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THE LOST LITURGICAL BOOKS OF ICELAND

Understanding the Aspiciensbækr

ICELANDIC HISTORY and culture has long drawn scholarly interest in large part because of its books. The collections of surviving sagas and poems from the Middle Ages have defined our understanding of the Iceland of this period, both its distinctiveness and its interconnectedness with the wider medieval world. However, the same cannot be said for the thousands of liturgical books that were once housed in the collections of the many churches scattered across the rural landscape of the island. So little survives of this great corpus – even the catalogue of surviving manuscript fragments is fairly modest – that it is difficult to investigate the topic of Icelandic liturgy, Latinity, or church books with much depth.¹ Yet, because so many of these books were in daily use, we cannot attempt to understand book culture in medieval Iceland without taking them into account, to whatever extent is possible.

In addition to the extant fragments, what we do know about Icelandic liturgical books comes from surviving documents: occasionally wills and other records of the donation of books, but above all from the *máldagar*, or Icelandic church charters. *Máldagar* are records of the landed property and inventories of medieval Icelandic churches, often including details about their liturgical duties, and even specific donations to the church estates. They mostly survive in post-medieval copies, but taken as a corpus, they provide a substantial if incomplete record of the books owned by Icelandic churches.

1 The standard edition of Icelandic liturgical fragments and texts is *Liturgica Islandica*, ed. by Lillie Gjerløw, 2 vols., Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XXXV–XXXVI (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1980); see more recently Merete Geert Andersen *Katalog over AM Accessoria 7. Den latinske fragmenter*, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana XLVI (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 2008). For a useful overview of the general situation with regards to Icelandic liturgical manuscripts and scholarship, see Áslaug Ommundsen and Gisela Attinger, “Icelandic Liturgical Books and How to Recognize them,” *Scriptorium* 67.2 (2013): 293–317.

This record is most complete for the northern diocese of Hólar, from the early fourteenth century to the time of the Reformation. The first major collection of *máldagar* was compiled by Bishop Auðunn of Hólar in 1318.² As an inventory of church books these *máldagar* have been little studied: the main scholarship is a series of articles published by Tryggvi J. Oleson between 1957 and 1961; these respond to and expand upon a 1948 article by Guðbrandur Jónsson, as well as a short book published by Emil Olmer in 1902.³

The present study has two core aims: first, to resolve a long-standing misidentification of the term *aspiciensbók* – a word that only survives in these *máldagar* book lists – exploring its meaning and significance in the context of the source texts and medieval liturgical terminology; second, to use this example to emphasize the need for updating and expanding upon Tryggvi Oleson’s articles. While quite thorough and detailed in

- 2 According to *Grágás*, the law code for Iceland during much of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a *máldagi* was to be kept by every Icelandic church that owned property (*Grágás: Konungsbók*, ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1852), vol. 1, 15). However, a number of these episcopally directed collections of *máldagar* have been identified for the fourteenth century and later: for Hólar there is Bishop Auðunn Þorbergsson’s 1318 collection (*DI II*, 423–89), Bishop Jón Eiríksson’s from 1360 (*DI III*, 155–78), Bishop Pétur Nikulásson’s from 1394 (*DI III*, 508–95), the *máldagar* of Bishop Óláfr Rögnvaldsson from 1461 (*DI V*, 247–361), and a collection made by Sigurður Jónsson, the son of Jón Arason, the final Catholic bishop of Hólar, the oldest part of which is from 1525 (*DI IX*, 293–334). A number of *máldagar* survive from Skálholt, but the only known and dated collection is that of Bishop Vilchin Hinriksson from 1397 (*DI IV*, 27–240). Several of these collections were produced over several years, and the dates of individual *máldagar* can vary – Bishop Óláfr’s, for example, range from 1461 to 1470 – but it is conventional to use the shorthand of assigning them a single year. The vast majority of them also survive only in post-medieval copies, and when a dating does not survive in the text of the *máldagi* itself or a clear attribution to a particular bishop’s collection, it is difficult and often impossible to accurately date them. Most of the *máldagar* dated to before 1318 in the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, particularly those attributed to 1179 and the tenure of Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson, are only very speculatively dated and are in need of re-examination and re-editing.
- 3 See bibliography for full references. Oleson wrote three articles on the book collections of Hólar diocese between 1957 and 1960: the first on the 1318 collection, the second on the 1394 one, and the final on the 1461 list. In 1957 and 1961 Oleson also published two articles on book donations made to Icelandic churches during the medieval period. Though critical of it in places, Oleson presents Guðbrandur Jónsson’s 1948 article “Íslenzk bókasöfn fyrir siðabyltinguna” as the best scholarship on the topic available, while he is dismissive of Olmer’s study (Tryggvi J. Oleson, “Book Collections of Mediaeval Icelandic Churches,” *Speculum* 32.3 (1957): 502).

comparison with Guðbrandur and Olmer's previous work, Oleson was still summarizing a massive amount of information in a few relatively short publications, and the subject calls for more extensive treatment. In addition, many of the attempts to identify and describe the Old Norse terms for different kinds of liturgical books, by both Oleson and others, have been quite cursory. In the case of the *aspiciensbækr*, these cursory attempts, combined with limited interest in Icelandic liturgy as a subject, has led to the misidentification of this type of book being propagated though more than a century of scholarship.

The Books and Their Context

An *aspiciensbók* was, we can be fairly confident, an Antiphonal.⁴ However, understanding what exactly that is requires some explanation. To begin at the most general level, medieval liturgical books can be divided into three broad categories: books of general instruction and information, books for the Mass, and books for the Office.⁵ A general trend in thirteenth-century Latin Europe led to compilation of liturgical texts into larger books, and by the late thirteenth and earlier fourteenth century, there were five basic books for the Mass and the Office: the Breviary, Antiphonal, and Psalter for the Office, and the Missal and Gradual for the Mass. Before the shift towards larger books, the components of these could be spread out across a greater number of shorter volumes, often in practice divided according to specific use of various officiants of whatever the liturgical service was. Throughout the Middle Ages, however, it was normal for most of

- 4 There are numerous variations in both the Latin and English terminology for this and other liturgical books: in English it can be an Antiphonal, Antiphony, or Antiphoner, in Latin an *antiphonarium*, *antiphonarius*, or *antiphonale*. The forms used in John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) have been used in this study for the sake of consistency, but in quotations of sources and scholarship other forms will appear.
- 5 The Mass refers to the core rite of the medieval Latin Church: the Eucharist, and the liturgical rituals surrounding it. The Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours refers to the cycle of daily prayer, based primarily around the psalms. For a summary of these two liturgies and their development, see Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 73–126. For the lists and categorizations of the basic types of books, see Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to their Organization and Terminology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 118–23 and Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 58–66.

those in the choir to sing their parts from memory.⁶ Likewise, this is a basic list reflecting a generalized overview, and other books continued to circulate and find uses: as late as the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Archbishop of Canterbury's list of the books required in all parish churches in Canterbury included two additional Mass/Office books.⁷ Understanding the context of the *aspiciensbækr* requires keeping in mind both the centrality of these core five books and the potential for variation.

A core distinction among these later medieval books is between those used by the main officiant or priest – the Breviary and Missal – which usually lacked any sort of musical notation, and the notated books used by the choir, namely the Antiphonal and the Gradual. The Antiphonal was the core choir book for Office performances, containing all proper (changing) parts of the Office for the choir, generally supplemented by a Psalter, which contained the common or ferial (unchanging) parts. Further compilation could happen, and so-called Noted Breviaries and Noted Missals were complete Office and Mass books which incorporated full notation and the material from the Antiphonal and Gradual. But the general distinction between the officiant's books and the choir books, divided between Mass and Office, was standard.⁸

- 6 Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 59. As Harper points out, surviving liturgical books from the earlier period were themselves often used for teaching, reference, or copying, and do not thus necessarily reflect those books being actively read during liturgical performance. For liturgical performance from memory, see Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 59; Katherine Zieman, *Singing the New Song: Literacy and Liturgy in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 31, 42–43, 67–71; Matthew Cheung Salisbury, *The Secular Liturgical Office in Late Medieval England* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 18.
- 7 Archbishop Robert Winchelsey issued his constitution between 1295 and 1313, which included a *legendam* and a *troparium*, see discussion in Judith Middleton-Stewart, *Inward Purity and Outward Splendour: Death and Remembrance in the Deanery of Dunwich, Suffolk, 1370–1547* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 159–60, where these are identified as a “lesson-book” and a “troper.” The archbishop's list, notably, does not require churches to own a Breviary. See also footnote 46.
- 8 For a quick and useful survey of the medieval liturgy, including liturgical books, see Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*. A more detailed English-language study of the liturgical books and manuscripts can be found in Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*. Both Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. William George Storey and Niels Krogh Rasmussen (Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1986) and Eric Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books from the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) are also useful, though it should be kept in mind that they are focused on books from

The Icelandic book lists are emblematic of how complicated this picture could become in practice. They use a variable mix of Latin and Old Norse terminology to describe significantly more than these five books; some of the additional books were very common and present in many churches. This variety is a significant and neglected part of what makes these lists so valuable: they provide detailed evidence for the complex structure and distribution of late medieval books whose structure and contents we cannot study directly. One of the most significant difficulties lies in determining what sort of book any given term refers to and where there is overlap between them.

