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Journeys to Rome and Jerusalem in Old Norse-Icelandic Sagas

Many Scandinavian characters in the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas travel south to the distant cities of Rome and Jerusalem. This paper examines the literary uses sagas make of accounts of travel to Rome and to a lesser extent Jerusalem and compares their functions and significances in the saga-mindset. The context of this paper is my larger study over the last five years, which have focused on accounts of “far-travel” in saga-literature, that is, by Norse saga-characters to lands recognisably outside the area of familiarity. Of the three main destinations of southern far-travel in saga-literature, Rome, Jerusalem and Byzantium, the latter two, being self-evidently conceptually “distant” from the north, were covered at length in a previous thesis on the subject. Rome, however, is also at least at the southern edge, if not actually beyond the border, of cultural familiarity, and this paper thus treats Rome as a destination for far-travel as the others that were analysed in the thesis, examining what characterises journeys there. Jerusalem and the Holy Land will feature in this paper to a more limited extent, as travel to Rome and Jerusalem is in saga-literature characteristically taken for the same purposes – pilgrimage and absolution – and accounts of travel to the two places exhibit some of the same characteristics. The two sites are not equal, however, and some of the conclusions of this paper will draw out the differences between Rome and Jerusalem as far-travel destinations.

In the second chapter of *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka*, the pure-hearted Icelander Auðunn, after travelling to the court of the Danish king Sveinn Úlfsson (Ástríðsson) to give him a priceless polar bear, announces his intention to leave for a while. When the king asks him where he will go, Auðunn responds: “Suðr vil ek ganga” – ‘I wish to go south’. The king replies: “Ef þú vildir eigi svá gott ráð taka [...] þá myndi mér fyrir þykkja í, er þú fýsisk í braut” (*Auðun.* 364²) – ‘If you had not desired to take so

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Medieval Scandinavia seminar at University College London in February 2011. My thanks are due to all those in attendance, as the post-paper discussion has enhanced this study in several ways. I am also grateful to Dr. Chris Abram, who invited me to speak, as well as to the anonymous reviewers of this article, whose more recent suggestions and critiques have been very helpful.

² All primary-text citations use an abbreviated form of the work’s title or the author’s name (if

good a course [...] I should be displeased at your eagerness to depart'. The king reacts with the immediate assumption that travel from Scandinavia to the south is by its nature morally upright behaviour, and the specific type and destination of Auðunn's southward journey is confirmed when he is said to travel to Rome (with the blessing and silver of the Danish king), in company with other *Rúmferlar*, 'Rome-travellers' or 'pilgrims'. This episode illustrates the general principle that in Old Norse-Icelandic saga-literature the words *ganga suðr* and *fara suðr* commonly take not only their literal meaning, 'to travel south', but also 'to make a pilgrimage to Rome'. Also, the usual meaning of the words *suðrferð* and *suðrför* is 'pilgrimage' rather than their literal meaning, 'a journey south' (Fritzner 1954: II 595, Cleasby-Vigfússon 1874: 603). These words most often indicate travel to Rome rather than to Jerusalem, but both cities, the undisputed foci of Christianity in the medieval European cosmography, are sites of pilgrimage and other piously-motivated travel in saga narratives. I have elsewhere observed that the Icelandic sagas reflect this world-view by exhibiting a 'moral geography' in their accounts of the far-travels of various Scandinavian characters³. To the Icelandic saga-writers, movement south and southeast towards the two unequivocally holy cities Rome and Jerusalem is 'good' or 'holy' movement. Movement north certainly takes one towards the land of evil beings: trolls, giants and (in the saga mindset) semi-human Lapps. Thus movement south in the physical world is travel towards the centre of the spiritual as well as the temporal world, towards places truly imbued with God's presence. King Sveinn's conception of travel southward as holy by definition certainly fits this thought-scheme. The purpose of this paper, however, will not be to place saga-accounts of travel to Rome and Jerusalem in the context of travel to other distant destinations, but to examine the literary uses sagas make of accounts of travel to Rome and

known). The number following is page number in the edition named in the bibliography, unless otherwise specified. Roman numerals indicate volume of a multivolume work or, for Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, Book and chapter. All English translations provided are my own.

