THE SERMON

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OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC SERMONS

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I. DEFINITION

The corpus of sermons in Old Norse comprises just over 150 sermons or parts of sermons surviving in thirty-three manuscripts written in Norway or Iceland between the mid-twelfth and the mid-sixteenth century. In linguistic parlance, the term “Old Norse” is customarily used as an equivalent of the modern Scandinavian norrøn (Icelandic norræna), a blanket label for the literary dialects of the Old Scandinavian period (ca. 1050 - ca. 1350) before they became fully distinguished as individual languages. Theoretically, a study of “Old Norse sermons” ought to take into account sermons written in any of the older Scandinavian dialects, including medieval Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and Icelandic, as well as the Norse dialects of the Faroes, Orkneys, British Isles and Greenland, but in practice this isn’t the case since, as happens to be true with virtually all other categories of Old Norse literature, the surviving texts in Norwegian and Icelandic are both much older and far more abundant than those in any of the other dialects, so that in effect they dominate and define the entire field, particularly in its earliest stages. As any student of Old Norse language and literature soon comes to realize, most of the texts one encounters under this rubric are in fact Icelandic, and as a result the terms “Old Norse” and “Old Icelandic” are often, if not quite accurately, used synonymously. The potential for confusion in this overlapping linguistic terminology has recently prompted some scholars to adopt a new term, “Old Norse-Icelandic”, to refer to the large number of texts of Old West Scandinavian (i.e. Norwegian or

1 Witness E.V. GORDON’s blunt assertion in *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd ed. revised by A.R. TAYLOR, Oxford, 1957, p. 265, that “almost all Old Norse literature of any value is written in Icelandic”.

Icelandic) origin surviving mainly or exclusively in Icelandic copies, recensions, or manuscripts, but once again this turns out to be a roundabout way of saying everything in Old Icelandic plus a few odd bits in Norwegian and peripheral dialects

Generally speaking, when a text today is designated Old Norse, this typically means it originated in Iceland or Norway, or that even if its point of origin is unknown it is linguistically identifiable as a form of West Scandinavian rather than East Scandinavian. The East Scandinavian languages of Old Danish and Old Swedish are usually excluded from this designation for the simple reason that by the time they come into vogue as suitable vehicles for literary, legal, and historiographical writing in the late-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they are already so clearly individuated as Danish and Swedish that it makes little sense to group them under the Old Norse umbrella, and since scholars working with sermons in these languages consistently refer to them as Old Danish or Old Swedish anyway rather than Old Norse, it is convenient to leave them out of the present discussion. With rare exception, the extant sermons in Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic bear no historical or textual relation to the much later corpora of sermons in medieval Danish and Swedish, which are confined almost wholly to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and take part in a significantly different tradition of preaching and popular devotion.

However, many do share points of contact with sermons from medieval England and Germany, the two countries from which the most successful Christian missions to Western Scandinavia originated.


during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries (see under Diffusion below)\(^4\).

Given these preliminary distinctions, it comes as little surprise that the majority of Old Norse sermons — those in twenty-nine out

of thirty-three manuscripts — are Icelandic rather than Norwegian, and that the greatest concentration are datable to the late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a period commonly referred to as the Classical Age of Old Norse literature. Together with the saints’ lives, prayers, and other religious works preserved in the oldest Scandinavian manuscripts, they are frequently acknowledged as the earliest monuments of vernacular literary production in all of Scandinavia, long predating most of the written versions of the sagas, romances, and skaldic and Eddic poems for which Old Norse literature is best known. As Jónas Kristjánsson has remarked in a recent discussion of the birth of Christian learning in Iceland, the Old Norse sermon corpus is built largely on a foundation of Icelandic texts that qualify as “the very first writings in Icelandic — perhaps indeed the very first compositions that could be dignified with the title of Icelandic literature”.

The chronological boundaries of the corpus are fixed at one end by the earliest extant manuscript and at the other by the dawn of the Reformation, which brought a decisive end to the medieval church in all parts of Scandinavia. The earliest sermon manuscript (AM 237 a folio, ca. 1150) happens also to be the oldest known manuscript containing a text in a Scandinavian language written in the Latin alphabet, a fact with significant implications for the role of the Christian church in promoting vernacular literacy in twelfth-century Iceland and Norway. Sermons were almost certainly written and preached in Scandinavia before this, but much of what we know about them is based on the assumption drawn from linguistic evidence that many of the earliest sermons are copies (if not copies of copies) of much older texts. For the purpose of this survey it is sufficient to note that the beginnings of the sermon corpus coincide with the inception of written literature in Scandinavia. The closing date of the corpus is more difficult to pin down since the end of the Old Norse period is not quite the same as the end of the Middle Ages in Iceland and Norway, the first being a fundamentally linguistic distinction, whereas the second is best defined in terms of cultural and ecclesiastical history, which operates according to a different chronology. From a linguistic perspective, Icelandic in particular is a notoriously conservative language that remained fundamentally un-

changed until the early modern era. Icelanders today can read their nation's earliest literature with minimal difficulty, and some would object to the notion that their language differs substantially from that spoken and written in the twelfth century. Norwegian, on the other hand, developed at a slightly faster rate, in part due to ongoing contact with Swedish and Danish, so that it effectively ceased being "Old" much earlier than Icelandic did. In order to facilitate discussion of the comparative development of the two languages, historical linguists tend nevertheless to date the outermost limits of Old West Scandinavian at about 1350 since this is when features of the present-day dialects began to distinguish themselves and when Icelandic and Norwegian became so clearly differentiated that they could be classed as separate languages. As helpful as this date is for linguistic analysis, however, it corresponds with no discernible break in literary or ecclesiastical history, so relevant dating criteria must be sought elsewhere. For Iceland and Norway, as for Sweden and Denmark, the period of history we now refer to as the Middle Ages arguably lasted until the Reformation, which in Iceland can be said to date from the death of Jón Arason (†1550), the last Catholic bishop of Hólar. After that point, the literature came under extensive Lutheran influence, and even though medieval texts continued to be copied for centuries, most genres of medieval literature had long since reached their maturity and were no longer actively cultivated. As it happens, this watershed date in the history of the Icelandic church agrees almost precisely with an important transitional date in studies of the literary language since the date of Jón Arason's death comes close to the date adopted as a cut-off point for the prose literature by the Arnamagnæan Commission's Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre [Dictionary of Old Norse Prose: Indices], Copenhagen, 1989, the first volume of what will eventually become known as the authoritative dictionary of Old Norse prose, currently in preparation.

6 An extreme instance of this view is that of V. Gödel, Katalog öfver Kongl. Bibliotekets Fornsländska och Fornnorska Händskrifter, Stockholm, 1897-1900 (Stockholm Kungliga Biblioteket Handlingar, 19-22), who accepts as "Old Norwegian" or "Old Icelandic" all vernacular manuscripts through the nineteenth century.

at the University of Copenhagen. When complete, this dictionary will take into account the language of all prose texts, including sermons, written in Norwegian to ca. 1370 and in Icelandic to ca. 1540. Its importance as a standard reference tool will no doubt make these dates conventional for literary scholars and historians of the language, and together with the above-stated rationale for dating the close of the Middle Ages in Iceland to 1550, it provides a convenient guideline for the present discussion. In the inventory of manuscripts toward the end of this chapter, I therefore adopt a liberal interpretation of the limits established by the Copenhagen Ordbog and include all sermons in Norwegian and Icelandic datable to ca. 1550. This date goes beyond what many would view as the close of the Old Norse period, but it has the advantage of being inclusive, and it agrees satisfactorily with both a pivotal date in Icelandic ecclesiastical history and a recognizable turning point in the history of Old Norse prose.

The definition of a sermon in this context is relatively straightforward since the sermons, their titles, and even Old Norse terms for preaching are based largely on Latin models. The thirty-one texts in the Old Norwegian Homily Book, for instance, from the first quarter of the thirteenth century, bear Latin titles of the same sort one would expect to find in a Latin homiliary or sermonary. Twenty-two are rubricated as sermones, while four are titled homiliae (ómeliae), a term that refers, as in English and Continental practice, to the systematic exposition of a biblical pericope according to a pattern of lectio continua. The remaining texts are either parenetic pieces of a general nature designed for reading or delivery quando volueris (e.g., Admonitio ualde necessaria), or are intended for a particular feast within the sanctorale (e.g., In die sancti Johannis baptiste). The names assigned to these texts are thus entirely in keeping with the distinctions one encounters in most medieval homiliaries. By contrast, the titles in the Old Icelandic Homily Book, a collection of roughly the same date, are less consistent and occasionally appear in Icelandic rather than Latin. Of the twenty-seven titled sermons, only two are identified as sermones. The remaining titles typically indicate only the relevant feast or topic, either in Latin (e.g., In cena domini) or Icelandic (e.g., Á ioladagin “On the Day of Yule”, i.e. Christmas).

