænkast alldrej get eg föýr
enn giörest það mikla þing.
17. Seth ried iâta sagdrǽ grein
sidann hiönenn kvadde
17v þann hinn dýra dändis | svein
dagsins liösed gladde
förrinn fann alvis
allan dalen Ebron rann
upp ad Paradis.
18. Sâ hann þar eingil Cherubin
senn með nocktu sverde
erenden föðurz og svo sin
üt hann skýra giörde
og sagdest sendemann
ad frietta umm drottins föýrheit
sem fordum lofade hann.
19. Eingillin sagde inn gack þu
umm alldengardssins hliðenn
helldur drottenn hiet og tru
þö heims sie alldur lidenn
og läng giæð lifsins tíð
su mun koma framm sidar meir
sigurvinningenn blid.
20. Jnngieck Seth og sidan sier
18r sömann allra giæða
ýlm og änga bestan ber
bid mun umm ad ræða
vesölum vesling mier

- huxa giörde hann vm slikt
 huad firer augun ber
22. Annare huor þar eikinn laut
 6v eins og fadmast villde
 med blöma skart og besta skraut
 af blidre drottins millde
 kuister og laufinn liös
 blærinn heite bærde það
 sem blankade himnesk rös
23. Vjn og vidsmiör mätte få
 meir enn nóg ad smacka
 hunangs kelldur hreinar sä
 hönun ber ad þacka
 er situr ⁴i soddann stad
 epter þessa æfe tid
 vnne oss Jesus það
24. Sadning fieck af soddann dird
 7r seggurinn lucku sterke
 vt mun verda alldre skird
 ägiæt drottinz merke
 nie hannz há tigninn nein
 þo tale fra Adam til domz dags
 tungann huor Sem ejn
25. J midium garde madurinn sier
 mikla eik og suarta
 suiddinn þorklaus suört hun er
 su kann ecke ad skarta
 ørm og lika aum
 Seth ried lita soddann trie
 vid sárann vaknar draum
26. Allt frá rotum upp til midz
 7v er hun j giegnum rifinn
 mestur hlute mannlegs frids
 munde j burtu drifinn
 þä át hann af henne blöm
 hier firer vrdu hiöninn tuo
 ad hafa þann rietta dom
27. Höggorm litur halurinn hir
 hana j giegnum skrida
- hugsa giördj hann umm slikt
 hvad fyrrer augun ber.
21. Annare hvor þar eiken laut
 einz og fadmast villde
 med blöma tru og besta skraut
 af blidre drottins millde
 kvister og laufen liös
 blærenn litell bærde þeim
 sem blankandj himnesk rös.
22. Miölk og vin þar mätte få
 meir enn nóg ad smacka
 hunangs kiellur hreinar þä
 honum ber ad þacka
 sem situr i soddann stad
 epter lidna æfetid
 unne oss Jesus það.
23. J midium garde madurin sier
 mikla eik og svarta
 18v snoden börk | laus sýndest hier
 su kann ecke ad skarta
 órm ad lita og aum
 Seth⁴ ried lita soddann trie
 vid sarann vaknade draum.
- 15v *6. Allt frá vótunum inn til mids
 þä at hann af henne blöm
 hier fyrrer urdu hiönen tvö
 ad hafa þann rietta döm.
- 18v 24. Höggorm litur haluren hýr
 hana i gegnum skrída