³ See Shafer (2009: 869-71) and (2010a: 142-43). This medieval 'moral geography' is not exclusive to Scandinavia. The Frenchman Abbo of Fleury, for example, observes in his *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* that it is known on good authority that all evil originates in the north (Abbo 71-72). In addition to the direct influences of biblical passages threatening evil from the north, such as Jeremiah 1:14-15 and 6:1, Abbo's own experience of marauders from Northern Europe may also affect his judgment of the north.

to a lesser extent Jerusalem, and to compare their functions and significances in the saga mindset⁴.

A few words may be said about the reasons for this paper's purpose and particular focus. My studies over the last five years have focused on accounts of 'far-travel' in Old Norse-Icelandic saga-literature. For these studies 'far-travel' has been defined as travel by recognisably Norse saga-characters to lands outside the area of familiarity, well beyond the borders of the Scandinavian world that includes not only continental Scandinavia and Iceland, but also such places that are represented in sagas as interacting on familiar terms with Norse lands, such as the British Isles and Germany. Beyond these 'near' lands are those that the sagas represent as distinctly 'distant', either in terms of the time or difficulty of travel there or in terms of the people who inhabit these lands, people culturally and often physically 'other' to the Norsemen and their neighbours. The three main destinations of southern far-travel in saga-literature are Rome, Jerusalem and Byzantium. The latter two are clearly conceptually 'distant' from the north. Byzantium is exotic by virtue of its splendid, almost unimaginable wealth, characteristically portrayed in saga-accounts of travel there and in the reports of returning Norse visitors. Jerusalem, besides being the exact centre of the world and thus nearly as far from the peripheral north as it can be, is also a place known to be close to lands inhabited by Saracens and *blámenn* and constantly requiring defence from them, people very much 'other' in appearance, character and, most importantly, religion. Rome's imaginative 'distance' from the north is more problematic; there is little exotic about it in the episodes that occur there, and even the great churches and basilicas are mentioned rather than described. For these reasons, Byzantium and Jerusalem were covered at length in the chapter of my Ph.D. thesis devoted to southern far-travel, and Rome was omitted. A case can nevertheless be made for Rome's position at the southern edge, if not actually beyond the border, of cultural familiarity. The best indication of Rome's imaginative distance from the north is the great number of pilgrims whose journeys there the sagas

⁴ It should be noted that though this article is organised primarily according to the motivations evident in saga-characters' journeys to Rome and Jerusalem, it is understood that motivations – both the characters' and the saga-writers' – and other aspects characterising far-travel do overlap and interact with each other. I have categorised far-travel by motivations, but the categories are not discrete. This paper will make note of this interaction in individual instances where it is especially significant to my analysis.

relate. Essentially, for the travel to Rome to be the ultimate (or perhaps penultimate) pilgrimage a northern Christian can make, it must be far from home. Especially in the examples of Orcadians and Shetlanders who make pilgrimages first to St. Magnús's shrine in Kirkwall and later all the way to Rome (see below), the difference between piously-motivated regional travel and piously-motivated distant travel is acutely drawn. By the same token, when in *Njáls saga* Flosi Þórðarson is enjoined at the *Alþingi* to spend three years abroad (*útan*) and also to make a pilgrimage to Rome, it is apparent that Rome is beyond the places ordinarily considered abroad. This paper thus treats Rome as a destination for far-travel as the others that were analysed in my thesis, asking and providing some answers to many of the same questions: what characterises far-travel to this destination? Do saga-writers find travel to Rome noteworthy? How and for what purposes are accounts of far-travel used in the narratives in which they appear? Though it was covered independently in my previous studies, far-travel to Jerusalem and the Holy Land will also figure in this paper. Jerusalem is organically related to Rome, the two being the seats of Christian authority on Earth, but most relevant to this paper is the fact that travel to Rome and Jerusalem is in saga-literature characteristically taken for the same purposes – pilgrimage and absolution – and accounts of travel to the two places exhibit some of the same characteristics. The two sites are not equal, however, and some of the conclusions of this paper will draw out the differences between Rome and Jerusalem as far-travel destinations.