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Four are designated by the Icelandic term mal, a word that means "language, speech, discourse, or story", thus a close equivalent of Latin sermo. Examples include Drottens daga mal ("a discourse on the Lord's day") and Postola mal ("a sermon on the apostles"). Sermons in other manuscripts, if titled at all, are most often identified by a topical or thematic heading such as those in the Old Icelandic Homily Book. A small number are distinguished by another vernacular term, ræða (pl. ræður), a word related etymologically to the verb ræða ("to speak or discuss"), thus "a talk or discussion", another close approximation of sermo.

The contents of the sermons, like their titles, reflect a great deal of similarity with contemporary sermons in Latin and other vernaculars, although strictly speaking not all of these texts conform to a modern scholarly definition of sermon. Only a minority are equipped with formulas of address that suggest they were meant to be read aloud to a congregation; few conclude with a version of the doxology; and none, regrettably, can be connected with a specific preaching event. Some clearly grew out of a monastic milieu and are concerned with sophisticated exegetical arguments perhaps best absorbed through private study, while others take up moral and penitential themes suitable for presentation to a lay audience. Institutionally their affiliations are almost wholly with Benedictine and Augustinian foundations, since these are the orders that dominated the Norwegian and Icelandic churches until well into the thirteenth century, whereas the Danish and Swedish sermon corpora reflect a much greater influence from the French mendicant orders. All the Old Norse sermons are anonymous, and few can be assigned to a

particular scriptorium — or for that matter to a particular geographical region — with any certainty. Nearly all are based on Latin models (at least two are translated from sermons in Old English), although the texts they translate include not only sermons and homilies but well-known works such as Gregory’s *Dialogues*, medieval apocrypha such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Trinitium Annae*, and popular saints’ *vita*, *acta*, and miracle collections. Some are even redactions of Old Norse sagas. To judge from the kinds of texts represented by these sources, the sermons thus constitute a relatively fluid genre, centering on *sermones* and *homiliae* as such, but including other religious works as well. In the manuscripts, they are frequently paired with texts of a liturgical or paraliturgical nature such as prayers, creeds, and commentaries on the Mass. A propensity among modern scholars to refer to just about any short religious text in Old Norse as a “sermon” thus actually finds some support in the fluidity of the genre and in the lack of precision and consistency with which Norwegian and Icelandic authors titled and structured the texts we would now identify as sermons.

II. DEVELOPMENT

The corpus as a whole is more or less homogeneous in that the sermons from the close of the period, while mostly fragmentary, have much in common with their earliest precursors. Certain texts, such as the Stave Church Dedication Sermon and translations of Gregory’s forty Gospel homilies, were copied repeatedly over a span of three or four centuries as if they were found to be indispensible resources for preaching and private meditation, regardless of their antiquity. The impression one gets from this recycling of old favorites is that the corpus was built around a core repertoire of scripturally based exegetical homilies, sermons for principal feasts, penitential sermons, and sermons on select topics such as church dedication and the consecration of an altar, all based on materials from the twelfth century and earlier. Catechetical sermons and sermons compiled from Gospel harmonies are less well represented but still appear at both early and late stages of the corpus. This continued reliance on the same types of material, if not on precisely the same texts, was by no means due
to a paucity of Latin models since Norwegian and Icelandic libraries were comparatively well stocked with patristic and medieval sermon collections. Rather, the conservative nature of the sermon corpus is probably ascribable to the same backward-looking antiquarian impulse that governed much of Old Norse literature during the period. If the history of the genre is marked by few significant formal or intellectual developments, it seems to be because Norwegian and Icelandic authors sustained a greater fascination with Bede, Caesarius of Arles, and Gregory the Great than they did with most later writers. They appear never to have become seriously engaged with scholastic theology, and as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they were still translating works by Alcuin and Honorius Augustodunensis.

If one turns from individual sermons to their arrangement in collections, however, one can see a number of developments in habits of compilation that may have implications for the way the sermons were intended to be used. It has long been assumed that most Old Norse sermons are translations of Latin texts transmitted through Carolingian homiliaries imported from England or the Continent. Many of those Latin models have now been identified, but we are still unable to identify the routes by which they came to Norway and Iceland or explain how, in most cases, the collections they were transmitted in relate to the main families of Carolingian homiliaries. The most conservative representative of a Continental homiliary, the Old Norwe-

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gian Homily Book, has thirty-one sermons distributed throughout the liturgical year from Christmas to All Saints, with seven sermons intervening on topics such as tithing, the symbolism of church bells, and the fate of the good and bad souls at Doomsday. This collection also includes several non-sermonic texts which disrupt this general plan, but as Ian Kirby has remarked, the core of the Norwegian Homily Book seems to be “a de tempore sequence that makes considerable use of the 8th-century homiliarium by Paulus Diaconus”\(^\text{12}\). Though unique in its selection and arrangement of texts, the collection thus preserves the essential structure of a liturgical homiliary and may well have been employed for either ad clerum preaching or for monastic use in the night Office in the same manner as Paul the Deacon’s Homiliary. The Old Icelandic Homily Book, on the other hand, represents a more debased form of a liturgical homiliary and should not really be termed a homiliary in the technical sense, since its contents do not follow any systematic pericopal order. Instead, it conflates at least two independent series of sermons to which other texts have been added that are difficult to class as sermons\(^\text{13}\). The outlines of a conventional plan can be discerned in the first half of the manuscript, which includes a series of texts in the order Assumption of Mary, Nativity of John the Baptist, Ascension, Whitsunday, Ember Days, All Saints, Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Last Supper, Passion, and Resurrection. But to these have been added sermons on Epiphany, the Purification, the Passion, All Saints, St Stephen’s Day, St John’s Day, Holy Innocents, and the Wedding at Cana. Then comes a set of sermons for Advent and Christmas which probably originated from a separate collection. Interspersed among these liturgical sermons are admonitory, penitential, and catechetical sermons on topics such as the symbolism of the twelve apostles, the obser-


\(^{13}\) G. Neckel, *Zum Stockholmer Homilienbuch*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 38 (1913), p. 459-500, argued that the Old Icelandic Homily Book was pieced together from two sermon cycles, but that the second cycle was probably already a combination of two annual liturgical cycles.
vance of Sunday, the mystery of the Cross, the consecration of an altar, and the symbolism of church architecture. Three are commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer (one very close to the text in the Roman missal for Feria VI in Parasceve), one is a translation of chapter 4 of the Regula S. Benedicti, and one is an extract of the Old Icelandic Stephanus saga. The random order of the sermonic texts, together with the addition of these non-sermonic works, has led some scholars to describe the collection as a manual or handbook rather than a homiliary, and has led to the idea that the Old Icelandic Homily Book may have been meant for private devotion rather than liturgical use. Such assertions about the intended purpose or audience of a medieval sermon manuscript are of course notoriously problematic, but comparisons like this on the basis of content can be revealing if they show, as in this case, how far a collection has degenerated from the carefully structured framework of a liturgical homiliary with readings arranged per circulum anni. This movement away from a coherent and systematically ordered homiliary is in fact the prevailing pattern in Old Norse sermon manuscripts, apparent already in the two early Homily Books, but much farther advanced in later manuscripts such as AM 671 quarto, a fourteenth-century miscellany consisting of two sermons within a collection of theological tracts including a letter by St Bernard, excerpts from Alcuin’s De virtutibus et vitiiis and Gregory’s Moralia, some Norwegian canon law texts, a Latin poem De quatuor temperamentis, and several Icelandic episcopal statutes and decreets.

14 R. BOYER, La vie religieuse en Islande (1116-1264) d’après la “Sturlunga Saga” et les “Sagas des Évêques”, Paris, 1979, p. 234, suggests that the Old Icelandic Homily Book “se donne, malgré le décousu de sa présentation, des allures de manuel”. F. PAASCHE, Homiliu-bók (Icelandic Sermons). Perg. 41o No. 15 in the Royal Library Stockholm, Copenhagen, 1935 (Corpus Codicum Islandicum Medii Aevi, 8), p. 21, writes more ambiguously that “The Icelandic books of sermons have served their readers as books of devotion, and to many priests the written text probably also formed the basis of their sermons in church”.