4 The letter *l* is crossed out just before *reid*.

- vt og jnn hann avallt snir
so alldrei giører ad bida
vm eitt augna blík
fieck þær skrifter falsarinn
firer sin þolvud suik
28. Forbannad Seth fældeſt trie
8r furdu hryggvann⁵ sette
higgur viſt það sama ſie
ſem ſvikarenn drö ad prettye
þa forelldra froma ſueik
þvj er hann jafnann frá kualenn
vid þeſſa enu ſömu eik
29. Ogn hrædſlu ad hönun ſlö
aptur a bak ried venda
jdrun heit j briöſte biö
bad ſier miſkun ſenda
dirann drottinn ſinn
ſiäſtu vm betur ſorgadu ei
ſagde Eingillinn
30. Otta ſleigenn þä um ſig leit
8v Eik ſä fagra ſtanda
biärta og hreina j blöma reit
blessan heilags Anda
mätte merkia þar
heita mä það himneſk röſ
ä huörium kuiste Var
31. Birtann ſkiær enn laufinn liös
lieku ä vidarens greinum
hätt ad vexte j huirfle röſ
af himna liöma hreinum
drottinn dird ſie þier
langtum fegra lifa vann
enn leiptred ſölar er
32. J limunum þeſſ ens liöſa tries
9r leit hann ſuein barn ſitia
upp haf þider andar fleſ
aumingianna ad vitia
liking lausnaranns
- ut og inn hann ävallt snir
alldrej giörer ad bida
umm eitt augnablik.
fieck þær ſkriffter falſarenn
fyrer ſin bolvod ſvik
25. Forbanad það fældeſt trie
furdu hriggvann sette
hýggur viſt það sama ſie
ſem ſvikarenn drö ad prettye
þa forelldra fröma ſveik
þvj er hann iafnann þra kvalenn
vid þeſſa sömu eik.
26. Ogn og hrædſlu ad hönun ſlö
aptur äbak ried venda
ydrun þrätt i briöſte biö
bad ſier miſkun ſenda
dýrann drottenn ſinn
ſiäſtu umm betur
ſorgadu ej ſagde Eingillinn.
19r
27. Otta ſleigenn umm ſig leit
eik ſvo fagra ſtanda
biarta og fagra i blöma reit
blessun heilags Anda
mätte merkia þar
heita matte himneſk röſ
ä hvorium kviste bar.
28. J limenu þeſſ hins liöſa tries
leit hann ſveinbarn ſitia
upphaf þider andar fieſ
var aumingianna ad vitia
liking lausnarans

5 *blödan* is crossed out and *bryggvann* written above.

- daud leg tunga ej dicta kann
 vm dird og pride hanns
 33. Fegre enn sól su fǫgar heim
 frá eg barnid sindist
 j hialpar garde helgum þeim
 hǫnum Seth ad tindist
 angur og allskins mein
 af þeim sueine allt j kring
 edla Geislenn skein
 34. Gledinnar olium Gudzson þar
 9v giörde j Eik ad sitia
 hann ein mær j hollde bar
 þa heimsins giörde ad vita⁶
 og leisa af lǫstum hann
 treigin vr hiartta titt og þrátt
 enn tár af augum rann
 35. Arm vt breiddann ǫllum baud
 sem ä hann villdu trua
 helvitiss frá hættre naud
 ä hialpar veiginn snua
 veröldinn vjst er aum
 vill hun helldur vakna seint
 af vondum sinda draum
 36. Eingillenn þa sagde Seth
 10r sæt legt hialpar efne
 sem Almättugur Gud Adam hiet
 Oleum dirt eg nefne
 drottinns dirdar son
 af hǫnum ättu og allt þitt kin
 endur lausnar von
 37. Fardu og seigdu fǫdur þin
 huad firer þig bored hefur
 jntu hǫnum ordinn min
 hann vt af eimdu sefur
 þa lidinn er litil stund
 Gud vill ad þier grafid hann
 jgræna veralldar grund
- daudleg tunga ej dicktad fær
 umm dýrd og pride hanz.
 29. Arm ut breiddan ǫllum baud
 sem ä hann villdu trua
 helvítis fra hættre naud
 ä hiälparveigen snua
 verölden vjst er aum
 vill hun helldur vakna seint
 vid vandan sýnda draum.
 30. Eingillen sagde siä nu Seth
 19v sæt | legt hiälpar efne
 sem almattugur gud Adam hiet
 Oleum dirst eg nefne
 Drottins dýrdar son
 af hónum ättu og allt þitt kin
 endur lausnar von.
 31. Fardu og seigdu fódur þin
 hvad fyrrer þig bored hefur
 intu hónum orden min
 hann ut af deýr og sefur
 þä lidenn er litel stund
 Gud vill ad þier grafed hann
 i græna veralldar⁷ Grund.