1. *Absolution*

Piety is the one overwhelmingly prominent characteristic of far-travel south to the city of Rome, and most journeys there are concerned with gaining spiritual kudos. Most travel to the Holy Land is also oriented towards Christian spirituality, but journeys to Rome are typically characterised by a much more specific quest for spiritual gain, the quest for absolution for sins – or often a specific sin – the traveller has committed.

Many of the straight-forward examples of far-travel south to Rome for the purpose of absolution from sins are found in *Orkneyinga saga*,

especially in the portion relating the miracles of the martyred St. Magnús. The simplest example concerns Þorfinnr jarl Sigurðarson:

Réð þá jarl til suðrfarar. Fór hann þá til Róms ok fann þar páfann, ok tók hann þar lausn af honum allra sinna mála. Vendi jarl þaðan til heimfarar ok kom með heilu aprt í ríki sitt. (*Orkney*. 80)

‘The jarl then went on a pilgrimage. He travelled to Rome and had an audience with the pope, and there he received absolution from all his sins. The jarl then turned to the homeward-journey and returned safely to his own domain’.

This example of the absolution-motivation is as uncomplicated as one can be: Þorfinnr jarl travels to Rome, he is absolved of his sins, he returns home without a single other activity mentioned. Another *Orkneyinga saga* example, from Chapter 52, is not quite so straight-forward. Hákon jarl Pálsson also makes the journey south to Rome, and indeed travels beyond to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. However, the text makes no explicit mention of Hákon either intending to be absolved of his sins in Rome or being given absolution by any authority there. Instead, that Hákon seeks (and finds?) absolution on his *suðrför* suggests itself from the context of the account within the larger narrative of the jarls of Orkney. This jarl is the one who orders the death of his cousin and co-ruler St. Magnús, and in *Orkneyinga saga* this follows several chapters’ worth of highly appreciative praise of Magnús’ saintly life and acts, the material that, along with the *Magnúss sögur* and the Latin *Legenda de Sancto Magno*, constitutes our primary literary witness to the cult of Orkney’s patron saint and the miracles that followed his martyrdom. A Latin vita of Magnús written around 1137 by an Englishman named “Master Robert” (possibly the same Robert who later wrote a vita of St. Thomas Becket shortly after his martyrdom) influenced all of this Icelandic material⁵. This early vita and the cathedral in Kirkwall constructed contemporaneously with it were only the first artistic outpourings interacting with the tradition of Magnús’ sainthood, and, as with Thomas Becket and Edward the Confessor, the Icelanders’ literary output shows their own fascination with the stories of

⁵ The Icelandic texts, including the Latin-language vita, appear together in *Íslenzk fornrit* 34. The introduction of this volume addresses the question of the original vita’s authorship, pp. xlv-xlvii (Icelandic); a more recent and fuller treatment is given in Haki Antonsson’s *St. Magnús of Orkney* (2007), pp. 42-67 (English).

these foreign saints. At any rate, from the perspective of saga-writers and readers, if anyone is in need of absolution it is the saint-murderer Hákon jarl. The following chapter in *Orkneyinga saga* reports that Hákon's later years are peaceful and that he dies in his bed (Ch. 53): this may with no great leap of imagination be construed as Hákon's earthly reward for his act of penitence in Rome.

There are several more examples of far-travel to Rome in the St. Magnús miracle-book portion of the saga, all pilgrimages in which it is contextually evident that absolution (*lausn*), though not mentioned by name, is the primary focus. In the first case, two men steal gold from the shrine of St. Magnús. One immediately drowns in a firth and the other goes insane, confessing his sin in his madness. A vow is made on his behalf that if he is healed at the shrine of St. Magnús, he will go on a pilgrimage to Rome. The episode concludes with the man being taken to the shrine and recovering at once (*Orkney*. 127). Though the saga-writer does not record whether or not the man ultimately makes that journey to Rome, we should probably understand that he does: to suggest otherwise is to suggest one can gyp God⁶. The motivation to travel to Rome is in any case the direct result of a particular sin. The healing of the insane man's mind may then be a token of forgiveness for his theft, the healing of his soul to follow when 'official' (or complete) forgiveness takes place, in Rome. The second episode is similar. A Shetlandic woman named Sigríðr is staying in Orkney in the house of a man named Þorlákr. On the eve of St. Magnús's mass, she keeps sewing long after the others have stopped for the holy day. Not heeding several warnings by the master of the house to cease her sinful sewing, Sigríðr continues until night falls and the fire is lit, at which point she promptly goes insane. Again, a vow is made on behalf of the helpless sinner; Þorlákr casts lots to determine what he should promise – a pilgrimage to Rome, freedom for a slave, or a donation to the shrine of St. Magnús. Though the lot falls to a donation to Magnús's shrine and Sigríðr recovers her wits once taken there, Sigríðr also later makes the pilgrimage south; the pilgrimage seems here to be an additional act of piety or repentance carried out of her own free will (*Orkney*. 128⁷).