In one rather unusual case, we can nevertheless point to a specific kind of homiliary that must have provided the source for a particular Old Norse sermon. A Rogationtide sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book entitled *In capite ieiunij*, for Ash Wednesday, is a patchwork of patristic admonitions on the subject of the six things necessary for the Christian faith, namely confession, penance, vigils, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving\(^{16}\). The sermon’s contents are entirely catechetical, and since it is rubricated for the first day of Rogationtide, a period traditionally marked by frequent preaching, it was doubtless meant for oral delivery *ad populum*. In 1963 Joan Turville-Petre proposed that the sermon was a translation of a lost Latin sermon which had itself been pieced together in florilegium style from an eclectic group of texts including Pseudo-Augustine *Sermo 254*, Theodulf of Orléans’ *Capitula*, the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, and Isidore’s *De ecclesiasticis officiis*\(^{17}\). Her argument was based on the fact that a virtually identical translation of the same excerpts from the same group of texts survives in Old English (as Vercelli Homily III), which would seem to indicate that the two vernacular sermons are independent translations of an earlier Latin compilation that first brought these excerpts together in sermon form. In 1982 Turville-Petre’s hypothesis was brilliantly confirmed by Helen Spencer, who brought to light the existence of two versions of the Latin sermon Turville-Petre had presumed lost\(^{18}\). The earliest such version survives in Cambridge, Pembroke College 25 (Bury St Edmunds, s. xi\(^{ex}\)), an English copy of the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres which J. E. Cross has recently shown to be a late copy of a sermon collection consulted by the authors of at least eight Old English sermons written in the second half of the tenth century\(^{19}\). Because all known manu-

\(^{16}\) *The Icelandic Homily Book*. Perg. 15 4\(^{o}\) in the Royal Library, Stockholm, ed. A. DE LEEUW VAN WEELEN, Reykjavík, 1993 (Íslensk handrit: Icelandic Manuscripts, Series in Quarto, 3), f° 29v l.8-31r l.11; *Homiliubók: Íslánska homilier eftir en handskrift från tolfté árhundredet*, ed. Th. WISEN, Lund, 1872, p. 61-64.


scripts of Turville-Petre's "lost penitential homily" were written in England, and because the earliest known version appears in an Anglo-Saxon redaction of the Homiliary of Saint-Père de Chartres, there is a reasonable possibility that the Icelandic Rogationtide sermon was translated from an exemplar closely related to Pembroke 25 which made its way from England to Iceland sometime before the late-twelfth century. If so, then the Old Icelandic Homily Book was compiled with the aid of an English homiliary designed as a resource for vernacular preaching, and both the substance and the liturgical setting of the Icelandic Rogationtide sermon can be traced to tenth-century English practice. The Rogationtide sermon would then figure into a small group of Icelandic works including the Old Icelandic Physiologus and the Latin private prayer Succurrite mihi omnes sancti in AM 655 XXIII quarto (?Skálholt, s. xiii) which are believed to derive from pre-Conquest English models taken to Iceland (probably via Norway) during the course of the English monastic missions to Scandinavia beginning in the late-tenth century 20.

III. DIFFUSION

Although no Old Norse sermons are likely to have circulated outside Iceland or Norway before the seventeenth century, a surprising number were recopied or retranslated in complex patterns of diffusion that attest to a fertile reception history within these two countries. The most copiously disseminated sermons in Old Norse are translations of Gregory the Great's *Homiliae xl. in Evangelia* which survive in seven manuscripts written over the course of five centuries. At least four of these manuscripts appear to be based on a lost Icelandic translation of all forty homilies made before 1150\(^{21}\). A chief witness to this lost Icelandic collection is the early thirteenth-century set of ten Gregorian homilies in Icelandic translation in AM 677 quarto, a manuscript evidently copied from an Icelandic exemplar which was a common source for six items in the Old Icelandic Homily Book. Because AM 677 quarto is incomplete at its beginning and end, it may have originally contained more than its present ten homilies, and it may in fact represent a fragment of what was once a com-
plete replica of the lost Icelandic collection. Multiple copies of other Gregorian homilies in Old Norse translation likewise point to an extensive collection used repeatedly in composing sermons and other vernacular works of pious instruction. Translations of Gregory’s *Homilia* 34 (on St Michael and All Angels) survive in AM 677 quarto, in the Old Icelandic Homily Book, and in two other early manuscripts: the Old Norwegian Homily Book and AM 237 a folio. Icelandic translations of the same homily are also incorporated into two thirteenth-century hagiographic works, *Mikael saga* and *Mariu saga*. This latter text, a learned synthesis of Marian legends attributed to the Icelandic bishop Kygri-Björn Hjaltason († ca. 1238), also includes a partial translation of Gregory’s *Homilia* 10 (on Matthew 2:1-12, for Epiphany), a nearly complete translation of which elsewhere appears in the Old Icelandic Homily Book. Two other Gregorian homilies in AM 677 quarto are similarly paralleled in religious prose of about the same age. A long passage from Gregory’s *Homilia* 40 (on Luke 16.19-31) is incorporated into the capacious thirteenth-century Norse paraphrase of portions of the Old Testament known as *Stjörn*, while a section from *Homilia* 33 (on Luke 7.36-50) appears in *Marthe saga ok Marie Magdalene*. Gregory’s *Homilia* 25 (on John 20.11-18, for Thursday after Easter) appears in an abridged Icelandic translation in the Old Icelandic Homily Book and in fragmentary form in AM 686 c quarto, from the first quarter of the thirteenth century. The Easter homily in the Old Norwegian

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Homily Book, based in part on Gregory’s *Homilia* 21 (on Mark 16.1-7, for Easter), is paralleled by a full translation in AM 624 quarto, from ca. 1500\(^{27}\). These works account altogether for a total of nineteen of Gregory’s Gospel homilies surviving in Old Norse translation, and since Gregory’s homilies are cited as a collection in at least four surviving booklists from medieval Norway and Iceland, one can imagine the importance these texts had for the development of ecclesiastical literature in these countries\(^{28}\).

Other sermons surviving in multiple copies or with connections to affiliated forms of religious prose (in both Latin and the vernacular) suggest equally intricate patterns of diffusion. The most celebrated sermon in Old Norse, the so-called Stave Church Dedication Sermon, survives in four manuscripts (both Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Homily Books, AM 237 a folio, and AM 624 quarto) which range in date from ca. 1150 to ca. 1500 and thus come close to defining the limits of the corpus\(^{29}\). Separate versions of the Ember Days sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book are found in both a fourteenth-century Norwegian manuscript (AM 114 a quarto) and in a roughly contemporary Icelandic miscellany known as *Hauksbók*\(^{30}\).

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A sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book on the consecration of an altar also appears in a fifteenth-century copy in AM 672 quarto. This last manuscript, a compendium of sermons, saints’ lives, and miscellaneous religious tracts, is one of at least ten manuscripts of various dates and provenances that almost certainly shared an exemplar with the Old Icelandic Homily Book.

For some sermons the question of sources and analogues is so complex that the details remain to be worked out. Ian J. Kirby has argued that a sermon on the Passion in the Old Icelandic Homily Book consisting of two disjointed episodes from the stories of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem and the Crucifixion is actually taken from a fuller Icelandic translation of a lost Latin Gospel harmony, portions of which are elsewhere represented by two fragmentary narratives of events from the life of Christ in AM 655 XXI quarto and AM 667 XIX quarto, both translated almost wholly from the Gospel of John. This hypothetical Latin harmonized story of the Passion, Kirby speculates, may originally have been a passion narrative designed for liturgical reading during Holy Week, and may testify to a more general practice of adapting Latin liturgical material for the composition of vernacular sermons. More complicated is the

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31 See H. BEKKER-NIELSEN, Caesarius af Arles som kilde til norrone homilier, in Opuscula, II.1, Copenhagen, 1961 (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 25.1), p. 10-16.


textual history behind the first sermon on St Stephen in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 80v 1.4-80v 1.35), a translation mainly from the Epistola Luciani presbyteri and Augustine's De ciuitate Dei. Excerpts of the same sermon are preserved in two other manuscripts (AM 655 XIV b quarto and AM 655 XXII quarto), while a virtually identical translation appears in the famous thirteenth-century anthology of saints’ lives known as Reykjahólabók, and yet another translation of the same material takes up chapters 10, 11 and 13 of the Icelandic Stephanus saga. In another case, the sermon on the Assumption of the Virgin in both Homily Books so closely parallels a portion of Mariu saga that all three texts are generally presumed to share a common source, though the question remains unsettled as to whether the saga borrows from the sermons, the sermons from the saga, or all three from an earlier vernacular sermon now lost. At the very least, these intricate patterns of borrowing, redaction, and reproduction give evidence of an industrious program of textual study carried out by generations of Norwegian and Icelandic scribes.

A particularly intriguing set of connections, and one that deserves a great deal of further study, is the pattern of correspondences


34 O. Widding, Et fragment of Stephanus Saga (AM 655, 4° XIV B), Tekst og kommentar, in Acta Philologica Scandinavica, 21 (1952), p. 143-171; Id., De norrene homiliebogers prædiken på Stephensdag, in Maal og Minne (1959), p. 42-47; A. De Leeuw van Weenen (ed.), The Icelandic Homily Book, p. 13-14; I.J. Kirby, Biblical Quotation, p. 49 (n. 2.3.7), 60 (n. 2.4.33), and 106 (n. 2.45).

