SIÂN E. GRØNLIE:
The Saint and the Saga Hero:
Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature.
D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 2017. Pp. xii + 306.
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HAKI ANTONSSON:
Damnation and Salvation in Old Norse Literature.
D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 2018. Pp. xiv + 258.
ISBN 978-1-84384-507-2.

These two books deal in different ways with the impact of Christian literature and ideas on Old Norse-Icelandic literature. A keyword in Grønlie's book is 'interference', used most often in inverted commas. As she explains in her opening chapter, the term is adopted from polysystem theory as propounded by Itamar Even-Zohar (*Poetics Today* 11, no. 1, 1990) and applied to saga literature by Massimiliano Bampi (most recently in the *Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas* (2017), pp. 9–11): in a literary tradition, thought of as a system of interrelating literary forms, a form newly introduced will be on the periphery of the system and prone to interference from the dominant form at its centre, the central form in this case being hagiography and the peripheral one the emergent Icelandic saga. In reading this book I have not found the word in question in the chapter where it seems at first sight to be most needed: in chapter 2, on Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, it appears from the saga's account of much of Óláfr's life that there is pressure on the saga author from the hagiographic tradition to portray this missionary king as a saint, while the lack of evidence for his sainthood, not least where his heroic acts of violence are concerned, makes this impossible: one almost has the impression that Oddr might have wished for a more exclusively heroic subject, with less interference from hagiography (p. 63). Reading on, however, one becomes aware that, as Grønlie reveals on her final page (p. 264), she is using the word by no means exclusively in a negative sense. In chapter 3, it is true, she finds that *Egils saga* and *Hrafnkels saga*, in portraying Egill as an 'anti-saint'

(p. 108) and Hrafnkell as a convert to atheism, have benefited from a relationship with hagiography describable in terms more of 'struggle' or 'contest' than of troublesome interference; she refers here (p. 109) to Snorri's *Edda* but not to Anne Holtsmark's notion of Snorri's 'contrastive association' of the pagan with the Christian — a notion which would have assisted her argument (see Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi* (1964), p. 24). In chapter 4, however, she uses the word (p. 161) in showing with evident approval how *Vatnsdœla saga*, *Njáls saga*, and *Eyrbyggja saga* enlarge the scope of the classical saga form by drawing on hagiography in their different treatments of the implications of Christian mission and conversion, and in their shared concern with salvation and damnation. In chapter 5, on *Gísla saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, she shows how 'interference' (p. 207) from lives of the desert saints has enhanced the portrayal of Gísli's solitary life as an outlaw in the first of these three sagas, and the accounts in the other two of temptation in the wilderness. In chapter 6 she uses the word yet again (p. 255; cf. also pp. 208, 209) in reviewing the ways in which the Norwegian kings Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr Haraldsson – the former a John-the-Baptist-like forerunner of the latter (see below) – interfere or interact with the lives of seven characters listed here together with the sagas in which they mainly appear: Sigmundr Brestisson in *Færeyinga saga*, Hallfreðr Óttarsson in *Hallfreðar saga*, Kjartan Óláfsson and Þorkell Eyjólfsson in *Laxdœla saga*, Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld in *Fóstbrœðra saga*, Bjǫrn Arngeirsson in *Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa*, and Grettir Ásmundarson in *Grettis saga*. Óláfr Tryggvason interacts with the first three of these, in foretelling Sigmundr's death as a result of his refusal to accept from him a replacement for a ring of pagan provenance (pp. 213–14); in protecting Hallfreðr as long as he, Óláfr, lives, and after both their deaths exposing in a dream the despoilers of Hallfreðr's coffin (p. 228); and in giving Kjartan a sword which Kjartan abandons to his cost, not having it with him at his last stand (pp. 231–32). St Óláfr, on the other hand, has dealings with the remaining four, correctly claiming that Þorkell Eyjólfsson's arrogant response to his gift of church timber does not bode well, since Þorkell later drowns when transporting the timber by boat (pp. 234–35); giving sustained support and help in various

ways to Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld and Bjǫrn Arngeirsson (pp. 236–46); and denying Grettir his support when Grettir fails to undergo an ordeal that might have cleared him of the charge of arson (pp. 248–49). In a concluding chapter Grønlie recommends such terms as 'dialogue' or 'interdependence', or 'active and willing engagement' (of sagas with saints' lives) as possible substitutes for 'interference' in discussion of her subject (p. 264).