We can be more confident in the identification of the term *aspiciensbók* than many others, both because the name refers to a very specific liturgical passage and because it was used in a consistent way outside of Iceland. *Aspiciens* comes from the beginning of Advent, a pivotal time in the cycle of the liturgical year, as Helmut Gneuss notes in his study of Anglo-Saxon books:

Aspiciens is the first word of the responsory following the first lesson in the Night Office of the first Sunday of Advent. Although antiphoners do not begin with this responsory, they give special prominence to its initial, and this has led to the adoption of *aspiciens* as signifying the book.⁹

Gneuss' study is the most significant work on the sort of ambiguities that arose from the names given to medieval liturgical books in book lists, particularly in the context of a bilingual vernacular-Latin textual culture; the fact that he deals with Anglo-Saxon books make it all the more relevant to Iceland, despite the chronological gap between the two corpora. Most of the main vernacular terms used for Icelandic liturgical books, including

before the thirteenth century. In the comments he does make on the later period, Palazzo misleadingly does not explicitly treat the Antiphonal and Breviary as separate books, but rather views the Breviary as a singular, holistic compilation for the Office (Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 169–72).

9 Helmut Gneuss, "Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England," *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 117. Gneuss' point that the prominence of the initial is the reason for *aspiciens* becoming the name of the book is compelling but speculative; the point here is that *aspiciens* here developed some kind of prominence that led to it becoming the name of the book.

aspiciensbók, probably derive from Anglo-Saxon usage, presumably coming from books brought from England to Iceland in the first half of the eleventh century, either directly or through Norway or Denmark.¹⁰ As with many aspects of the early Icelandic Church, there may have also been some German influence on this vocabulary, though it is impossible to say how much.¹¹

As Gneuss points out, both the Latin term *antiphonarius* and the Anglo-Saxon *sangboc* could refer to choir books for both Mass and Office, so more specific terms provided more clarity. For the Gradual – the choir book for Mass – the term *Ad te leuauí* was sometimes used, on the same principle as *aspiciens*: it was the introit for the Mass sung on the first Sunday of Advent.¹² *Aspiciens* continues to appear in the later medieval

- 10 The Old Norse terms *söngbók*, *messubók*, *handbók*, and *aspiciensbók* all have clear Old English parallels; *söngbók* and *aspiciensbók* will be discussed in detail as part of this study. In an Anglo-Saxon context, *mæsseboc* referred to a Sacramentary (Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 99–101), and *messubók* would have referred to the same when it was first used in Iceland. By the fourteenth-century, it likely more often referred to the larger Missal, but we cannot be certain that that is the case in every instance – both the terms *messubók* and *missale* are used in the fourteenth-century lists and later, and some scribes may have maintained a distinction between them. *Handbók/handboc* is without a doubt the least ambiguous term: it refers to a Manual (*manualis*), a basic book that priests used for their main ritual duties outside the core Mass/Office cycle: baptism, marriage, burial, etc. (Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 134–35). The book was called a *ritual* in continental Europe (Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 63), corresponding to the modern title Ritual, and it is unclear whether the term *manualis* or *handboc* came first in English usage.
- 11 A *Messbuch* appears in a 1065 inventory for Limburg Abbey (*Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse I: Von der Zeit Karls Des Grossen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Bernhard Bischoff (Munich: Prestel, 1967), 49), as well as a *Sequentialbuch*, which roughly parallels the Norse *sequentiubók*. At Trifels in 1246 there were other *messbücher*, but also a *mettenbuch* (book for Matins) (*Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse I*, 99–100), which does not resemble the parallel Norse term for a Matins book, *óttasöngvabók*, but at least suggests related naming practices, since there is no parallel Latin term. These Matins books may have been Nocturnals: the list of Matins services for the full year, separated from the rest of the Antiphonal (Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, 118–19, 193). In any case, the precedent for the Icelandic terminology for liturgical books may have come from multiple sources, and more comparative research is needed into German, Icelandic, and English book lists, and possibly other traditions.
- 12 Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 102–4. See footnote 21. For further discussion of these specific books, see Michael Lapidge, “Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England,” *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 56–57, 69–73 and Richard W. Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 510–11.

period, in both England and France,¹³ and in two churches in Vestland, in Norway, in early fourteenth-century book lists, possibly reflecting the path of influence from Anglo-Saxon England to Iceland, but certainly also showing the shared textual, linguistic, and religious culture of Iceland and Norway at the time.¹⁴ Thus, while the term *aspiciensbók* almost certainly developed during the eleventh century when Iceland was first developing its own liturgical culture, the continued appearance of the word in later centuries was not without contemporary parallels.

As in Anglo-Saxon England, in Iceland there were also additional terms that could be used to describe Antiphonals, with varying levels of ambiguity. The Latin term *antiphonarius/antiphonarium* is uncommon in Iceland, but fifteenth-century book lists identify an *antiphonarius* at four different Hólar diocese churches between 1431 and 1501; one of them even owned two.¹⁵ None of these lists mention an *aspiciensbók*, and there are

- 13 Multiple *aspiciens* are mentioned among the records of the Abbey of St. Bertin in northern France in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Alexandre de La Fons-Mélicocq, “Les calligraphes et les manuscrits des cathédrales d’Arras, de Tournai, et de l’abbaye de Saint-Bertin,” *Revue du Nord de la France* 1 (1854): 23). The English Abbey of St. Albans records an Antiphonal with the “local house name” of *aspiciens* being repeatedly lent out to the monks in the fourteenth and fifteenth century (R. W. Hunt, “The Library of the Abbey of St Albans,” *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts & Libraries: Essays Presented to N.R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978), 254–55; *The St. Albans Chronicle 1406–1420*, ed. by V. H. Galbraith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), xxxvii; *The English Benedictine Libraries: The Shorter Catalogues*, ed. by R. Sharpe et al., Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 4 (London: The British Library/The British Academy), 555); ten *aspiciens* appear at the church of Glastonbury on a list probably written around 1248, and at the priory of Rumburgh in York there are three *aspiciens*, one of them bound together with a *sanctor(ale)*, by 1448 (*The English Benedictine Libraries*, 210, 792). There is a distinct but interesting use of *aspiciens* in a late fifteenth-century catalogue at Leicester Abbey, wherein it appears after *antiphonarium* in the entries for a number of books, though several Antiphonals have different descriptors (*The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, ed. by T. Webber and A. G. Watson, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 6 (London: The British Library/The British Academy, 1998), 383–85).
- 14 At Ylmheim/Ølmheim church in 1321: “aspiciens gott detempore et de sanctis pertotum annum cum bona litera et nota. Jtem annat aspiciens” (*DN XV*, 11); at Hålandsdal church in 1306: “æt aspiciens de tempore et de sanctis per annum” (*DN XXI*, 7).
- 15 In the 1431 lists, Tjörn in Svarfaðardalr has two copies, one of them in two volumes, and Árskógr in Eyjafjörðr has one (*DI IV*, 465–66). In the 1461 lists, Húsavík and Höskuldsstaðir each own a copy, though the Höskuldsstaðir list makes it clear that this is a later addition to the *máldagi*, and the book was given to the church sometime between 1492 and 1501 by Abbot Jón Þorvaldsson of Þingeyrar monastery (*DI V*, 274, 346).

indications that some of the scribes for the 1431 lists had a taste for Latin terminology.¹⁶ The most notable use of *antiphonarius*, however, is in the extensive 1461 book list for the Augustinian house of Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur. In this list there are seven books titled *antiphonarius* and two titled *antiphonabók*, and not a single mention of *aspiciens*.¹⁷ No *antiphonarius* or *antiphonabók* appears in Möðruvellir's shorter 1525 book list, and two *aspiciensbækr* have appeared in their place.¹⁸ Likewise, all but one of these fifteenth-century lists that use *antiphonarius* also mention a Gradual, so we can be fairly confident that it is an Office book, the Antiphonal, being described, rather than a Mass book.¹⁹ It seems clear then that *antiphonarius* and *aspiciensbók* were used in Iceland primarily to refer to the same type of books, and that two or three fifteenth-century scribes in northern Iceland simply had a preference for the Latin term.