35 The sermons are edited by A. De Leeuw van Weenen, The Icelandic Homily Book, f° 2r 1.1-5r 1.6; Th. Wisén, Homilieu-bók, p. 4-10; and G. Indrebø, Gamal Norsk Homiliebok, p. 129-134. On their relationship to Mariu saga, see K. Vrátny, Enthält das Stockholmer Homilienbuch durchweg Übersetzungen ?, in Arkiv för nordisk filologi, 32 (1916), p. 31-49, at 42; G. Indrebø, Gamal Norsk Homiliebok, p. 62; G. Turville-Petre, The Old-Norse Homily on the Assumption and the "Mariu saga", in Mediaeval Studies, 9 (1947), p. 131-140; and O. Hjelde, Norsk preken i det 12. århundre, p. 329-331. The main source of all three texts is the Pseudo-Jerome Epistola ad Paulam et Eustochium (CPL n. 633, epistula 9), which often circulated in medieval homiliaries as a sermon for the feast of the Assumption (e.g., Cambridge, University Library, Kk. 4. 13 (Norwich, s. xii°), f° 152r-158r); however, the Old Norse sermons and the Mariu saga consistently make use of material not found in the Pseudo-Jerome letter.
between sermons in Old Norse and those in other vernaculars, especially Old English, through the use of shared material. Didrik Seip once suggested that the most cogent vernacular analogues for the texts in the Old Norwegian Homily Book are the sermons in "Ælfric’s Anglo-Saxon collection, with which the Norwegian branch of this genre shows considerable affinity, both in its composition and spirit". Milton McC. Gatch proposed a historical context for that affinity by suggesting that "in both Norway and Iceland there was direct English influence on the development of the vernacular literary tradition" and that "the first preaching in Scandinavian dialects may have taken place in the Danelaw area of the archdiocese of York in the tenth and eleventh centuries". Just how the Old English and Old Norse sermon corpora are related is still difficult to say, but certain textual links are beyond question. Mattias Tveitane once showed that a Christmas sermon appearing in slightly different redactions in the Icelandic and Norwegian Homily Books shares themes including the miracles at Christ’s birth and the Sunday respite of the damned with Vercelli Homilies V and VI and with several other anonymous sermons in Old English and Middle High German, all of which appear to translate the same group of Latin texts independently. Joan Turville-Petre similarly demonstrated the collateral development of a distinctive collection of admonitory and devotional materials in a *Sermo ad populum* in the Old Norwegian Homily Book and in two

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36 D.A. Seip, Introduction to *The Arnamagnaean Manuscript 677*, 4to, p. 36. M.McC. Gatch, *The Achievement of Ælfric and His Colleagues in European Perspective*, in *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds*, eds. B.F. Huppe and P.E. Szarmach, Albany, 1978, p. 43-73, at 57, likewise finds that “the Norse homilies are more reminiscent of the Old English than of the other vernacular traditions”.

37 M.McC. Gatch, *The Achievement of Ælfric and His Colleagues*, p. 55.

Old English texts: a pseudo-Wulfstan sermon and a Lenten sermon by Ælfric. From the correspondences between these three vernacular sermons she concluded that “the Latin sources used by Ælfric’s predecessors, and by Ælfric himself for some of his later works, were available in some form to Icelandic and Norwegian scholars writing about a century later”\textsuperscript{39}. Other correspondences between sermons in Old Norse and Old English also point to patterns of reliance on a common group of Latin sermons if not on a common family of sermonaries and florilegia. A sermon for All Saints in both Homily Books translates the Pseudo-Bede \textit{Legimus in ecclesiasticis historiis}, the standard sermon for All Saints in the Homiliary of Paul the Deacon and in several derivative homiliaries, as well as in most medieval breviaries, including the 1519 Breviary of Nidaros, an important witness to medieval Norwegian liturgical practice\textsuperscript{40}. The two versions of this sermon in Old Norse are paralleled by translations of the same text in Old English and Old Saxon\textsuperscript{41}. As mentioned earlier, a peni-


potential sermon rubricated for Ash Wednesday in the Old Icelandic Homily Book translates a ninth-century Latin Lenten sermon known only in manuscripts with English connections. The Icelandic text closely parallels two independent Old English translations (Vercelli Homily III and Belfour Homily VI) which survive altogether in nine copies. Similarly, an Advent sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book based on two Latin sermons by Caesarius of Arles (n. 187 and 188) closely parallels the Old English sermon Assmann XI, which combines the same texts in an identical manner. Some of these parallels could conceivably be accounted for by the coincidental use of well-known materials that happened to be widely available at the time, but in other cases the lines of exchange are so precise and unusual that they preclude the possibility of coincidence. Most conspicuously, the early fourteenth-century compilation known as Hauksbók includes Icelandic translations of two sermons by Ælfric, De falsis diis and De auguriis, which shows that at some point Icelanders were not only making use of manuscripts imported from the British Isles but were translating directly from Old English.

Landes- u. Stadtbibl., Cod. B. 80 4° (s. ix/x) is a rare dual-language homiliary, with Latin texts and German translations on facing pages.

The Icelandic Homily Book, ed. A. De Leeuw Van Weenen, f° 29v 1.8-31r l.11; Homilie-bók, ed. Th. Wisén, p. 61-64.

On the background of this Latin sermon and its relation to the vernacular versions, see J. Turville-Petre, Translations of a Lost Penitential Homily; H. Spencer, Vernacular and Latin Versions of a Sermon for Lent; and J.E. Cross, Cambridge, Pembroke College MS. 25, p. 27 (n. 22), 91, 140-141.


IV. PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

The two issues that have dominated scholarship on the Old Norse sermons to date have been the question of Icelandic versus Norwegian origin and the problem of whether they represent translations of foreign sources rather than original native compositions. At the heart of both issues is the Stave Church Dedication Sermon, probably the best known of all medieval Scandinavian sermons since it has been so intensively studied and has been translated into English at least four times. This sermon, which in two of its four surviving manuscripts is rubricated *Kirkjudagsmål* ("Church Day Sermon") and *In dedicatione templi*, commemorates the dedication of an unnamed church. The text is structured around an elaborate allegory of church architecture, culminating in a sophisticated homology that identifies the church’s ornate exterior with the body and its interior with the soul. The allegory operates on two levels, first as an explication of

the characteristics of the spiritual church collectively, then as an explanation of the virtues of the individual Christian. The author begins by reminding his audience that the feast of church dedication originated with the erection of King Solomon’s temple, and he admonishes them to take care of their church since it is the center of their community. He then enters into the allegory by unraveling the significance of the chancel, nave, and altar:

The chancel signifies the saints in heaven and the nave the Christians on earth. The altar signifies Christ, for just as no sacrifices offered to God are sanctified except over the altar, our words will not be acceptable to God unless they are sanctified in the love of Christ. The altar cloths are the saints who adorn Christ in good deeds, as Paul the Apostle said: All of you who are baptized in Christ have adorned Christ [cf. Galatians 3.27]. The foundation timbers of the church signify the Apostles of God, who are the foundations of all Christendom. The portal into the church signifies the true faith, through which we are led into the community of Christianity. The door before the portal signifies the wise who boldly resist the heretics in their teaching, and exclude them from God’s Christianity. The floor-boards signify the humble who lower themselves in all dignity and give greater support to the whole community the more they are trodden under foot. The benches in the church signify the merciful who relieve the sufferings of their weak brethren in their mercy, as the benches give comfort to those who sit upon them.

The allegory continues in this fashion by explicating everything in the church, including the bells and crucifixes and other items that make up a priest’s customary equipment, painting a vivid picture of the inside of a wooden church whose every detail resonates with divine symbolism. After a brief transition, the author then takes up a tropological reading of the same objects, beginning again with the chancel:

The chancel of this church is prayer and psalm-singing. The altar signifies love and the altar-cloth good-deeds, which must accompany love. Just as all sacrifices are hallowed over

47 This passage and the one following are from the translation by G. Turville-Petre, The Old Norse Homily on the Dedication, p. 215-217.
the altar, so all good works are hallowed and made acceptable in love. And this love may be distinguished in two commandments, i.e. love of God and love of our neighbor. The front wall and the rood-screen of the church signify this two-fold love, the front wall love of our neighbor and the rood-screen love of God. In the rood-screen is a large doorway into the chancel, for the more deeply he loves God the less narrow will the path of God appear to every man. In the front wall, there are windows, for light is the command of the Lord, said the psalmist, and it enlightens our eyes. The Lord Himself explained this clear precept more fully when He said: *It is My commandment that each of you love the other* [cf. John 15.12]. The doorway before the portal signifies control of the tongue, as David said in the psalm: *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door to guard my lips* [Psalm 141.3], and as he spoke in these words: *Open my mouth when it befits better to speak than to be silent, but close it when it is better to be silent than to speak.* The door may further signify wisdom, which distinguishes good things from evil, so that we open our hearts to good things and shut out all evil fantasies. The foundation timbers of this church signify faith, for over this foundation and basis we shall fashion all our good works, so that we may become temples of God. The four corner-posts signify the four cardinal virtues which are the stoutest supports of other good deeds, i.e. wisdom and justice, fortitude and temperance. The floorboarding signifies humility and obedience and patience, not being ashamed to suffer humiliation and injustice of men. The benches signify those works of mercy which bring comfort to the needy, as the benches give rest to those who sit upon them.