6 Likely a scribal error, *vita* should be *vitja*

7 *lund* is written after *veralldar* and crossed out.

38. Priu korn fær eg⁸ þegninn þier
 10v þau skalltu halurinn läta
 nær fader þinn andast frægur hier
 fill þu þennann mäta
 adur enn grafenn er
 vnder tungur tignar manns
 tiäer suo drottinn mier
39. Set vard gladur sidann gieck
 senn a stad og kvadde
 korninn mætur kappinn fieck
 kiätinn hiartad gladde
 fir greind förinn fann
 fliotur liette ej ferdu fir
 enn fódur sins bigd ad rann
40. Adam heylsar synenum sin
 11r sætt og kissa näde
 jntu sonur erjdinn þin
 af ædsta hialpar ræde
 feingid hefur þá fregn
 halur þa komstu heim til vor
 hrestest allt mitt megn
41. Hermde allt huad heirde og sä
 hann vr paradjsu
 Adam þä j brun suo brä
 hann broste og hlö ad visu
 enn alldreij ädur fir
 sidann gieck frá sælldar braut
 j surar daudanns dir
42. Hann leit augum himna til
 11v og hugde ej meir ad vjlast
 volldugur drottenn veit þau skil
 vil eg nu giarnann huilast
 af langre sinda sekt
 þitt miskunar Oleum miukt og blidt
 mier er elskulegt
43. Þadann j frá vm þridia dag
 ad þegninn sottar kende
 liet sier falla liuft j hag
32. Priu korn fæ eg þegnenn þier
 þaug skallt haluren läta
 nær fader þinn andast frægur hier
 fýll þu þennann mäta
 ädur enn grafenn er
 under tungu tignar manns
 tiade svo Drottinn mier.
- 20r 33. Seth vard gladur sidan gieck
 senn ä stad og kvadde
 kornenn mætur kappenn fieck
 kiäten hiartad gladdj.
 fyrrgreind fören fann
 fliótur ej liette fórum fyr
 enn fódur sins bygder rann.
34. Adam heilsar synenum sin
 sætt og kyssa näde
 ýntu sonur erinden þin
 af ædstu hiälparrade
 feinged hefur þu fregn
 halur þä komstu heim til vor
 þa hrestest allt vort megn.
35. Hermde allt hvad heýrde og sä
 hann ur Paradisu.
 Adam þä i brun so brä
 hann broste og hlö ad visu
 enn alldreij ädur fyr
 20v sidan gieck | frá sælu i burt
 i sürar daudans dir.
36. Þadann i frá umm þridia dag
 þegnenn sottar kiende
 liet sier falla liufft i hag

- þá líkn af drottens hende
ad hujla holld og blöð
vt af sofnar jdrun med
þuj andlätz stund var göð
- 12r 44. Sidann korninn Seth j munn
snum fōdur lagde
riett sem eingils ræðann kunn
reknun firer sagde
þeir grietu og gröfu hann
so hefur daudinn sjdar meir
sokt huørn veralldar mann
45. Af þeim kornum vr hannz munn
eirn spratt þirne runnur
þesse søgn er þiōðum kunn
þidur elsku brunnur
djrstur drottenn minn
þar vaxande þuj ā trie
þolde daudann sinn
- 12v 46. Adam firre āt af trie
øllum kom j dauda
enn vor Jesus ætla eg sie
ending sārra nauda
ā krosse kualldest hann
ad endur lausn oss orkad fieck
og ovin sigra vann
47. Miōg er rād ad litil liōd
loksins falle nidur
bid eg jdur þørninn göð
ad blessann Gudz og fridur
æ vm krjnge oss
firer djrstann drottinn vorn
er daudann þolde ā kross
- 13r 48. Eg mig gled þo enn vid þad
þa er eg vr heime lidinn
hiā vngu folke eige stad
sem elskar digd og fridinn
ad lære skilnings skj
þeir sem vilia þeinkia j hug
vm þetta æfinn tjr