Much more ambiguous is *söngbók*, almost certainly a direct borrowing of the Old English term *sangboc*.²⁰ Indeed, here the Icelandic situation seems more comparable to the Anglo-Saxon one. In Gneuss' analysis of Old English *sangboc*, the term is shown to refer to choir books for both the Office and the Mass, i.e. both Graduals and Antiphonals.²¹ The word

16 *DI* IV, 465–66. The Árskógr list is just particularly rich in the sort of Latin terminology common in the *máldagar*. The Tjörn list, however, includes a second type of rare Latin book word: *breviarius* (Breviary) which, as will be discussed below, is rarely seen in Icelandic book lists. The Tjörn Breviary is unusual, moreover, in that the scribe is actually noting that the book has gone missing, and has not been seen at the church since a priest named Sigurðr and a certain Jón Einarsson departed – perhaps a coy suggestion that one of these men made off with the valuable tome.

17 *DI* V, 286–90.

18 *DI* IX, 317–18.

19 The exception is the 1461 *máldagi* for Höskuldsstaðir (*DI* V, 344–46), which is perhaps unsurprising, since the book collection is minimally described, and as noted earlier the *antiphonarius* appears in an addition to the core text. Icelandic book lists use the Latin term for a Gradual, but often in the form of a significantly altered loanword, so it can either be written *graduale* or *grallari*, or some variant of these two basic forms. The relationship between *grallari* and its source is more transparent when the Latin term drops the “u” (*gradale*), see for example *The Libraries of the Augustinian Canons*, 383–85. The variable Latin forms also gave rise to the English vernacular term from the Gradule, “grail,” see for example Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval English*, 513. See also footnote 41.

20 In light of the extensive influence of the English language on early Icelandic ecclesiastical language and intellectual culture, see for example Ryder Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland* (Berlin: De Gruyter/Medieval Institute Publications, 2021), 196.

21 Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 103. Gneuss argues that *sangboc* shares the same sense as the

söngr itself could signify the liturgy very broadly in medieval Iceland – essentially every type of liturgical performance can be referred to as *söngr*²² – and so as a descriptive term *söngbók* is highly ambiguous and may have been extremely variable, possibly even more variable than its Old English parallel.

In certain cases a *söngbók* seems to be meant as a counterpart to *lesbók*, possibly meant to collectively describe a complete set of liturgical books. The 1318 book list for the great northern church of Grenjaðarstaðr is not particularly detailed and describes a significant portion of its library simply as: “Saungbækur oc lesbækur og ad aullu per Anni circulum. og þo ey secundum ordinem” (*Söngbækr* and *lesbækr* complete for the full year, but not following the Ordinal), followed by a vernacular saga of the church’s patron saint, some Psalters, and some books noted as being old and in poor condition.²³ While the 1394 list for the same church is more detailed and mentions seven incomplete *lesbækr*, there are no *söngbækr* or *aspiciensbækr* there.²⁴ There is a definite dichotomy set up in the 1318 list, but it is unclear whether it is between choir books and books for the officiant/altar, between Office and Mass books, or perhaps between books with and without musical notation.²⁵

This highly generalized usage must be related in some way to how *söngr* and *les* are also used as descriptors for the contents of liturgical books, including for *aspiciensbækr*. The terms seem to indicate how complete a book is: two *aspiciensbækr* in the 1318 lists are said to include both *söngr* and *les*, while a slightly later list, from 1344, has an *aspiciensbók* that only includes *söngr*.²⁶ It is not impossible that these terms refer to the sung and read parts of the Office, the parts for the choir and officiant, and so an *aspiciensbók* that includes both would be more of an Breviary and Antiphonal

early use of *antiphonarius*, referring to both Mass and Office books, the very ambiguity that likely first led to the use of the term *aspiciens* to refer to a category of book.

22 The funeral service, for example, was referred to as *líksöngr*; Matins was referred to as *óttusöngr*. For *söngr* as musical skill and subject of education, see Ryder Patzuk-Russell, *The Development of Education in Medieval Iceland* (Berlin: De Gruyter/Medieval Institute Publications, 2021), 160–65.

23 *DI* II, 433.

24 *DI* III, 580–81.

25 In addition to the Grenjaðarstaðr example, there are hints of *söngbók* and *lesbók* as being a set pairing at the 1318 lists for Grimsey and Árskógr (*DI* II, 443, 455).

26 At Laufás, Víðimýri, and Sauðanes (*DI* II, 448, 466, 786).

compiled together than an Antiphonal.²⁷ It may equally be that *söngr* here refers to musical notation. In any case, it is very unlikely that such usage of *söngr/les* corresponds neatly with the meaning of *söngbók/lesbók*. More detailed and complete research would be needed to better explore the relationships between these terms.

In at least one case, *aspiciensbækr* seem to be presented as a sub-category of *söngbækr*. The 1360 *máldagi* for the church of Viðimýri, although incomplete, does record the beginning of a book list, which finishes with “Aspiens Bok. aunnur saung Bok per anni circulum.”²⁸ No *söngbók* appears before this, and *önnur* (second) thus appears to be referring back the *aspiciensbók* as the first *söngbók*. With this in mind, in lists that seem fairly complete, where there are Graduals and *söngbækr* but no *aspiciensbækr*, it may be that the *söngbækr* are in fact Antiphonals.²⁹

Söngbók has a broad and complex meaning that requires more research to be better understood. For now, it seems best to follow Gneuss in taking *söngbók* as referring at the very least to both Graduals and Antiphonals; the term must therefore have sometimes overlapped in meaning with *aspiciensbók*. There were thus at least three terms, and minor variants of each, that could refer to an Antiphonal in medieval Iceland: *aspiciensbók*, *antiphonarius*, and *söngbók*. This surplus of terminology likely reflects the usage of liturgical books in Iceland before the compilation trends of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the undoubtedly slow process of adapting to new liturgical trends in this peripheral region.

Not all of these Icelandic Antiphonals were exactly the same book, however, with identical structure and organization.³⁰ Antiphonals in general were large books, often divided into two volumes, with summer and

27 There are hints, however, that even such Noted Breviaries present in Icelandic library may have been broken up in some idiosyncratic ways. The *brefér* at Holt undir Eyjafjöllum is said to “tekur til að paskum og til aduentu. og er syngjandi að hatijder” (*DI VI*, 330) which indicates a summer book, from Easter to Advent. However, the final clause suggests that it is only *syngjandi* on *hátiðir*, i.e. that it only includes musical notation on feast days, and thus that the sung parts of the daily, ferial Office are not included, the sections of the Office that would normally be in a Choir Psalter. So while the book has characteristics of a Noted Breviary, it is far from a comprehensive collection of Office texts and music.

28 *DI III*, 175.