Many details in this two-part allegory are closely if not exactly paralleled in medieval treatises on architectural symbolism such as Honorius’s *Gemma animae* and William Durandus’s *Rationale divinarum officiorum*. But the Old Norse sermon, which was written no later than ca. 1150, predates most of its Latin analogues and remains essentially unsourced, leading some scholars to suppose that it is a fundamentally original work only partly inspired by Latin models. The skillful reworking of traditional materials thus lends to the sermon the appearance of what Fredrik Paasche has called “personal
authorship, in a framework of ecclesiastical tradition", a characteristic common to many Old Norse sermons. Because the architectural features described in the sermon — the foundation timbers, floor boards, rafters, planking, ridge beams, tie beams, roof beams, and so forth — are all of wood, it was long suspected that the church so depicted is meant to represent a Norwegian stave church rather than a Continental or Icelandic church built of stone or turf. All the sermon’s Latin analogues seem to refer to a stone rather than a wooden building, while the argument for a Norwegian (or at least non-Icelandic) origin for the sermon is supported by archaeological evidence for the existence of timber churches at Jelling, Lund, Roskilde, and other parts of continental Scandinavia as early as 990. Yet timber churches are also known to have been built in Iceland by the early twelfth century, and as Hans Bekker-Nielsen has rightly pointed out, the church described in the sermon probably “never existed anywhere except in the homilist’s imagination. He did not, as far as a study of the text shows us, describe an existing church (there is, in any case, not much of an architectural description in the homily) but concentrated on transferring literary symbols that he had picked up from European tradition into a native context”. After Bekker-Nielsen made this observation and it became widely accepted that the sermon’s provenance is probably not ascertainable on the basis of its architectural detail, interest in the Dedication Sermon fell off considerably, and the questions about its place of origin and its relation to Continental literature to this day remain essentially unanswered. While there is still much we do not know about it, the Dedication Sermon is nevertheless important as one of the oldest literary texts of any kind from medieval Scandinavia, and it continues to be acknowledged as “one of the most interesting of all Icelandic or Norwegian homilies”.

For the rest of the sermon corpus, similar questions about provenance, sources, and genre persist alongside equally difficult questions.

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51 H. BEKKER-NIELSEN, *The Old Norse Dedication Homily*, p. 130.
about audience and reception, the sermons’ importance for the development of native secular literature, and their relation to contemporary theological and philosophical currents. Although the full historical context of the composition or delivery of these sermons is in most cases beyond recovery, it is still possible to catch an occasional glimpse of an intended audience, as when the author of a sermon for Easter Sunday reminds his listeners of their obligation to provide wax for the paschal candle⁵³, or when the author of the Purification sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book remarks on the commemorative nature of the day’s service:

This feast is called the Purification of St Mary, yet her humility signifies our own purification, that which she revealed on this day. Mary’s entrance into the church with offerings betokens the entrance into the heavenly kingdom of righteous men with good deeds. We make remembrance of this when we stand in church with burning candles on this day, for as the Lord said in the Gospel, *Let there be burning candles in your hands* [cf. Luke 12.35]⁵⁴.

These allusions to the physical immediacy of the Mass and its equipment, appropriate for lay and monastic congregations alike, compare interestingly with a passage in the Pentecost sermon in the Old Norwegian Homily Book which is expressly directed to a monastic audience. Here the speaker, in praising his listeners for having abandoned secular life and taken a vow of apostolic poverty, quotes freely from the Vulgate without bothering to translate (italicized phrases are in Latin):

We therefore have greater hope of obtaining His mercy since we have done as Peter said regarding himself and other apostles: *Behold, we have forsaken all and follow you* [Matthew 19.27]. We have abandoned everything for the sake of God, both property and friends and *all the glory of the world*. We also hold everything in common, as it is written: *Of the multitude of believers there was one heart and one soul, etc.* [Acts 4.32]. Praise be to God that we too have all been gath-


ered in this place. We too own everything in common — house and home, earth and other property — just as they did. It is therefore necessary that we have no desire for the world, nor for the folly of earthly things, as was the desire of the sons of Israel, who *looked back in their minds to the melons and pots of meat* [cf. Numbers 11.5]. When they were in the wilderness where God had called them, they longed for Egypt and for the kinds of lodgings and provisions they had had there. In the same way, many devout men yearn for worldly pleasures and for the folly of the life they were once accustomed to, even though they now live in the cloister\(^55\).

The second and third sentences of this passage, with their insistence that the monks have abandoned all the glory of the world and own everything in common, may hold a more specific clue to the sermon’s original audience, since they quote from the founding document of the Augustinian order\(^56\). This entire sermon and the one preceding it (on the Ascension) are full of untranslated quotations from the Vulgate, yielding a rich macaronic texture that argues for a fully bilingual author (and perhaps audience as well) and a fondness for a peculiar style that is widely paralleled in European sermon literature\(^57\).


\(^{56}\) Augustine, *Regula ad servos Dei*, ch. 1: “Primum, propter quod in unum estis congregati, ut unanimes habitetis in domo, et sit vobis anima una et cor unum in Deo. Et non dicatis aliquid proprium, sed sint vobis omnia communia: et distribuatur uniciuique vestrum a praeposito vestro victus et tegumentum, non aequaliter omnibus, quia non aequaliter valetis omnes, sed potius uniciuique sicut opus fuerit. Sic enim legis in Actibus Apostolorum: *Quia erant illis omnia communia et distribuebatur uniciuique sicut quique opus erat* (Acts 4.32, 35)” (PL 32, cols. 1378-1379). This source was identified by O. Hjelde, *Norsk preken i det 12. århundre*, p. 287.

In other sermons, an audience is occasionally identified through references to local custom or descriptions of church gatherings. The author of a sermon on the story of Job in the Old Icelandic Homily Book, in an opening section modeled loosely on a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (n. 227), explains that “it is more common in other countries than it is with us here [in Iceland] that people take the eucharist at several of the great feasts.” Another sermon in the same collection compares the sins characteristic of the Icelanders with those of the Norwegians by claiming that “carnal lust is promoted in this country through the praises of people at popular gatherings the same way drunkenness is in Norway.” One of the most valuable witnesses to the public reception of an Icelandic sermon comes not from a sermon itself but from Jóns saga helga I, an account of the life of St Jón Ógmundarson, the first bishop of Hólar (1106-1121), by the thirteenth-century hagiographer Gunnlaugr Leifsson. In relating Jón’s educational accomplishments, Gunnlaugr explains that a Swedish priest named Gísli whom Jón had engaged as master of his school at Hólar customarily preached from a book before him in the church pulpit:

Whenever master Gísli preached (talaði) God’s word to the people at high feasts, he did not speak extemporaneously nor rely on his own memory, but rather he expounded the writings of the holy fathers from a book that lay before him on the lectern. And this clever man did this utterly out of prudence and humility because since he was very young, he knew that those who listened to him would value his teachings more highly when they saw that he took it from holy books and not from his own intellect and understanding. He not only caressed and softened the hearing of the people standing about with graceful eloquence and a scholarly delivery, but he abundantly sated their minds and hearts with the spiritual food of God’s word, so that he appeared to preach (predika) as well with words as with deeds.

58 The Icelandic Homily Book, ed. A. DE LEEUW VAN WEENEN, f° 43r 1.16-17; Homiliu-bôk, ed. Th. WISEN, p. 93, lines 20-21.
60 Jóns saga helga, I, in Biskupa sogur, ed. J. SIGURDSSON and G. VIGFÚSSON, Copenhagen, 1858-1878, vol. 1, p. 236 (my translation). For a
This account of Gisli preaching to a crowd out of a book has been taken by some scholars as evidence that all preaching at the time was done in the vernacular and that the book in question was a vernacular homiliary, perhaps even the Old Icelandic Homily Book itself or another sermon manuscript that now survives only in fragments. Whether or not this is true, we do know that popular preaching continued to flourish in medieval Iceland, for at the close of the twelfth century Bishop Páll Jónsson of Skálholt (1195-1211) complained about excessive preaching in Iceland and discouraged it except at major feasts on the grounds that he felt sermons would be more valued if less frequent.

V. MANUSCRIPTS, EDITIONS, AND STUDIES

For most of the medieval vernacular sermons discussed in other chapters of this volume there exist competent editions and in many instances translations that help make the sermons accessible to a non-specialist audience. With the Old Norse sermons, however, this is not quite the case since, apart from the two Homily Books and a handful of individual texts, much of the corpus remains in manuscript, and even the best editions can be hard to find in libraries outside Scandinavia. A list of editions would thus convey only an incomplete picture of the corpus, and because no complete inventory of Old Norse sermons has ever been compiled, it would seem that the proper separate edition and translation, see *Origines Islandicae: A Collection of the More Important Sagas and Other Native Writings Relating to the Settlement and Early History of Iceland*, ed. and trans. G. VIGFÚSSON and Y. POWELL, Oxford, 1905, vol. 1, p. 552.