⁶ The corresponding episode in *Magnúss saga lengri* (Ch. 34) also fails to mention whether or not the man fulfils the vow made on his behalf. See ÍF 34: 378-79.

⁷ The corresponding passage in Ch. 34 of *Magnúss saga lengri* mentions Rome by name as the destination of Sigríðr's pilgrimage.

Again, though absolution is not mentioned by name, the vow and subsequent journey to Rome immediately follow a specific sinful act for which a person needs forgiveness. Once again, the body is healed first, at the shrine in Orkney, the soul's healing to follow with true absolution in Rome. Rome, it seems, is the destination of choice for those who feel a very specific sense of guilt above and beyond that occasioned by general piety.

The fullest treatment of the journey to Rome for absolution from sins occurs in *Spesar þáttur* (the concluding, largely self-contained story constituting the last few chapters of *Grettis saga*) when the two main characters, Þorsteinn drómundur ('galleon') and his lady-love Spes, decide to atone for the sins of their youth. The pair had many years before carried on a love affair under the nose of the lady's husband, perjuringly 'proven' before the bishop in Constantinople that she was innocent of infidelity, and relocated to Þorsteinn's native Norway with all her husband's wealth (*Gret.* Ch. 90). Now expressing her desire to make this pilgrimage, the older and wiser Spes tells her companion:

Vit gerumsk nú gömul bæði ok af æskuskeiði, en okkr hefir gengit meir eptir ástundun en kristiligum kenningum eða röksemðum réttenda. Nú veit ek, at þessa okkra skuld megu hvárki leysa okkrir frændr né fémunir, útan vit sjálf gjöldum skyld fyrir. Nú vil ek breyta ráðahag okkrum ok fara ór landi ok á páfagarð, því at ek trúi, at svá má mitt mál leysask. (*Gret.* 287)

'Both of us are now growing old and are beyond our prime, and we have pursued our desires more than Christian teachings or what is right and just. I now know that neither our friends nor our wealth will be able to free us from this: rather, we must repay it ourselves. I wish now to alter our lives, leave this land and go to the place where the pope dwells, for I believe that in this manner I may free myself of my debt'.

The saga-writer here leaves no room for ambiguity. Þorsteinn agrees with Spes, and the two of them divide their wealth among their relations and make large donations to churches, keeping just enough money for the journey. They set off for Rome with the prayers of loved ones to speed them on their way (*Gret.* Ch. 91). The account of the absolution-process in Rome is correspondingly detailed: the pair is said to confess truthfully their entire sinful past and submit humbly to any penance that might be laid on them. The penance is said to be the lightest possible, specifically because they have exhibited such forthrightness in seeking absolution

without being urged to it by church leaders (*Gret.* 288). Absolved of their sin, the two withdraw themselves from the world and from sin by building a pair of stone huts and living out the rest of their lives in isolation (*Gret.* Ch. 92). The account in *Spesar þáttr* thus gives the cause, motivation, journey to Rome, absolution, and effect of that absolution in the characters' lives, each step in the process described in full detail. Given this wealth of detail, as well as the fact that *Spes* calls Rome *páfagarðr* – 'the pope's city', it is perhaps odd that the writer does not have the Pope himself absolve the pair, as sometimes happens in other sagas.