29 As at Möðruvellir in Eyjafjörðr and Breiðibólstaðr in Vesturhóp (*DI II*, 449, 479).

30 For the layout and structure of the medieval Antiphonal, see Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, 161–97.

winter halves, or with even more divisions. This type of division would not generally affect the contents or their organization.³¹ Breaking up large liturgical books into summer and winter parts was a widespread medieval practice.³² In the Icelandic book lists, such divisions are usually communicated as being from one feast day to another, most commonly the beginning of Advent to Easter.³³ There were also two central types of liturgical cycle around which books were structured, usually communicated in Icelandic lists with the terms *de tempore* (temporale) and *de sanctis* (sanctorale): the temporale cycle, which covers the moveable holidays, such as Easter and Pentecost, in addition to Christmas, and the sanctorale cycle, which covers the feasts of saints. Books could be only *de tempore* or *de sanctis*, but a truly complete volume included both cycles, and thus incorporated all the liturgical events of the year. While some medieval Antiphonals mixed the temporale and sanctorale sections together, creating a single unit for the full calendrical year, it was more common to maintain them as separate sections.³⁴

Some examples from the Antiphonals of the 1461 Möðruvellir list can help clarify the full range of these divisions. One of the Möðruvellir books is described as an “antephonarius de tempore et de sanctis per annum sæmiligr” (an excellent Antiphonal for the temporale and sanctorale through the whole year). It was thus a truly complete Office choir book, noted as being *sæmiligr*, and probably an expensive and exceptional book. Another, however, is given as “antefonarivm de sanctis fra jonsMesso baptiste til aduentu” (an Antiphonal for the sanctorale from the feast of John the Baptist to the beginning of Advent). Thus, it is strictly a book of saints’ feasts from 24 June to a saint’s feast marking the end of the sanctorale before the moveable beginning of Advent between 27 November and 3 December; this may have been St. Cecilia on 22 November. This Antiphonal

31 Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, 193. Hughes notes that the most extreme example he is aware of is an Antiphonal from the monastery of El Escorial, which is divided into a set of 223 separate books.

32 Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 158–59, 171.

33 Some Icelandic liturgical books could focus on even shorter periods, most exemplified by the *jólabók* (Christmas book), which may have included texts for the Mass or Office, or perhaps both, for the Christmas feast and perhaps some period around it. At least four churches had *jólabækur* at some point in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: Svalbard, Illugastaðr, Gufudalur, and Glæsibær (*DI* II, 440; *DI* III, 520, 590; *DI* V, 300, *DI* VI, 203).

34 See Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, 243.

is therefore a different, and significantly shorter, book from the truly complete Antiphonal. However, Möðruvellir appears to have owned five different copies of this Antiphonal for the summer sanctorale; this may suggest a scriptorium copying a particular book for sale or distribution, or short working books being actively used by the resident choir, or perhaps both.

The largest *aspiciensbækr* could thus be complete choir books for all the Office liturgies for the full year, sometimes split into two volumes but seemingly sometimes bound together into one great tome; others could be much smaller, possibly more utilitarian volumes.³⁵ The variable structure of the Icelandic Antiphonals could also result in additional books: the Hymnal, usually expressed as *hymnarium* in the Icelandic lists, contained all the hymns for the Office. Hymns could be incorporated into the Antiphonal in various ways, but were often all collected in a separate section in the back of the book, and this section could thus easily be turned into a separate volume of its own.³⁶ Judging from the frequency of the term *hymnarium* in the Icelandic book lists, this separation was probably the standard practice in the later medieval Iceland.³⁷ This is perhaps emphasized by the fact that several Icelandic Antiphonals are specifically noted as including hymns.³⁸ Likewise, in cases like that of the

- 35 Even the *antiphonarius* given to Höskuldsstaðir by Abbot Jón at the end of the fifteenth century, rather than a particularly impressive or even complete book, is noted as being a small book for the summer season (*DI V*, 346).
- 36 As Hughes notes: “Hymns, which are generally proper to seasons, may be given in their correct place within the offices, lending a distinctive appearance to the book, but are more usually placed in a separate section at the end or quite separately in the Psalter or in an independently bound book” (Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office*, 161). Exploring the frequency and distribution across Latin Europe of such separately bound Hymnals in the fourteenth and fifteenth century could throw additional light onto the Icelandic book lists.
- 37 According to Oleson’s count in the 1318 Hólar lists, thirteen churches had one Hymnal each, and a fourteenth had three copies (Oleson, “Book Collections of Mediaeval Icelandic Churches,” 504).
- 38 On the island of Grímsey in 1318 there are two: “Aspiciensbok medur Hymnum fra Trinitatis viku til Aduentum ad Dominicum de sanctis allt oc so suffragium Aspiciens Bok forn frá páskum til huijta daga. med ollum Hymnum” (*DI II*, 443; An Antiphonal with hymns from Trinity week to Advent, complete for Sundays and the sanctorale, and also suffrages . . . an old Antiphonal from Easter to the week of Pentecost, with all hymns). These are both excellent examples of how, even including the hymns, Icelandic Antiphonals could be very heavily broken up, the latter book covering a mere seven weeks! At Laufás in 1461: “aspiciens bok oc tekr til de trinitate med ymnvm oc oraciones oc de sanctes” (*DI V*, 267; An Antiphonal, and it begins on Trinity week, with hymns and prayers and the

large Mōðruvellir Antiphonal, when particular emphasis is laid on how comprehensive the book is, it may have been understood that such books also contained hymns.

Having explored what an *aspiciensbók* and an Antiphonal were in medieval Iceland, it is worth clarifying what they were not. As the second section of this study will show, it has been common for scholars to interpret the *aspiciensbók* as a type of Breviary. This makes some sense: the Breviary and Antiphonal were the two core Office books of the later Middle Ages and had a significant amount of overlap in their contents, with the Breviary written for the celebrant and the Antiphonal for the choir. The distribution and make-up of Breviaries in medieval Iceland, moreover, is complex and unclear. However, Icelandic Antiphonals and Breviaries were separate books, and there is some distinct terminology to show this.

The core issue is that there seem to be multiple terms for a Breviary in Iceland, and at the same time the component parts of the Breviary – the earlier books that developed into this compilation – are present and fairly common in the Icelandic lists. Two books that formed the basis for the Breviary in the thirteenth century, the Collectar and the Lectionary, appear to be present in the Icelandic lists. According to Gneuss, in the Anglo-Saxon lists, both *collectaneum* and *capitularium* could refer to a Collectar; because the book contained two types of readings, collects and chapters, either term could be a fair description.³⁹ Both of these terms appear frequently in the Icelandic lists.⁴⁰ We cannot be sure that the terms

sanctorale). It is unclear what types of prayers/liturgical texts are meant by *oraciones* here. There is a different Antiphonal, but still with hymns, at Laufás in its 1525 list (*DI IX*, 331), though it is possibly one of the two descriptions was made incorrectly.

- 39 Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 112–13. For the development of the Collectar, see Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books*, 145–48. While this study proceeds following the assumption that *collectarius* in Iceland generally refers to an Office book related to the Breviary, there is one example of a *collectarius missalis per annum* at Mōðruvellir (*DI V*, 286). I am inclined to think that this is a wholly different type of book, probably a Missal, and that *collectarius* is functioning as a descriptive adjective of some kind; the 1461 Mōðruvellir list is particularly rich in Latin terminology and uncommon liturgical books. The example does, however, provide some room for doubt.
- 40 Oleson counts *capitularius/capitularium* and *collectarius* separately, and both terms appear at twelve churches in the 1318 Hólar lists (Oleson, “Book Collections of Medieval Icelandic Churches,” 503). Both terms do not seem to ever appear together on the same list in 1318, which could support the idea that they are used to describe the same book, but more close and detailed research is needed.

were always interchangeable, but the charters of the church of Hrafnagil in Eyjafjörðr hint that they may have been: a *collectarium* in the 1318 *máldagi* appears to have morphed into a *capitularius* in the 1394 *máldagi*.⁴¹

Lesbók almost certainly indicates a Lectionary, but Lectionaries were a broad category of books that could contain readings for either Office or Mass; only the Office Lectionaries were compiled into the Breviary. There is no close English equivalent to *lesbók*, and it is possible that it is a Norse invention.⁴² The standard Old English term for an Office Lectionary, according to Gneuss, was *rædingaboc*;⁴³ an equivalent Norse term, *reddingabók*, does appear in the 1318 list for that same church of Hrafnagil in Eyjafjörðr, but it impossible to judge the significance or motivation behind such an isolated usage.⁴⁴ The term *málbók* also probably originally referred to a Lectionary, and has the same general semantic sense as *lesbók* and *reddingabók*. Like the *reddingabók*, however, *málbók* only appears in a single list.⁴⁵ Finally, a definition for the term *legendubók* was not attempted by Oleson, and no definition appears in any Old Norse dictionary, but it is possible it also refers to a Lectionary of some kind.⁴⁶

41 *DI* II, 453; *DI* III, 560–61. The two lists have a number of differences, and of course these may be entirely different books. However, there is a clear tendency for small variations between scribes in such lists; in the Hrafnagil lists there is a notable variation between Latin *gradualia* and the adapted loanword *grallari* when referring to Graduals. So it is at least feasible that *collectarium* and *capitularius* could be used by different scribes to describe the same book. See also footnote 19.