63 Fifteen manuscripts are identified by F. JÓNSSON, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteratsurs Historie*, 2nd ed., Copenhagen, 1920-1924, vol. 2, p. 930, who indicates contents for only a few. A more thorough, though still
place to begin in a bibliographical orientation to the field is with a list of manuscripts rather than editions. I therefore take the opportunity here to list in roughly chronological order the thirty-three manuscripts known to me to contain sermons (and texts traditionally referred to as sermons) written in Norwegian or Icelandic before the mid-sixteenth century, together with references to important editions, facsimiles, translations, and studies. All but two of the following manuscripts (n. 2, 24) belong to the celebrated Arnamagnæan collection established in the early eighteenth century by the Icelandic antiquary Árni Magnússon (hence the siglum AM)\(^{64}\), and for this reason it will be convenient to cite the catalogue number assigned to each by Kristian Kålund in his two-volume *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, Copenhagen, 1889-1894 (cited below as *Katalog*). Dates for all manuscripts except n. 24 are taken from the Arnamagnæan Commission’s *Ordbog over det norrone prosasprog: Registre*, Copenhagen, 1989, which identifies and dates all manuscripts containing Norwegian prose to ca. 1370 and all those containing Icelandic prose to ca. 1540. Until relatively recently, all manuscripts in the Arnamagnæan collection were housed at Det Arnamagnæanske Institut in Copenhagen, where many still reside, but over the past few decades a number of those of Icelandic origin have been transferred to the Arnamagnæan Institute (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar) on the campus of the University of Iceland in Reyk-


javik, where they can now be consulted. Twenty-nine of the following manuscripts were produced in Iceland, four in Norway. Thirteen contain unpublished sermons or sermon fragments.

1. AM 237 a folio (ca. 1150; Katalog, n. 358)

The oldest Icelandic manuscript in existence, consisting of two leaves once used as binding strips. Although the manuscript now contains only fragments of two sermons, David McDougall has suggested that it is "probably a remnant of a homiliary of considerable size."

The two sermons, written in a two-column format, are the Stave Church Dedication Sermon and an Icelandic translation of Gregory's *Homilia 34 in Evangelia* (on St Michael and All Angels).

Complete versions of both sermons appear in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (n. 2 below) and in the Old Norwegian Homily Book (n. 4 below).


2. Stockholm, Kunglinga Biblioteket, Cod. Holm. Perg. 15 quarto: The Old Icelandic Homily Book (ca. 1200)

A miscellaneous collection of sixty-two sermons and other religious works copied by several Icelandic scribes. In addition to forty-two texts and parts of texts which are readily identifiable as sermons or pericope homilies, the manuscript contains a fragmentary allegorical exposition of the eight musical church modes, three commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer, two versions of the Apostle’s Creed, an explanation of the Mass based on Honorius’s Gemma animae, a partial translation of the Pseudo-Ambrose Acta S. Sebastiani (BHL 7543), a harmonized account of the Passion, two extracts from an Icelandic Stephanus saga, a translation of ch. 4 of the Regula S. Benedicti, a prayer each to Christ and Mary, a translation of the Trinubium Annae, and an unsourced tract on a priest’s pastoral duties which may have been intended as a preface to the collection. Sixteen sermons are more or less direct translations of widely available Latin works including sermons by Augustine, Bede, Gregory the Great, and Caesarius of Arles, while the rest are often highly original in their manipulation of both traditional and non-traditional materials. Eleven sermons have close parallels in the Old Norwegian Homily Book and thus probably go back to an exemplar from the early twelfth century which was used in compiling both Homily Books.

The manuscript is described by A.I. Arwidsson, Förteckning öfver Kongl. Bibliothekets i Stockholm Isländska Handskrifter, Stockholm, 1848, p. 24; and by V. Gödel, Katalog öfver Kongl. Bibliote-

66 The number of hands in the manuscript is still disputed, with opinions ranging from one to fourteen. For a review of the problem with full bibliography, see A. de Leeuw van Weenen (ed.), The Icelandic Homily Book, p. 32-35.

67 On the contents of the manuscript, see Ibid., p. 7-15.

68 The texts of the eleven shared sermons are compared by G. Indrebø, Gamal Norsk Homiliebok, p. 42-57.
kets Fornisländska och Fornnorska Handskrifter, Stockholm, 1897-1900 (Stockholm Kungliga Biblioteket Handlingar, 19-22), p. 55-56 (n. 27).


3. AM 673 a II quarto (ca. 1200; Katalog, n. 1682)

A fragmentary manuscript of nine folios containing the illustrated B-Text of the Old Icelandic Physiologus, followed on f° 8-9 by two short Icelandic tracts which are commonly referred to as sermons, although they would in fact be more accurately described as allegorical exempla. The first is an allegorical exposition of a ship and its parts. The second, an allegory of the colors of the rainbow, is paralleled by a late copy in Hauksbók (AM 544 quarto; n. 15 below).

Editions and Studies: E. KÖLBING, Geistliche Auslegung von Schiff und Regenbogen, in Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und

4. AM 619 quarto: The Old Norwegian Homily Book (ca. 1200-1225; Katalog, n. 1607)

A collection of thirty-one sermons, mostly de tempore, reflecting an incomplete cycle from Christmas to All Saints. The manuscript also contains a Norwegian translation of Alcuin’s De virtutibus et vitiis, a soul-and-body dialogue based on the Old French poem Un samedi par nuit, a collection of the miracles of St Olaf Haraldsson, and a commentary on the Lord’s Prayer. The manuscript was probably compiled in the Bergen vicinity, although the language of the sermons betrays an admixture of forms from other parts of Norway and exhibits some features that go back to the close of the eleventh century.69

69 This according to the detailed linguistic analysis by M. Hægstad, Vestnorske maalfore fyre 1350, I: Nordvestlandsk, Christiania, 1908 (Videnskabs-Selskabets Skrifter 1907, Hist.-filos. Klasse, 1), p. 41-76, who proposes (at p. 75) that the Homily Book was compiled at a Benedictine foundation in western Norway, perhaps at the monastery of St Alban’s, founded on the island of Selja ca. 1100. G.T. Flom (ed.), Codex AM 619 Quarto. Old Norwegian Book of Homilies Containing “The Miracles of Saint Olaf” and Alcuin’s “De Virtutibus et Vitiis”, Urbana, 1929 (University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 14.4), p. 50, note 21, places the dialect of scribe 1 at Sonfjord and the dialect of scribe 2 at Western Sogn. Against E. Wadstein’s argument in Formnorska Homiliebokens Ljudlära, Upsala, 1890, that the Homily Book was written in eastern Norway at Hamar, G. Storm, Kan det ansees bevist, at den norske Homiliebog (AM. 619 qv.) er skrevet i Hamar?, in Arkiv för nordisk filologi, 10, n.f. 6 (1894), p. 197-200, proposes more generally a point of origin somewhere in the region of Oslo Fjord. The current view is best summed up by D. McDougall, Homilies (West Norse), p. 290, who locates the manuscript “in the vicinity of Bergen, Norway, perhaps at either of the Benedictine monasteries of Munkalff or Sancte Albani on Selja, or at the Augustinian house of Jónskirkja”, a conclusion supported by M. Tveitane, “Første Julepreken” i Gamal Norsk

Facsimiles: T. Knudsen, Gammelnorsk Homiliebok etter AM 619 qv, Oslo, 1952 (Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi, Quarto Serie, 1); Kr. Kalund, Palæografisk Atlas, plate 10 (f° 56b); G. T. Flom, Codex AM 619 Quarto, plates for f° 3b, 4a, 51a, 69a, 69b, 72a, 78a, 80a.


5. AM 677 quarto (ca. 1200-1225; Katalog, n. 1690)

A manuscript from southeast Norway containing Norwegian copies of Icelandic translations of ten of Gregory’s Homiliae .xl. in Evangelia (P 7-24) followed by an Icelandic translation of Gregory’s Dialogues. The manuscript was evidently copied from an early twelfth-century Icelandic exemplar which was a common source for six sermons in the Old Icelandic Homily Book.


6. AM 686 b quarto (ca. 1200-1225; Katalog, n. 1711)

Five leaves containing fragmentary Icelandic sermons, including portions of sermons on the Annunciation, the Nativity of Mary, and the Resurrection which are found complete in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (P 62v l.25-65v l.8, 57r l.4-61r l.23, and 33v l.34-37r l.5 respectively).


Facsimile: b. BJARNARSON, Leifar fornra kristinna fraða íslenskra, plate Va.


7. AM 686 c quarto (ca. 1200-1225; Katalog, n. 1712)

A single leaf containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon on the Resurrection based in part on Gregory’s Homilia 25 in Evangelia. A
complete version appears in the Old Icelandic Homily Book and probably derives from a common exemplar.


**Facsimile:** H. BENEDIKTSSON, *Early Icelandic Script as Illustrated in Vernacular Texts from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Reykjavík, 1965 (Íslenzk handrit / Icelandic Manuscripts, Series in folio, 2), plate 16.

**Study:** I.J. KIRBY, *Biblical Quotation*, p. 94 (n. 2.23).

8. AM 696 XXIV quarto (ca. 1200-1225; *Katalog, n. 1741*)

Two leaves containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon, unpublished.