One such saga is *Njáls saga*, but what is of more note with regard to this travel narrative is the unique way it is woven into the social and legal concerns of Iceland that are the primary subject-matter of the *Íslendingasögur* as a body and *Njáls saga* in particular. In other sagas, pilgrimage to Rome is a result of feuding violence and legal settlements; in *Njáls saga* it becomes of a part of them. The account of Flosi Þórðarson and Kári Sölmundarson's pilgrimages to Rome in the final chapters of the saga is narrated in similar detail to that in *Spesar þáttr*, and is similar too in its treatment of the causes and effects of the sinners' absolution and feelings of regret. Having burned the honourable Njáll and his family in his home and survived the proceedings of the ensuing (increasingly bloody) lawsuit at the *Alþingi*, Flosi and his companions relocate to Wales in compliance with the ultimate settlement by which they must pay compensation, live in exile for several years, and make pilgrimages to Rome (*Njála* Ch. 145). After Kári, Njáll's son-in-law and avenging kinsman, kills one of the burners and openly declares this act of vengeance to Flosi, Flosi buries the body of his companion at great cost to himself and immediately begins his journey south to Rome (*Njála* Ch. 158). He is probably not motivated even partly by fear of vengeance, despite the proximity of this avenging kinsman of his victims. Flosi, rather, seems to be the one in the position of greater power – as indeed he was back in Iceland. The saga reports that, Kári's relentless pursuit and slaying of Flosi's friends notwithstanding, *Flosa stukkum aldri hermðaryrði⁸ til Kára* (*Njála* 461) – 'from Flosi never flew angry words about Kári'. Perhaps Flosi, far from being perturbed by Kári's violent actions, is reminded of his own blood-guilt. Flosi's composure also recalls his earlier words of

⁸ Some manuscripts have *orð* ("a word") in place of the principal manuscripts' *hermðaryrði* ("angry words").

admiration: “Fám mönnum er Kári líkr, ok þann veg vilda ek helzt skapfarinn vera sem hann er” (*Njála* 422) – “Few people are like Kári, and for that reason what I wish most is to be tempered as he is”.’ Also, Flosi walks to Rome rather than sails – hardly the most fleet method of escape. More examples of pilgrims who walk to Rome will follow. Desire for absolution from God, and thus from his fellow Icelanders by the terms of the settlement, must be considered Flosi’s primary motivation. (Desire for honour from foreign dignitaries may be a secondary motivation: Flosi is said to receive this in Rome, and he also returns home by the European mainland route, where he receives honours from many powerful men along the way; see *Njála* Ch. 158.) In Rome, Flosi “tók lausn af páfanum sjálfum, ok gaf þar til mikit fé” (*Njála* 462) – ‘received absolution for himself from the Pope, and for it gave a lot of money’. Unlike Þorsteinn drómundr and Spes, Flosi then returns to the north. Kári travels south to Rome the following summer – walking from Normandy, as Flosi had – and receives absolution, also returning to Iceland immediately afterwards. Shipwrecked near Flosi’s home in Svínafellr, Kári goes to him for help and is placed in a seat of honour by Flosi’s side, and full reconciliation is finally made (*Njála* Ch. 159). Absolution does not, however, seem to have as complete a spiritually healing affect on Flosi as it does on the Rome-pilgrims of other sagas. Flosi sets out to sea late one summer in an ill-conditioned ship, brushing aside objections and saying the ship is “œrit gott gömlum ok feigum” (*Njála* 463) – ‘good enough for an old man fated to die’. Though his lack of concern for his own life may indicate spiritual enlightenment, the fulfilment of the promise of the spiritual world awaiting only his physical death, the tone of his statement sounds more like simple sorrow. Regret, it seems, is not as easily disposed of as guilt. With this we see the literary artistry of *Njáls saga* and, again, that pilgrimage to Rome has been incorporated into the saga’s purposes rather than merely inserted as a logical and pious conclusion to character’s time in a saga or a self-contained vignette. This poignant moment effectively completes the character-arc of the conflicted Flosi, honourable to a fault and trapped in his family’s feuding concerns, showing that neither in settlement at the Icelandic assembly nor fulfilment of Christianity’s ritual requirements can the tragically flawed character get off ‘scot free’. This elegant completion of Flosi’s character-arc and focus on his pious qualities, seen in both his pilgrimage and in his forgiveness of Kári, are

also consistent with the effort to rehabilitate the notorious Njáll-burner's reputation which, according to Lars Lönnroth, is central to the purpose of *Njáls saga* as a whole (see Lönnroth 177-80).