42 However, further research into German and other vernacular traditions could uncover parallels: even if it has a completely different meaning from *lesbók*, the existence of the modern German *Lesebuch* is a compelling hint that there could be a connection.

43 Gneuss, “Liturgical Books,” 120–21.

44 There were nine *reddingabæk*r at Hrafnagil in 1318 (*DI* II, 453). However, in the 1394 list for the same church, the *reddingabæk*r have disappeared, and a very conspicuous nine *legendubæk*r have appeared (*DI* III, 560–61). See note 45 below. The Old Norse term *ræðingr* was also used for Latin *lectio*, in the sense of a liturgical reading (onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o65829).

45 *DI* I, 256.

46 By my own count, there are one or more *legendubæk*r at ten churches in Hólar diocese in the 1318 lists (*DI* II, 434–85). Cleasby-Vígfússon gloss *legenda* simply as “legend” (Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vígfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), 378). The different names used for a Lectionary refer to the fact that it is a collection of *lectiones*, readings used in various parts of the liturgy, generally taken from scripture or saints’ lives. *Legenda* could also indicate such a reading, perhaps specifically a reading from a saint’s life: Gneuss uses the term “legendary” to describe collections of saints’ lives for liturgical use, though he does not reference any medieval uses of such a

Despite the difficulty of the terminology, it is clear that two core parts of the Breviary, the Lectionary and the Collectar, circulated in late medieval Iceland. Without knowing the contents of these books, it is impossible to know for sure, but their presence may indicate that at some Icelandic churches the celebrant of the Office continued to use a number of different books into the fourteenth and fifteenth century, rather than a single Breviary.⁴⁷ At the same time, some churches without a doubt did use Breviaries, though they were not as common as the other types of core liturgical books.⁴⁸ The Latin term *breviarium* appears in two different churches in the fifteenth century, as well as at the Augustinian house of Viðey in the fourteenth. The Old Norse terms derived from the Latin, *brefér* and its several variants, appear in at least six different contexts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁹

term (Gneuss, "Liturgical Books," 125–26). The possibility that these *legendubækkr* are Lectionaries specifically for the sanctorale may be supported by the "Legenda de sanctis ä ij selskinns Bokum" (*legenda* of the saints in two seal-skin books) in the church of Müli in 1318 (*DI* II, 435). The same list also mentions *legendubækkr* for the full year. However, for an English example of a *legenda* that includes both temporale and sanctorale, see Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England*, 402–4.

- 47 Iceland had little influence from the mendicant orders, whose widely travelling members were a primary driver of the use of larger, more complete liturgical books, and it is possible that this may have contributed to a particularly slow response to the development of more complete Breviaries and Missals. But Breviaries may also have been seen as less necessary than the other core liturgical books in early fourteenth-century England, see note 7.
- 48 The term *tíðabók* (book of hours) is glossed as a Breviary in Cleasby-Vigfússon (Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 633). However, in this case the *tíða* prefix likely does not refer to the Office specifically, but rather the divine liturgy as a whole, since in many of its appearances *tíðabók* seems to refer generally to the full collection of liturgical books at a church. The Skálholt lists use *tíðabók* more frequently than the Hólar lists, and the frequent phrase *xii mánaða tíðabækkr*, rather than an identification of a particular type of book, seems more likely to indicate that the church has the core Mass and Office books for the full year, see for example *DI* III, 32, 85; *DI* IV, 136, 142, 148, 160, 172. In no cases do we have any indication that *tíðabók* refers to what are conventionally known as Books of Hours, late medieval books of private prayer largely based on the psalms. It is thus probably best to gloss *tíðabók* simply as "service book" or "book for the liturgy."
- 49 Oleson's articles entirely overlook *breviarius* and related terms, which is all the more surprising considering how he considers other terms as possibly referring to Breviaries. Olmer gives two examples of *breviarius/breviarium*, and five more of the derived Old Norse terms *brefér* and *breferi* (Emil Olmer, *Boksamlingar på Island 1179–1490* (Göteborg: Wald. Zachrissons Boktryckeri, 1902), 9); the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* gives the variable forms *brefér*, *breferi*, and *breferr* (onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?010757). There were a number of *brefér* of several types at Hólar in 1396 (*DI* III, 612), one at Presthólar in 1394 (*DI* III, 553),

Neither *brevarius* nor *brefér* appear in the 1318 Hólar lists, which could indicate that the Breviary was still only coming into use in Iceland early in the fourteenth century. The relative rarity of these terms in the later period – alongside the more widespread circulation of Collectars and Lectionaries, some of which were presumably Office Lectionaries – suggests that even while Icelanders began to use Breviaries, they never became the sole Office book for the celebrant. Many of the extant examples of *brefér* also show books with distinctive or unusual features, including parts of the Mass liturgy being incorporated into the book, and are therefore in need of more focused study.⁵⁰ For present purposes, the terminology of the book lists provides sufficient evidence to show that the Icelandic Antiphonals were distinct books, whether used in conjunction with a Breviary or its component parts.

Finally, the frequency of *aspiciensbækr* in Icelandic collections can help emphasize their importance to liturgical practices: they were a standard and widely distributed type of book. There are thirty-seven *aspiciensbækr* in the great 1318 collection of Bishop Auðun of Hólar, distributed among twenty-two churches;⁵¹ as Oleson notes in his count, the majority of these

two at Álftamýri in 1378 and 1397 (*DI IV*, 12–13, 147), one listed in 1467 among the private debts of Björn *riki* Þorleifsson after his death (*DI V*, 504), one at Árskógr in 1461 (*DI V*, 262), and one at Holt undir Eyjafjöllum around 1480 (*DI VI*, 330). One *brevarius* noted by Olmer, at Viðey monastery, is listed as a *brevarium Augustini* and was thus presumably a very particular book for the liturgy of the Augustinian canons (*DI IV*, 111); the other is at Melstaðr in 1461 (*DI*, 338); a third, at Tjörn in 1431, is discussed below and is not noted by Olmer (*DI IV*, 465).

- 50 One of the books at Möðruvellir in 1461 is described as a “brefere de sanctis med Messum syngiande j tueim hlutum fra jonsMesso baptiste til aduentu” (*DI V*, 286; A Breviary for the sanctorale, with Masses, with music, in two parts, from the feast of John the Baptist to Advent). This book thus only contains the sanctorale section of the full Breviary, not the temporale, but *syngjandi* suggests it does include musical notation, making it a sort of Noted Breviary. Yet it includes some sort of Mass texts as well, and the division into two parts suggests a large book. It would appear that the book represents a type of ultra-complete liturgical volume, a Noted Breviary-Missal, but limited to a narrow part of the calendar, the summer sanctorale.
- 51 There are purportedly two references to *aspiciensbækr* from older *máldagar*: an 1179 one from Miðarnarbæli undir Eyjafjöllum, and a 1270 one from Vallanes (*DI I*, 255; *DI II*, 84). However, these dates are pure guesswork from the editors of the first two volumes of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, and – like most *máldagar* – the manuscripts they are referencing are from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; lacking an explicit dated event upon which to base the dating, as with Bishop Auðunn’s 1318 collection, we cannot be confident that the sources of the early modern scribes were any older than the fourteenth

were not complete books, covering the full service for the full year, but rather winter or summer books, sometimes only covering the sanctorale, or even only Sundays.⁵² The largest gathering of them was kept at Vellir in Svarfaðardalur: five copies, two of them donated by a certain Erlingr. This is unsurprising since Vellir was the largest parish church library in the north.⁵³ Two other churches in the Hólar diocese, the Grenjaðarstaðr noted earlier and Háls in Fnjóskadalr, had four *aspiciensbækr* at certain points in time.⁵⁴ The other types of books with comparable frequency to the *aspiciensbók* are all similarly basic, core liturgical books: *messubækr* (Mass-books), Graduals, *lesbækr*, Psalters, *söngbækr*, and perhaps the only unexpectedly common type, *sequentiubækr* (books of Sequences).