9. AM 655 XXI quarto (ca. 1200-1250; *Katalog, n. 1646*)

A set of *membra disiecta* consisting of six leaves from what Kr. KALUND characterized as an Icelandic breviary but which Hans BEKKER-NIELSEN identified as a homiletic handbook designed for use in a Benedictine monastery, containing short lections for the feasts of St Gregory the Great, St Cuthbert, and St Benedict, all of which occur in March. The fragments also include the conclusion of a homily involving several episodes from the life of Christ which Ian KIRBY, following H. BEKKER-NIELSEN, has shown to correspond closely with a passage from the *Lifssaga Jesú* in AM 667 XIX quarto (n. 26 below) and with portions of a sermon on the Passion in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 78r 1.1-80v 1.3). F° 1 and 4 were at one time inserted in AM 686 b quarto (n. 6 above) and are edited as such by Þorvaldur BJARNARSON.


10. AM 655 XXVII quarto (ca. 1200-1300; *Katalog, n. 1646*)

Fourteen leaves containing Icelandic sermons, unpublished.

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11. AM 655 XXIII quarto (ca. 1225-1250; Katalog, n. 1646)

A single leaf containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon which James W. MARCHAND has argued is probably actually a portion of a commentary on Psalm 50. The verso of the leaf contains Latin prayers.


12. AM 655 I quarto (ca. 1225-1250; Katalog, n. 1646)

A single leaf containing a fragmentary Icelandic copy of a Norwegian translation of Bede’s *Homilia* I.12 (for Epiphany).


**Facsimile:** H. BENEDIKTSSON, *Early Icelandic Script*, plate 35.


13. AM 655 XVIII quarto (ca. 1250-1300; Katalog, n. 1646)

A single leaf containing the conclusion of one Icelandic sermon and the beginning of another. The second, on All Saints, is found complete in both the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 18v 1.1-22r 1.6) and the Old Norwegian Homily Book (ed. G. INDREBØ, p. 143-147).


**Study:** I.J. KIRBY, *Biblical Quotation*, p. 93 (n. 2.23).

14. AM 238 XXVIII folio (ca. 1275-1300; Katalog, n. 360)

A single-leaf fragment once used for bookbinding which contains portions of an Icelandic sermon on the pains of hell and joys of heaven. The sermon is a translation from ch. 5 of the Pseudo-Ambrose *Acta S. Sebastiani martyris* (BHL n. 7543) and has close parallels in three other Icelandic texts: a fragment in AM 238 XII folio (ca. 1400), a two-part sermon on St Sebastian in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 65v 1.19-66v 1.34 + 69r 1.1-29), and *Matheus saga postola*. Stefán KARLSSON has speculated that these four texts
may represent a small family of copies of a single Icelandic translation of the Acta S. Sebastiani made in the twelfth century.


15. AM 544 quarto: Hauksbók (ca. 1290-1334; Katalog, n. 1321)

The second of three manuscripts, now separated, which once formed part of a single codex compiled by the Icelandic scholar Haukr Erlandsson († 1334). Three sermons appear on f° 4r-13v: an Icelandic translation of Ælfric’s Old English sermon De falsiis diis; a sermon against superstition and witchcraft attributed to Augustine but probably based on another Old English sermon by Ælfric, De auguritis; and an Ember Days sermon which parallels sermons in both the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 16v-17r 1.22) and AM 114 a quarto (n. 19 below).


16. AM 655 XI quarto (ca. 1300; Katalog, n. 1646)

Two folios containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon for Ascension Day.


17. AM 655 XX quarto (ca. 1300-1350; Katalog, n. 1646)

Two leaves containing two fragmentary Icelandic sermons, one on the Nativity, the other on confession, both unpublished.

18. AM 671 quarto (ca. 1320-1340; Katalog, n. 1680)

An Icelandic theological miscellany of 63 folios, probably from Skálholt, containing two sermons: one for All Saints (f° 24r-25r), the
other on the Annunciation (f° 33v-34r). The second sermon is immediately followed by an Icelandic prayer.

**Edition:** B. BJARNARSON, *Leifar fornra kristinna fræða íslenskra*, p. 172-175, 186-188.

**Study:** The two hands on f° 24r-26r are described by O. WIDDING, *Håndskriftanalyser*, in *Opuscula*, I, Copenhagen, 1960 (Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 20), p. 81-93, at 81-82.

19. **AM 114 a quarto (ca. 1330-1350; Katalog, n. 768)**

A sixteenth-century Norwegian manuscript evidently copied from a much earlier exemplar since the language of its contents is of the first half of the fourteenth century. F° 9va-10vb contain a Norwegian sermon for Ember Days which is paralleled in both the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 16v-17r 1.22) and in *Hauksbók* (n. 15 above).


20. **AM 642 a II quarto (ca. 1400; Katalog, n. 1629)**

A single leaf containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon on St Nicholas, followed by a versified Latin prayer to St Nicholas.


21. **AM 686 a quarto (ca. 1400; Katalog, n. 1710)**

Two leaves containing fragmentary Icelandic sermons, unpublished.

22. **AM 672 quarto (ca. 1400-1500; Katalog, n. 1681)**

A theological miscellany of 88 folios containing (on f° 60r-61r) a single Icelandic sermon on the consecration of an altar adapted from Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 227, which is paralleled by a sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 89v 1.26-90v 1.7). This manuscript also contains (on f° 57r-61r) an explanation of the Mass based on Honorius’s *Gemma animae* which is paralleled in AM 625 quarto (ca. 1300-1325) and in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 54v 1.1-56v 1.35).


23. AM 696 XXX quarto (ca. 1400-1500; Katalog, n. 1741)
Two leaves containing two fragmentary Icelandic sermons, unpublished.

24. Linköping (Sweden), Stiftsbibliotek, Link. T. 180 (ca. 1450)
A collection of Dominican sermons in Norwegian. The collection is unpublished, and is unaccounted for in the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre* (since it post-dates 1370, the cut-off point for Old Norwegian prose texts), but it is briefly discussed by F. PAASCHE, *Homiliu-Bók (Icelandic Sermons)*, p. 13-14, and by D.A. SEIP, *Studier i norsk språkhistorie*, Oslo, 1934, p. 240-242, who prints an extract from a sermon on the eucharist.

25. AM 650 b quarto (ca. 1450-1500; Katalog, n. 1640)
Four leaves containing fragmentary Icelandic sermons, unpublished.

26. AM 667 XIX quarto (ca. 1450-1500; Katalog, n. 1664)
The bottom half of the center folio of a gathering containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon on the Passion. The text parallels the sermon on the Passion in AM 655 XXI quarto (n. 9 above) and in Ian KIRBY’s view represents a harmonized Icelandic account of the Passion which also served as the principal source of the Passion sermon in the Old Icelandic Homily Book (f° 78r 1.1-80v 1.3).
Study: Id., *On the Fragmentary “History of the Passion”*.

27. AM 696 XIII quarto (ca. 1475-1500; Katalog, n. 1741)
Two leaves containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon, unpublished.

28. AM 624 quarto (ca. 1500; Katalog, n. 1612)
A theological miscellany of 170 folios containing six Icelandic sermons on f° 16-53 and f° 235-251. The sermon on f° 37-47 is a late
version of the Stave Church Dedication Sermon. The two sermons on f° 238-251 are an Easter homily translated from Gregory’s *Homilia 21 in Evangelia* and a sermon on Mary and Martha. The three sermons on f° 16-36 (on the symbolism of the days of the week), f° 47-53 (on the custom of church-going, fragmentary), and f° 235-238 remain unpublished. Because the Easter homily parallels a portion of the Easter homily in the Old Norwegian Homily Book, which similarly relies on Gregory’s *Homilia 21*, it may depend on the same lost twelfth-century Icelandic translation of Gregory’s homilies that was used in compiling the Old Icelandic Homily Book, the Old Norwegian Homily Book, AM 237 a folio (n. 1 above), and AM 677 quarto (n. 5 above).

**Editions:** The Easter homily and the sermon on Mary and Martha are ed. by P. BJARNARSON, *Leifar fornra kristinna frœða islenzka*, p. 151-158; the Dedication Sermon is ed. by O. KOLSRUD, *Messuskýringar*, p. 85-107 (bottom text, “D”).


29. AM 687 c I quarto (ca. 1500; *Katalog*, n. 1716)

Four leaves containing fragmentary Icelandic sermons and prayers, unpublished.

30. AM 696 XXXI quarto (ca. 1500; *Katalog*, n. 1741)

Four leaves containing two fragmentary Icelandic sermons, unpublished.