It is natural that a more minor character will receive briefer and less emotionally developed – though no less engaging – treatment in their exit from the saga, and this is certainly true of another *Njáls saga* character, Hrafn inn rauði ('the red'). In contrast to Flosi and Kári's piety in the fulfilment of their settlement vows, the predominant orientation of Hrafn's impulse to travel to Rome is pragmatism (see below, 'Conclusions'). Hrafn fights with Flosi's brother-in-law Þorsteinn and others at the Battle of Clontarf, described at length in Chapter 157. Hrafn runs from the battle when the Norse forces begin to lose to the Irish. Crossing a certain river, he sees the torments of hell (*helvítis kvalir*) below him and devils ready to drag him down. Hrafn cries out: "Runnit hefir hundr þinn, Pétur postoli, tysvar til Róms ok mundi renna it þriðja sinn, ef þú leyfðir"⁹ (*Njála* 452) – 'Your hound has twice run to Rome, Apostle Peter, and shall run there a third time if you permit it.' Hrafn's exclamation reveals his motivation for making a pilgrimage to Rome: he seeks deliverance not from sin but from summary dispatch into hellfire, and it is not a particular sin he seeks absolution from, but a particular problem he feels a promise of pilgrimage will solve. Hrafn's sense of self-preservation seems to be accurate and his intentions pure enough for St. Peter: the devils do let go of Hrafn, and he escapes to tell the tale of the battle to Flosi. Whether or not Hrafn fulfils his promise is not related.

Though in this episode Hrafn certainly exhibits only pragmatic self-preservation, his reference to two previous journeys (pilgrimages?) to Rome indicates that even this relatively minor character may have more to him than is obvious at a glance. With no other saga-material on Hrafn, however, his spiritual and peregrinatory landscapes must remain obscure, and his uniqueness to this narrative suggests that he may have been created by the saga-writer for some specific purpose in this episode. One possibility is suggested by his name, 'Raven'. The death in this battle of the jarl of Orkney who carries a magical banner with the emblem of a raven on it can probably be construed in *Njáls saga* as punishment for his

⁹ Einar Ólafur Sveinsson compares Hrafn's words to the Biblical figure of speech in which a man illustrates his humility or servility by calling himself a dog (1F 12: footnote). Cf. 2 Samuel 24:14-15 and 2 Kings 8:13.

trust in the banner's heathen power rather than the holy power of God, to whom he has recently allied himself in baptism. Hrafn's Christian piety may then be intended as a direct contrast to jarl Sigurðr's lapse into heathenism; Hrafn's pilgrimage would also fit as a narrative echo of the pilgrimages of Flosi and Kári, the narrative significance of whose voyages has been discussed above. It should also be observed that vows to perform great feats and make long journeys, including religiously-oriented journeys, are commonplace in saga-literature. Eirekr víðförli's vow to travel the world in search of earthly Paradise is one significant example (*Eireks saga* Ch. 1), but the vow of Ormr Stórolfsson in his þáttr provides an especially close parallel to Hrafn's. Like Hrafn, Ormr makes his vow when he is in battle and seemingly overwhelmed by his (monstrous) opponents, and he too promises to make a pilgrimage to Rome if God delivers him (Ch. 9). The circumstances in both episodes indicate that though the saga-writers clearly construct Hrafn and Ormr in their narratives as pious, Christian characters, the immediate impulse for their promises of travel to Rome is pragmatic. When danger threatens a Christian, the promise of a pilgrimage may help him escape.

2. *Pilgrimage*

Pilgrimage to Rome is not always motivated by the desire for absolution for a specific sin. These are some characteristic examples of saga-characters travelling to Rome for a more general absolution from sins or plain pilgrimage. The Iclander Auðunn's pilgrimage to Rome and the Danish king's response to it were mentioned above in the introduction. Though King Sveinn is content to stay at home and let Auðunn improve his soul in Rome, other royal Scandinavians (including two of Sveinn's sons) make pilgrimages to the south. After King Knútr inn ríki (Canute the Great) has placed his sons on the thrones of Norway, Denmark and Caithness, himself sovereign over them, Knútr sets off south for Rome. There are a number of interesting details in the *Knýtlinga saga* account of his journey, not least of which is that, like Flosi Þórðarson and Kári Sölmundarson, he travels across Europe on foot. The prolific Icelandic *skáld* Sighvatr Þórðarson, sometime court poet to King Knútr, relates in his *Knútsdrápa*:

Svá mun fár feril
fetum suðr metinn
hringdrifr hafa,
höfuðfremstr jöfurr.
(*Knýtling*. 17: 123)

‘Few travellers stepping
southward shall be valued
like this ring-giver,
a most superior prince’.