It is difficult to make confident judgements about how the *aspiciensbækr* of Hólar diocese might have changed over time, but generally there seems to have been some consistency. The 1394 lists show slightly fewer *aspiciensbækr* distributed across slightly fewer churches – thirty-three books in twenty-one churches – even as the total number of books listed increased.⁵⁵ The 1461 lists show a similar slight growth in the total number of books, again with thirty-three *aspiciensbækr* across now only eighteen

century. However, if it was the case that *aspiciens* came into use as a category of book in Iceland from conventional Anglo-Saxon practice, then these dates are a moot point, since the term must have been in use since the eleventh century.

- 52 *DI II*, 428–80; Oleson, “Book Collections of Medieval Icelandic Churches,” 503. Oleson suggests that eight of these churches had complete *aspiciensbækr*, but in many of these instances the text simply states *aspiciensbók*, and it is hard to be sure that this implies a complete Antiphonal or whether it is just a more minimal description than in other passages.
- 53 At Vellir, the reference to the donation is gone by 1394, but otherwise the same books appear to be there (*DI II*, 455; *DI III*, 512).
- 54 Háls preserves the unusual description of two of its *aspiciensbækr* being bound in English bindings, which remains in 1394, though the descriptions of the two smaller copies had changed by then (*DI II*, 439; *DI III*, 573). Grenjaðarstaðr, as noted earlier, is very broad in describing its book collection in 1318, and while the physical *aspiciensbækr* may have been there, among the group of *söngbækr*, they are not mentioned by name; two of them are named in 1391, but the full four do not appear until the 1461 list (*DI IV*, 20; *DI V*, 282).
- 55 *DI III*, 512–94. Oleson counts an increase from 744 books to 1,095 books from 1318 to 1394 (Tryggvi J. Oleson, “Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fourteenth Century,” *Nordisk Tidskrift för Bok- och Biblioteksväsen* 46 (1959): 115). As Oleson himself is careful to note several times in his articles, the uncertain consistency of the lists means that this count is very rough. Equally, the nature of what is understood as a book is highly questionable, and there may have been items reckoned as a book here that consisted of no more than a small gathering.

churches.⁵⁶ Small changes are expected as older books fall out of use or as separate volumes are bound together into larger compilations, and certainly some *máldagar* are incomplete, and some churches are even missing from lists. The final collection, from 1525, is very incomplete and only includes a few parish churches: just six books at three churches, and another two at Möðruvellir monastery, are mentioned.⁵⁷ Notably, it does include Vellir and does not name any *aspiciensbækr* there. Oleson, while he did not address any sixteenth-century *máldagar*, did speculate that the small number of total books at Vellir in 1461 may have been because the list there was simply an addition to an older list.⁵⁸

The *máldagar* are highly layered documents, newer passages accumulating upon older ones. Some layers of Icelandic *máldagar* may be from as early as the late twelfth century, but we know next to nothing about the collections of those earlier centuries and therefore cannot say when or how the libraries of the fourteenth century were formed. The great library of Vellir in the fourteenth century may have been pre-eminent for centuries, or it may have been the new innovation of some intrepid cleric.⁵⁹ It is thus entirely possible that the library declined in size in the fifteenth century. However, in light of the lack of medieval *máldagar* manuscripts and infor-

56 *DI V*, 253–351. The increase, by Oleson's count, is only from 1,095 to 1,104 books, but as Oleson himself is careful to note, there are fewer churches with *máldagar* preserved in the fifteenth-century Hólar lists, so the count is deceptive, and the average number of books per church is actually significantly higher (Tryggvi J. Oleson, "Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fifteenth Century," *Nordisk Tidskrift för Bok- och Biblioteksväsen* 47 (1960): 95).

57 *DI IX*, 318–31.

58 Oleson, "Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fifteenth Century," 97.

59 *Lárentius saga* comments on Þórarinn Egilsson (d. 1277): "Síra Þórarinn kaggi var klerkr góðr ok hinn mesti nytsemðamaðr til letrs ok bókaþjórða sem enn mega auðsýnaz margar bækr sem hann hfeir skrifat Hólakirkju ok svá Vallastað" (*Biskupa sögur III: Árna saga biskups, Lárentius saga biskups*, ed. by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, Íslenzk Fornrit 17 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998), 217; Reverend Þórarinn kaggi was a good cleric and the most beneficial person in writing and bookmaking, as the many books which he wrote can still be seen at the church of Hólar and also Vellir). The author of the saga may be trying to suggest that the greatness of the library at Vellir is due to Þórarinn's own work in the mid-thirteenth century. While we cannot read such a passage at face value – Þórarinn is, after all, a relative and teacher of the protagonist of the saga – it at least emphasizes the possibility that a number of the books shown in the 1318 *máldagi* for Vellir may have only been a few decades old.

mation about how these lists were made and used, we can never be sure of how complete an extant book list or inventory might be.⁶⁰

Many more *aspiciensbækr* must have existed in medieval Iceland than are mentioned in the Hólar diocese *máldagar*. As the donation of Erlingr to Vellir shows, there is no doubt that *aspiciensbækr* were held in private ownership. Perhaps the most frequent owners were priests, but records of donations usually indicated whether a person was a priest, and Erlingr was thus almost certainly a layperson. The diocese of Skálholt was likewise larger than Hólar, and there is a good chance that its churches collectively owned more books, but the *máldagar* record for Skálholt is poor. Even among the surviving ones, there is often only a general mention of unidentified books or just a valuation of the collection.⁶¹ Oleson does speculate that, issues with the surviving evidence aside, Skálholt churches were probably poorer in books than Hólar ones.⁶² It is difficult to accept this conclusion at the present stage of the research, however, and it simply demonstrates that more thorough and critical study of the evidence for medieval Icelandic books collections is needed.

Reception of the Term

The term *aspiciensbók*, on the few occasions when it has been addressed by scholars, has generally been misunderstood. A survey of the scholarship discourse surrounding this term can help us understand why and how this happened, and how extensively. Exploring this misunderstanding can in turn provide insight into the difficulties of studying the extant evidence

60 Halldór Hermannsson points to the lack of books in the 1525 list for Möðruvellir monastery, relative to its massive 1461 collection, as evidence of the decline of that library decades before the Reformation (Halldór Hermannsson, *Icelandic Manuscripts*, *Islandica* 19 (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 1929), 33–34). Since Halldór's main point is about the disappearance of vernacular texts, it may well be that some less functional parts of the library were sold off, but it may equally be that, as Oleson suggests for Vellir, the 1525 list only includes new acquisitions.

61 The most complete *máldagar* collection for Skálholt, made by Bishop Vilchin Hinriksson around 1397, mentions only fourteen *aspiciensbækr* in twelve churches (*DI IV*, 43–207), out of a list of nearly three hundred churches. There must have been many more in the diocese, however. The Vilchin lists avoid descriptions of books in multiple ways, including simply give the valuation or size of the book collection, with little or no detail, for example *DI IV*, 67, 83, 86, 155.

62 Oleson, "Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fourteenth Century," 118, note 1.

for the lost corpus of Icelandic liturgical books and the necessity of more detailed research.

The earliest scholarly attempts to understand *aspiciensbók* appear in the later nineteenth century. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, compiled by Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon and released in 1874, records both *aspiciensbók* and *aspiciensskrá*,⁶³ but only describes it as “a service-book.”⁶⁴ Johan Fritzner’s authoritative *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog*, released and revised between 1886 and 1896, makes no mention of the term, and apart from Cleasby–Vigfússon’s minimalist definition, other dictionaries of the period appear to have shared Fritzner’s approach.⁶⁵ This general disinterest among dictionary writers is perhaps understandable, when considering that the term only appears in the *máldagar*, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon’s interest in these texts and their language was something of an exception. While Emil Olmer’s 1902 *Boksamlingar på Island 1179-1490*, noted at the beginning of this study, compiles references to *aspiciensbækr*, it makes no attempt at a definition.

Two publications in the 1880s identified the *aspiciensbók* with some success, but neither made any impact on later scholarship. Gustaf Cederschiöld released a study on the earliest *máldagar*, those thought to have been from the so-called Free State period, c. 930–1262, which spends a few pages discussing and identifying liturgical books. In this section he suggests that *aspiciens* could refer to the incipit of the book, but does not go any further; while *aspiciens* is not actually the incipit of the Antiphonal, Cederschiöld was clearly on the right track.⁶⁶ The second reference is

63 It is not certain what the distinction between *bók* and *skrá* in the *máldagar* may have been. It is possible that the *skrár* were simply unbound books or loose gatherings. In any case, *aspiciensskrá* is a very rare term, and there only appears to be one example in the extant corpus, alongside a single *aspiciensbókarskrá*, both in the 1394 Hólar lists (*DI* III, 556, 573).