31. AM 238 XVIII folio (ca. 1500-1550; *Katalog*, n. 360)


32. AM 696 VIII quarto (ca. 1500-1550; *Katalog*, n. 1741)

A single leaf containing a fragmentary Icelandic sermon on the Passion, unpublished.
VI. HISTORICAL VALUE

Medieval Icelanders and Norwegians were fascinated with their own history, and a considerable amount of Old Norse literature is devoted to the history of the conversion period and to the lives of the native kings and bishops who helped promote the establishment of the Christian Church in western Scandinavia. Yet reliable documentary sources for the period such as laws, charters, and narrative accounts of the people involved are in comparatively short supply before the second half of the thirteenth century, so that the bulk of the sermon corpus, which dates to the late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries, provides rare and valuable testimony to the intellectual activities of a period that is otherwise difficult to reconstruct. Because these sermons include the oldest vernacular prose texts of any kind from both Norway and Iceland, they are of extraordinary value for an understanding of the emergence of literacy in these countries, and because some sermons appear to be copies of texts written in the first half of the twelfth century if not earlier, they open a window to a formative period in the history of the Norwegian and Icelandic churches that is only dimly understood. The very fact that we can postulate the existence of a lost common exemplar behind the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Homily Books provides a concrete illustration of the routes of manuscript transmission that must have been in place between Norway and Iceland by the early twelfth century. As studies of the sermons’ sources continue, and as unpublished sermons and sermon fragments become critically edited, it should also be possible to refine our understanding of the scribal activities and liturgical practices that led to the copying of these texts, and of how the Latin models for these texts reached Norway and Iceland in the first place.
A Christmas Sermon from the Old Icelandic Homily Book


Thus we are told, good brothers, that Adam was created by almighty God so that he might live spiritually and partake of the joys of paradise in the presence and companionship of God’s angels. But after he was led astray by the devil’s deceit he would not heed God’s commandments. Thus he deprived himself of the gift of eternal happiness, and he lost the bliss of an angel and became an outcast in the bondage of this life which we now live on account of the righteous judgement of God’s vengeance. From him are descended all people in the world, who are forever harshly fettered as a result of the curse of the first man, and no one can escape that yoke. Rather, we are all subject to the rule of eternal death and the devil’s power.

So it came about that almighty God, creator of all things seen and unseen, was born into the world through his vast mercy and grace
and shattered the bonds of eternal death and heavy sins. And when he was born a total of 5338 years had passed since the beginning of the world. Patriarchs and prophets had foretold the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, and many other signs were made manifest. Just as the patriarch Abraham was born in the fortieth year of King Ninus of Asia, the one who ruled after King Bel, so Christ was born in the second year of the fifty-year reign of Caesar Augustus, who ruled fifty-six years and three months after Julius. Now just as all the kings of the Romans were named Augustus after Augustus, so Christians are named after our Lord Jesus Christ. And just as earl Cirinus was sent at the command of this Caesar in the second year of his fifty-year reign to Judea to claim tributes for him, so in that same year God sent his almighty Son into the world to claim from us the tribute of his commandment and righteousness. He was born in the city of the Jews known as Bethlehem to the Virgin Mary without a mortal father, and he who had an eternally divine origin took his human origin from the womb of a virgin. That same one put Caesar Augustus on the throne of the whole world, and during his reign he established the greatest peace, for it is fitting that the King of Peace should come amidst genuine peace when he came to earth.

In the time of Augustus many signs revealed that Christ would be born during his reign. At the beginning of his reign Augustus came to Rome in a chariot with his son Tiberius. Later, when he extended the kingdom beyond the sea, Christ likewise came to this world in the chariot of his mercy to rule this world as it was from the beginning and now and forever shall be with the divine Father according to one will and one essence. During the reign of Augustus a divine ring was seen around the sun, which signified that he would be born during his reign, when he would be surpassingly fair and bright, wise and mighty and powerful, and he would rule the sun and moon and all things. In the reign of Augustus a fountain of oil sprang forth from morning till evening, which signified that during his reign he would be born who is a fountain of mercy and the oil of all happiness. Then Augustus came to Rome and forgave the debts which the people were obliged to pay him that year. So in this way our Lord forgives us for our sins and debts through holy baptism and true confession and total repentance of the crimes which we have committed against his will. During his reign there was such a great peace over all the world that no one bore weapons because everything was peaceful and in concord and under one rule, for this betokens the peaceful rule of the
Son of the living God, who made peace between heaven and earth and established one rule. In the reign of Augustus there was a great earthquake, which signified that during his reign he would be born who will shake all the primal elements on Judgment Day with all his power, as it is written, “Stars shall fall from the sky, and the angels of heaven will tremble before the face of the Lord when he comes to judge all men” (Matt 24.29). It so happened that during his reign the sun rose at midnight contrary to its nature. This signified that in his time it would come to pass that the sun, Christ himself, would appear, who illumines the whole world and purges the error of eternal blindness, just as the prophet Malachi said, “Unto you that fear the name of the Lord shall the sun of righteousness arise” (Mal 4.2). Caesar is the name of the chief ruler. This signifies Christ, who wields ruling power over the people for present things and those to come.

This Caesar Augustus sent forth a summons unto all the world that all people, both rich and poor, young and old, man and woman — that every one should render to him a whole coin called a denarius, one worth ten of any other. So our Lord Jesus Christ sent his apostles over all the world, that everyone might pay him the coin of heeding his commandments. And this indicates to us that every man in all the world should be counted so that he might pay tribute. Thus it was that the world was first divided into three parts. The eastern portion of the world is called Asia. Africa is the southern portion. Europe is the northern portion. After that he counted how many nations there were in each part of the world, and how many tribes in a nation, and how many cities held by each tribe, and how many men in a city. And when this was accomplished, the whole world was gathered together with such care that no one could escape paying tribute. So it is now. No one in this world can escape paying tribute to our King and Lord Jesus Christ, who was born on this day to save the world.

It is rightly said that Augustus ruled Rome, for Rome signifies a holy place. Bethlehem betokens the house of bread, where Christ was born. Both names are appropriate to Christ, who rules in high places, and he himself is the living bread of the Holy Spirit and the angels. In his presence one never hungers or thirsts. Rather, one is fully sated forever by the glorious sight of his maker. Our Lord Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, city of the Jews, in a house that was between two walls and had two doors. One led into the city and the other out of the city. That house signifies Christ to all Christians, for it is set be-
tween paradise and this world. And just as a house is a place of rest, so the house of Christianity is a household for all the faithful. In this is affirmed the holy Trinity and the true unity. Now just as some go from the house into the city to rest, while others go out of the city to take a stroll, so some journey into this world to commit sin, while others journey to heaven to be with God. When our Lord was born, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, which beforehand had been a feeding trough for animals. This signifies that he was also King who satisfies all men with his body and blood and excellent teaching. Let us strive, good brothers and sisters, to attain our glorious dwelling, for there abides our eternal King, who was born on this night surrounded by his angels. And he does not want anyone to doubt the comfort of his mercy. We must believe in almighty God, creator of all things seen and unseen, who was sent from his Father's bosom to ransom mankind, he who made heaven and earth and all creation. For he was poor in order that he might enrich us with the ineffable rewards of future glory. Thus we should love him eternally so that we might obtain his love and guidance to the halls of the heavenly homeland. Then we shall meet the Father and Son and Holy Spirit as a single power and a beautiful entity surpassing all the angels. There we shall behold a vision of holy peace, one that awaits us as his faithful citizens, full of all glory and beauty, that it might protect us until the approach of the day of dreadful Judgement. Then the Lord will come to judge the good and the wicked and the world, accompanied by the greatest terror. On that day the sentence of all creatures will be made known. For this reason we should prepare ourselves early, so that we might find ourselves sinless in that terror, when we shall pay for every idle word.

Let us grieve for our sins, for blessed shall they be who mourn now for their wicked deeds, for then they shall be comforted in eternal bliss (Matt 5.4). And blessed shall they be who hunger now, for they shall be satisfied at the royal table where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rejoice with all the saints (Matt 5.6). And truly blessed shall he be who is steadfast in goodness and is against sin, for that one knows that nothing will avail worldly temptation if he shall suffer eternal torment in the final death. A man must decide for himself what he might wish to do, that he might not burn forever. What does it now avail those who have lived the decadent life of the flesh and have indulged in this life right up until the day of their death? Let us go to their graves and see whether we can discern any sign of their boast-
ing or lustfulness or riches. Where are their good clothes or fancy food or the men in their service? Gone is their intemperate laughter and their playing. In a little while these things will pass away like smoke, and there will be nothing left but bones and the stench of the worms that ate their flesh. Let us hasten to do the will of him who at this time was born from the Virgin Mary, for we see with our own eyes that this world will eventually fall into decay. And no one will become as mighty in heaven as he who can escape death. Rather, all will be subject to it — both strong and weak, nobly born and humble, old and young — and they will then receive the reward that they here deserved. Therefore we should pray for the mercy of almighty God, so that we will not lose eternal life on account of the promise of the eternal King. And we shall not be unprovided for in God’s presence when his beloved are invited in. And we shall not hear what his enemies will hear, “Flee from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire!” (Matt 25.41). Instead, let us strive to be virtuous and to perform noble deeds in anticipation of the severe judgement of him who on this day made himself a man for the salvation of men. Then when he returns on Judgement Day, may he call us mercifully and may he invite us joyfully to him, and may he say, “Come to me, blessed of my Father, and ascend to the kingdom now, all who have performed heavy labour for my sake and have wept for my affection. Rejoice now and be glad for ever and ever in my presence, you who have performed my will” (Matt 25.34). There we shall shine like the sun and forever be content, and there Christ will reveal to us all his glory, he who lives and reigns with the Father and Holy Spirit, God of all ages.