The keyword of Haki's book is 'binary', used as an adjective and not in inverted commas, the book's main argument being that the binary theme of damnation and salvation has a structural as well as a topicalising function in Old Norse literature. The theme is illustrated in *Hemings þáttr Áslákssonar*, where Hugi's dream-vision of a woman foretelling the arrival of two corpses in a churchyard, one welcomed there and the other shunned, hints at the respective fates in store for Hemingr, the eponymous hero of this *þáttr*, and Haraldr Sigurðarson harðráði, his principal antagonist, in the afterlife. It also typifies the structure of the *þáttr*, in the first and second part of which Hemingr and Haraldr are respectively the main characters, and draws attention to the contrast of Haraldr not only with Hemingr, but also with Hemingr's father Áslákr, and with St Óláfr and Haraldr Goðvinasun (pp. 14–22). The theme is further illustrated in the presentation in Gamli kanóki's poem *Harmsól* of the two thieves crucified together with Christ, one repentant and the other not (p. 35), and in the two fires, one made from the trunk of an oak tree (damnation) and the other from dry twigs (salvation), referred to in *Gísls þáttr Illugasonar* by Jón Ǫgmundarson when he is warning King Magnús berfœttr of the danger of making a false judgement (pp. 51–53). The binary nature of the theme is also reflected in the patterning whereby the salvation that is not achieved, or only doubtfully achieved, by one member of a pair, is granted, or at least made accessible, to the other member: whereas Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* leaves some doubt as to whether Óláfr Tryggvason survived his final battle and achieved salvation, the same saga also asserts that this Óláfr, in baptising his namesake, St Óláfr Haraldsson, is to him what John the Baptist is to Christ, the earlier Óláfr thus prefiguring the later one, of whose salvation there is no doubt (pp. 19, 71–72). In Oddr's *Yngvars*

saga víðfǫrla, by much the same token, after Yngvarr on a journey to the East has rejected Queen Silkisif's invitation to convert her kingdom and marry her, and has died uncertain as to whether his soul is saved, his son Sveinn, on a subsequent expedition, does convert the kingdom and marry the queen (pp. 84, 88–89); and whereas in *Gísla saga* Gísli's death in a pre-conversion Iceland denies him the prospect of salvation, his widow Auðr adopts Christianity in Hedeby on a pilgrimage to Rome (pp. 119–20). Other examples are the converted brothers Þorsteinn and Kolskeggr of Grettir and Gunnarr respectively in *Grettis saga* and *Njáls saga* (pp. 124–25, 211–12).

An example of the pairing of opposites is found in *Þorsteins þáttr skelks*, in which Þorsteinn, a follower of Óláfr Tryggvason, meets Þorkell, a demon who claims in phrasing suggestive of sinister circumstances to have fallen with Haraldr hilditǫnn at the battle of Brávellir in the pre-Christian past. The meeting takes place in a latrine, where Þorkell says he has just arrived from Hell, which it must be assumed is also the abode of Haraldr. The paired opposites are Þorsteinn and Þorkell, Óláfr Tryggvason and Haraldr hilditǫnn, and Svǫlðr (Óláfr's last battle) and Brávellir (pp. 145–46). Here we have a case of Holtsmark's 'contrastive association' (see above), to which Haki refers in another context (p. 90). The binary pattern associated with water, which could signify punishment for sin (by drowning) as well as baptism, is illustrated by *Hallfreðar saga*, in which Hallfreðr and his followers are blown off course at sea after praying to pagan gods for a favourable wind. They are saved from drowning through the agency, reportedly, of Óláfr Tryggvason, who later stands sponsor to Hallfreðr in baptism (pp. 160–61). In *Grœnlendinga saga* and the related *Eiríks saga rauða* Þorsteinn Eiríksson appears after death to his wife Guðríðr, in the former saga giving the impression that he has attained salvation, in the latter that he is speaking from Purgatory. *Eiríks saga* thus differs from *Grœnlendinga saga* in showing more of a tertiary than a binary view of the afterlife, but this cannot safely be seen as a development specifically from *Grœnlendinga saga* as there is no certainty that *Eiríks saga* derives from it (pp. 177–80). It is nevertheless true that in relatively late writings the damnation–salvation opposition shows an increased complexity. In *Árna saga biskups* the adversarial

relationship of Bishop Árni and Hrafn Oddson, which is compared to that of Elijah and Ahab, is not wholly antagonistic, and has as much to do with the interrelations of church and laity as with the saving of Hrafn's soul, for which Árni prays after Hrafn has died (pp. 192–97); and in *Njáls saga* the binary pairings of Gunnarr and Kolskeggr (already mentioned), Skarpheðinn and Hǫskuldr, Njáll and Flosi, and Bróðir and Óskapr, are not 'simply damnation /salvation oppositions, but rather varied, or graded, contrasts on that spectrum' (p. 224). There is a great deal more in both this book and Grønlie's than it has been possible to convey here.

It is clear from the beginning of Grønlie's book that she wishes to discourage the tendency to view Old-Norse-Icelandic hagiographic literature solely in terms of the origins of Icelandic literature. She has in mind here (pp. ix, 29) Gabriel Turville Petre's view that in order to write sagas, the Icelanders first had to be 'trained in hagiographic narrative', which taught them not 'what to think or what to say', but 'how to say it' (G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (1953), p. 142). She stresses (pp. 33–34) that saints' lives were central in the Icelandic literary tradition from the earliest saga-writing up to the Reformation, and both her book and Haki's show that the hagiographic and ecclesiastical literature taught the Icelanders hardly less about what to think and say than about how to say it. Both books are greatly to be welcomed.

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