64 Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 25.

65 *Aspiensbók* does not appear in Erik Jonsson, *Oldnordisk Ordbog* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab, 1863) and is absent from the other early dictionaries examined in this study. *Die Lehnwörter des Alttestnordischen* specifically notes *aspiciensbók* and *aspiciensskrá* as among those learned loanwords dealt with by Cleasby–Vigfússon that it would pass over (Frank Fischer, *Die Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1909), 10–11).

66 In the footnote to *aspiciensbók*: “Denna titel förekommer ofta i Aud måld.; kan benämningen vara tagen från textens begynnelseord?” (Gustaf Cederschiöld, “Studier öfver isländska kyrkomåldagar från fristatstiden,” *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 2 (1887): 62).

almost entirely correct, but appears in such an odd place that it is hardly surprising it has been unnoticed or ignored. Tucked away in the index of the second volume of his edition and English translation of *Thómas saga erkibyskups*, from 1883, Eiríkr Magnússon states:

Aspiciens-bók, an antiphony of the *pars hiemalis* of the church service according to the Roman Breviary, *i.e.*, from the first Sunday in Advent to the first Sunday in Lent, derives its name from the first word in the respond of the first lesson on the first Sunday in Advent: “*aspiciens a longe, ecce video Dei potentiam venientem, etc.*”⁶⁷

The only error here is the seasonal restriction: presumably the relation to the first Sunday in Advent led Eiríkr to assume that *aspiciensbækr* were only winter books, but multiple *máldagar* attest to summer *aspiciensbækr*.⁶⁸

The definitive misinterpretation of *aspiciensbók* came at the end of a study of Hólar cathedral which Guðbrandur Jónsson published piecemeal in *Safn til sögu Íslands* between 1919 and 1929. In the final section of this study, Guðbrandur provides a detailed study of the book lists of medieval Hólar, including definitions. In the section on Office books, he states:

Frammistöðubækur voru afarstór brefver, er ætlað var að standa á kóri, og voru með svo stóru letri að margir gátu lesið á þær og úr fjarska; voru líka kallaðar *aspiciensbækur*.⁶⁹

(*Frammistöðubækur* were very large breviaries, which were intended to be placed in the choir, and had such large letters that many could

67 *Thómas Saga Erkibyskups: A Life of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Icelandic*, ed. by Eiríkr Magnússon (London: Longman, 1875–83), Vol. 2, 589. The difficulty of finding Eiríkr’s definition is magnified by the fact that this index entry is a reference to a footnote in the preface of the volume, wherein Eiríkr is noting the presence of English books in the *máldagar* corpus (*Thómas Saga*, Vol. 2, ix).

68 For summer books, see for example *DI II*, 428, 430; for books covering the full year, see *DI IV*, 182. As discussed earlier, because of their size Antiphonals were often divided up, and this was certainly true of the Icelandic *aspiciensbækr*.

69 Guðbrandur Jónsson, *Dómkirkjan á Hólum í Hjaltadal: Lýsing Íslenzkra Miðaldakirkna*, *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta að fornu og nýju V*, Nr. 6 (Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1919–29), 408. Here Guðbrandur uses the term *tíðabækur* to describe Office books, as opposed to *messubækur*, books for the Mass. This is Guðbrandur’s own usage, which I do not believe reflects, at least not in a straightforward way, the broader sense of the medieval *tíðabók*. See note 47.

read from them, and do so from a distance; they were also called *aspiciensbækur*.)

Guðbrandur seems to have read into the literal sense of the descriptors here, *aspiciens* as “looking upon” and *frammistaða* as “standing forth/out,” and presumably then connected the two ideas as different perspectives on a large format book: the book is both looked upon from a distance and it stands out in its place in the choir. There is, however, no concrete basis for drawing a connection between the two terms. Cleasby-Vigfússon’s dictionary offers a completely different interpretation of *frammistöðubók*, suggesting that it was in fact a term for a Missal, and thus actually a book for Mass rather than the Office, and it was so named “from being read by the priest while standing.”⁷⁰ However, both senses may obscure the distinctiveness of the term: *frammistöðubók* is only ever used to describe one or two books at Hólar cathedral itself, never any other books in any other churches, and as such it may reflect either a unique book or a distinctive terminology within the cathedral community.⁷¹

Guðbandur Jónsson’s definition soon established itself. Without any discussion of the term, the first volume of the *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, from 1956, has an entry for *aspiciensbók*, where it simply references the article on the Breviary.⁷² Soon afterwards Tryggvi Oleson’s articles began to appear and became the standard study of medieval Icelandic church books. While Oleson is critical of Guðbrandur Jónsson in places,⁷³ his 1957 article copied Guðbrandur’s definition of

70 Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 170. Missal is also the definition given in the 1972 additions to Fritzner’s dictionary, which originally had no entry for *frammistöðubók* (Finn Hødnebo, *Rettelser og Tillegg: Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog af Dr. Johan Fritzner* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1972), 108).

71 There are two *frammistöðubækur* in the 1396 book list for Hólar (*DI* 3, 612), but only one copy in 1525, which is said to cover the entire year, with *commone* (*DI* IX, 296); *commone* is likely referring to common/ferial days, the normal weekday services. The description is thus emphasizing that it is a very complete book. In both lists the *frammistöðubækur* are stored in the choir of the cathedral, which might be thought to support Guðbrandur’s definition, but altar books are kept in the same space, and the place of storage cannot be equated with place of usage. The existence of two copies in 1396 does seem to argue against the idea of the *frammistöðubók* being some sort of nickname for a particular codex, but it is not impossible that a copy had been made of a previously unique book.

72 “Aspiciensbog,” *KLNM* Vol. 1 (1956), 273.

73 Most notably, Oleson disputes Guðbrandur’s conclusion that Icelandic church book collections were “small and unimpressive.” (Oleson, “Book Collections of Mediaeval Icelandic Churches,” 509).

aspiciensbók as a very large Breviary, which must have helped solidify it as the authoritative translation.⁷⁴ Oleson's analysis of later book lists in 1959⁷⁵ and 1960 continued to mention *aspiciensbækur*, and to categorize them as Breviaries, though by 1960 it is clear he was beginning to have difficulty grappling with how to associate particular terms with particular books. Under a long entry for *aspiciensbók*, after dealing with books identified by that term, he states:

There is little doubt, however, that breviaries as well as missals are included under such titles as *saungbækur*, *de tempore et de sanctis bækur*, *vor-*, *sumar-*, *vetrar-*, *páska-*, *jólabækur*, etc. [...] In my previous articles I was inclined to list these books as missals (and indeed some of them are missals), but I am now of the opinion that many of these books were either breviaries or possibly contained the part of the office sung by the choir.⁷⁶

Apart from the first two terms, which were discussed earlier, the issue is that books identified by season could conceivably be either Office or Mass books, and because of their narrow scope should probably not be identified with either the term Missal or Breviary, since both referred in a latemedieval context to fairly complete compilations that were intended for the celebrant, rather than the choir. Oleson's final speculation is essentially a definition of a standard latemedieval Antiphonal, and it is unclear why he did not consider using the term. Unfortunately he died shortly after, in 1963, and did not have a chance to continue developing his thoughts in this direction. It remains however, that he was key in bringing the misidentification of *aspiciensbók* into English-language scholarship and in establishing it as part of the most authoritative study of Icelandic book collections to date.

Guðbrandur's definition continued its dominance through the 1990s,⁷⁷ and the current online definition of the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* is

74 Oleson, "Book Collections of Mediaeval Icelandic Churches," 503. Oleson does not deal with cathedral or monastery books and so does not address *frammistöðubók*, since it is only mentioned as existing at Hólar.