- þä líkn af Drottens hende
ad hvila holld og blöd
ut af sofnar ydrun med
þvj andlätz stund var göð.
37. Sidan kornen Seth i munn
sinum fódur lagde
riett sem eingils ræðann kunn
reckum fyrrer sagde
þeir grietu og gröfu hann
so hefur dauden sīdar meir
sökt hvern veralldar mann.
38. Af þeim kornumm ur hanns munn
uppspratt þyrnerunnur
21r þesse sögn er | þiōðum kunn
þidur elsku brunnur
dýrster Drottenn minn
þar vagsande þvj ā trie
þolde daudan sinn.
39. Adam fyrrer sitt āt af trie
óllum kom i dauda
enn vor Jesus ætla eg sie
ending slíkra nauda
ä krosse kvaldest hann
ad endurlausn oss orkad fieck
og övin sigra vann.

49. Med sálu og holde skaparinn /skjr\
 skrid eg þier ad fótum
 fride mig Jesus frelsarinn dir
 vr fiándans kiäfte liótum
 og alla mjna ætt
 enn þa nalgast andlát \mitt/⁹
 vt af sofne eg sætt
- 13v 50. Brátt ed stutta bragar lag
 so bjde mædu þrotinn
 sónar vjn vm sunnudag
 sendest bendest brotinn
 fer eg so efne frá
 einum Gude æra sie
 vm allar allder Já
40. Brátt hid stutta bragarlag
 bið mædu þroted
 sónar vjn umm sunnudag.
 sundur bendest broted
 fer eg svo efne frá
 einum Drottnj æra sie
 umm allder allda Já
 Amen.

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9 *stund* is written after *andlát* and crossed out.

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ÁGRIP

„Quest of Seth“ í forníslenskum bókmenntum: *Sethskvæði* og fyrri gerðir þess.

Efnisorð: Biblíufræði, kvæði, þýðing, Gamla testamentið, krossinn helgi

Í þessari grein er því haldið fram að Sethskvæði sé ljóðræn endurvinnsla á texta sem Esther Quinn hefur kallað „The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life.“ Þessi staðhæfing er þýðingarmikil vegna þess að „Quest of Seth“ hefur einungis þekkt sem hluti Kross sögu. Bakgrunnur frásagnarinnar „Quest of Seth“ er rakinn í upphafi greinarinnar, allt frá hebreskum texta hennar og fram til þess er hún birtist í norrænum handritum. Þróun hennar er skýrð á þrjá vegu sem stuðla að sköpun Sethskvæðis. Í fyrsta lagi er það stytting Kross sögu sem hluta af *Legenda* („Quest of Seth“ og saga krosstrésins), í öðru lagi notkun fyrirsagna (e. *rubrics*) sem gefur til kynna að sagan sé um Adam og Seth frekar en um krossinn og í þriðja lagi er því haldið fram að Sethskvæði byggist á ljóðrænni frásögn af „Quest of Seth“ án Kross sögu. Þar sem Sethskvæði hefur aldrei verið gefið út í heild sinni þá fylgja í viðauka tvær uppskriftir þess úr handritinu AM 100 8vo.

SUMMARY

The “Quest of Seth” in Old Icelandic Literature: *Sethskvæði* and Its Antecedents

Keywords: Apocrypha, Biblical Studies, Hagiography, Old Testament, Poetry

In this article, *Sethskvæði* is identified as a poetic re-working of a text which Esther Quinn calls “The Quest of Seth for the Oil of Life.” This connection is important not only for Old Icelandic studies but also for the study of pseudepigrapha and apocrypha, because the *Quest* has not been preserved elsewhere in medieval or early modern literature separated from the Legend of the Holy Cross. The transmission of *Sethskvæði* is traced from its early Judaic beginnings up to its inclusion in Icelandic literature. Three trends are explored: the shortening of the Legend of the Holy Cross in the *Legenda* (The “Quest of Seth” plus the Legend of the Holy Cross), the use of rubrics that title the text as having to do with Adam and Seth rather than the Holy Cross, and the eventual existence of the *Quest* on its own in the form of *Sethskvæði*. Because *Sethskvæði* has yet to be edited, a transcription of two versions of the poem from AM 100 8vo is included in the appendix.

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