75 Oleson, "Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fourteenth Century," 111.

76 Oleson, "Book Collections of Icelandic Churches in the Fifteenth Century," 92.

77 See Kristján Eldjárn and Hörður Ágústsson, *Skálholt: Skríði og áhöld* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1998), 289.

simply a reference to Guðbrandur.⁷⁸ Most recently, in 2012, Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson published a short note on the medieval terminology for books in Iceland. There he expands upon the definition given by the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* and suggests that the large letters of the *aspiciensbækr* could also aid monks and clerics who had poor vision and/or difficulty seeing in the dim light of medieval Icelandic churches, and makes note of a certain *aspiciensbók* that is called *stórrituð* (largely written).⁷⁹ While such difficulties of vision must have been a consideration, and may have even encouraged some books to be *stórrituð*, it remains that the term *aspiciens* has nothing to do with how or where the books were viewed.

A few scholars, in addressing liturgical books in the historical context of medieval Iceland, have brought up the Antiphonal, but do not connect it to the *aspiciensbók*.⁸⁰ For most of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first, Guðbrandur Jónsson's misunderstanding of *aspiciens* as a description of how the book is read, rather than a key incipit in the text, has remained authoritative.

The Icelandic *máldagar* are a rich and fascinating corpus of texts, and one of our most important insights into the liturgical life of the island. The

78 onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?04928.

79 Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, "Af *aspiciensbók*, *reddingabók* og fleiri bókum," *Geisla-baugur: fægður Margaret Cormack sextugri, 23. ágúst 2012*, ed. by Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður, 2012) 37.

80 Perhaps most notably, *aspiciensbók* was not mentioned by Lilli Gjerløw either in her 1980 edition of the Icelandic liturgical fragments, *Liturgica Islandica*, or in her 1979 edition of the Antiphonal of Niðaróss archdiocese, of which Iceland was part, *Antiphonarium Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae*. Gunnar F. Guðmundsson mentioned Antiphonals in his general study of Christianity in medieval Iceland, but glosses the Latin *antiphonarium* as *andstefjabók*, a more or less direct calquing of the Latin term that does not appear to have any medieval precedent (Gunnar F. Guðmundsson, *Íslensk samfélagi og Rómakirkja*, Kristni á Íslandi 2 (Reykjavík: Alþingi, 2000), 201). Kristján Eldjárn and Hörður Ágústsson, *Skálholt*, 289, discusses the Antiphonal separately from *aspiciensbók*, and from the one reference given, the authors appear to have been focused strictly on uses of the Latin term *antiphonarius* in the Icelandic sources. Finally, Oleson himself identifies the *lesgrallari* as an *antiphonarium*, but his definition of an *antiphonarium* is misleadingly literal, seemingly suggesting that the book really did only contain the antiphons of the Office (Oleson, "Book Collections of Iceland Icelandic Churches in the Fifteenth Century," 93). He notes five *lesgrallarar* in the 1461 lists, and the term seems not to be used in the fourteenth century but does appear again at Hólar cathedral, Þingeyrar monastery, and the church of Laufás in the 1525 lists (*DI IX*, 296, 313, 331). It is not clear what might have distinguished a *lesgrallari* from a normal Gradual, if anything, though it seems safest to assume that the *les* refers to a compilation of additional material into the book.

book lists they contain are an invaluable glimpse into a massive corpus of lost Latin and liturgical manuscripts; the combination of Latin and vernacular terminology they use to describe those books is distinctive, sometimes even unique. In many respects, this terminology is almost all that remains of the medieval Icelandic liturgy, a central part of the culture and life of the island about which precious little is known.

The present discussion of the term *aspiciensbók* has aimed to show, among other things, the relationship between these Icelandic book lists and a broader European terminology for the Antiphonal. The distinctiveness of the Icelandic usage, however, should not be overlooked. The use of *aspiciens* to describe books in England and France is much less frequent or consistent, and in some instances *aspiciens* is clearly more of a nickname than a category.⁸¹ Though the evidence may simply be richer for Iceland, it is notable that the full compound *aspiciensbók* is almost always used there, while even the Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon examples use *aspiciens* alone. This evidence may suggest that the Icelanders really did more thoroughly adapt the term as referring to a category of liturgical book. Considering how little is known about the Icelandic liturgy, this is a valuable, if small, aspect of distinctive religious culture on the island.

Investigating the Icelandic book lists allows us to better understand the massive quantity of Latin books that have been lost and their overwhelming importance in the manuscript and textual culture of medieval Iceland. But perhaps even more importantly, the lists grant us a peek into the vanished diversity and distinctiveness of these books. Thinking of liturgical books as simple, functional things, detached from the active and creative culture of literary production, does them a disservice. Their contents were a significant part of daily life, and as objects they had significant value and presence. Although the term *aspiciens* was not itself used as a nickname for particular Antiphonals in Iceland, Icelandic liturgical books did still sometimes attract their own personal names.⁸² Such practices remind us that

81 See footnote 13.

82 There are at least three surviving examples, from Skarð in Skarðsströnd, Breiðabólstaðir in Fljótshlíð, and Helgafell monastery. In a late *máldagi* for Skarð, from sometime around the end of the fifteenth century, there is a *messubók* compiled with several different texts, including material for Matins – a rare instance of Office and Mass texts compiled together – but only covering the temporale from Advent to Easter, and it is called *Loginrá* (*DI VII*, 75), which may suggest something like “flame-post,” but the exact meaning is not clear.

these volumes were as valued and personal to the people who used them as any collection of vernacular sagas or poems.

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The 1397 *máldagi* for Breiðabólstaðr has no details about the doubtlessly substantial book collection of that wealthy church but does mention a single book named *Kolbása* (DI IV, 83), relating to coal, perhaps something like “coal-stalls.” These unusual names may be deep, opaque metaphors, perhaps scriptural references, or perhaps something as pedestrian as a reference to where the books are kept. A book sold by the abbot of Helgafell around 1360 is named *kolbrun*, which could either be the feminine personal name Kolbrún or a literal colour description, “coal-brown” (DI VI, 12). Further research, perhaps even a comparative study with book-naming practices elsewhere in Europe, would be valuable.

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SUMMARY

The Lost Liturgical Books of Iceland: Understanding the *Aspiciensbækr*

Keywords: Liturgy, liturgical books, book collections, Antiphonals, church charters, the Icelandic church

The surviving charters of late medieval Iceland record the books owned by many parish churches. These small collections contained mostly liturgical books, described by a variety of Latin and Old Norse terms, among which the term *aspiciensbók* is common. The argument is here put forth that *aspiciensbók* refers to an Antiphonal, a category of Office book for use by church choirs. The name comes from the fact that the Latin word *aspiciens* is the first word of the responsory following the first lesson of the first Sunday of Advent. Antiphonals appear to be identified by several other words, including the ambiguous term *söngbók*, but are clearly distinct from Breviaries, another important type of Office book. This conclusion stands in contrast to a long history of scholarship, going back to Guðbrandur Jónsson, that has identified *aspiciensbók* as a type of Breviary. This study corrects this misidentification and points the way forward for new research into the liturgical book collections of medieval Icelandic churches.

ÁGRIP

Glötuðu íslensku helgisiðabækurnar: Til skilnings á Aspiciensbókum

Efnisorð: Litúrgía, helgisiðabækur, bókasöfn, antifónabækur, máldagar, íslenska kirkjan

Íslenskir máldagar sem varðveist hafa frá miðöldum hafa að geyma bókaskrár íslenskra kirkna og eru til vitnis um að bókasöfn þeirra hafa aðallega geymt helgisiðabækur. Bókunum er lýst með margvíslegum heitum, ýmist á latínu eða forn-norrænu, og er eitt af þeim algengari *aspiciensbók*. Hér eru færð rök fyrir að heitið *aspiciensbók* vísi til antifónabóka, ákveðinnar tegundar tíðasöngbóka sem notaðar voru af kirkjukórum. Nafnið má rekja til þess að latneska orðið *aspiciens* er ætíð fyrsta orð í víxlsöngnum sem fylgir á eftir fyrsta lesi fyrsta sunnudags í aðventu. Antifónabækur virðast einnig vera einkenndar með öðrum heitum, meðal annars hinu óljósa heiti söngbók, en eru þó greinilega ólíkar breviaríum, annarri mikilvægri tegund tíðasöngbóka. Niðurstaðan er þvert á það sem tíðkast hefur innan fræðanna í um öld, allt frá því að Guðbrandur Jónsson skilgreindi *aspiciensbók* sem *brefver*. Rannsóknin leiðréttir þessa villu og vísar til nýrra möguleika í rannsóknum á helgisiðabókasöfnum íslenskra kirkna á miðöldum.

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