Though the lord/king kenning ‘ring-giver’ is a common one in skaldic poetry, the prose in which the verse is imbedded also focuses to a great extent on money. The saga-writer says that none can say how much Knútr’s journey cost in either marks or pounds, that he is free to use the Saxon emperor’s money, and that none of Knútr’s companions on the journey have to beg for food, each having enough money in his pocket. Finally, it is told that Knútr founds a hostel (*spítali*) at which all Norsemen – speakers of *dönsk tunga* – may find lodging for a night, and that the king donates generously to monasteries and other large establishments (*aðrir stórir staðir*) in the south (*Knýtling*. 123). Knútr’s concern for the well-being of pilgrims on the way to Rome, especially his own subjects, is well documented in the historical record and even in his own correspondence with the church (Lawson 1993: 203; Liebermann 1898: 276-77). Within this saga, a narrative of the kings of Denmark, the reason for this focus on Knútr’s money and the good use he puts it to is clear: the pilgrimage of Denmark’s greatest king must be correspondingly great, and the clearest identifying marks of (Christian) greatness on such a journey are wealth and acts of magnanimous charity. Other literary strategies for representing Knútr’s greatness and piety are seen in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, in which Knútr’s pilgrimage to Rome is recorded for the year 1031¹⁰, and the works of the 12th-century Danish historians Sven Aggesen and Saxo Grammaticus, who interestingly though mistakenly relate that Knútr travels to Rome to conquer and suppress its people after they rise up and depose the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad’s son and successor Henry (Aggesen 9, Saxo X:xvii).

Two of the sons of Knútr’s nephew and successor on the Danish throne also make pilgrimages to Rome. The first son is dispatched from the saga

¹⁰ The Worcester (D) and Peterborough (E) manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles note Knútr’s pilgrimage in 1031, though he in fact made it in 1027. Possibly the chronicler knew that the pilgrimage took place after a great battle and mistook Stiklarstaðir in 1030 for Holy River in 1026 (*Chronicles* 156-57, Swanton 2000: 156-57). The occasion of the journey was the coronation of that Emperor, Conrad II, to whom Knútr’s daughter was later married.

in a single sentence: “Knútr hét inn elzti, hann andaðisk at lifanda feðr sínum í Rómferð” (*Knýtling*. 135) – ‘The eldest was named Knútr, and he died during his father’s lifetime on a pilgrimage to Rome’. Knútr’s younger brother, however, Eiríkr góði, the final royal Danish Rome-traveller in *Knýtlinga saga*, journeys to Rome in a wealth of prose detail supported by several verses composed by Eiríkr’s *skáld* Markús Skeggjason. Shortly after acceding to the Danish throne, Eiríkr journeys south with a small but distinguished retinue, and like the Icelandic feuders Flosi and Kári as well as his great-uncle Knútr inn ríki, he travels across Europe on foot. Uniquely, Eiríkr is then said to go to several other cities, always on foot, visiting many holy places (*helga staði*): Venice and Bari are identified by name (*Fenedí, Bár*). Like Knútr before him, Eiríkr gives large amounts of money to monasteries and other establishments. Referring to one of Markús’s verses, the narrator also relates that Eiríkr, a fine scholar who is fluent in many languages, needs no interpreter when conversing with the important men of Italy (*Knýtling*. Ch. 74; on knowledge of languages being associated in sagas with great rulers, see below). Another unique detail in this account is Eiríkr’s conference with the pope: though other pilgrims to Rome are said to meet the pontiff, perhaps receiving absolution directly from him, this is the one account in which the pope is named, identified in the prose as the second pope of the name Páskális, Paschal II¹¹ (r. 1099-1118). The outcome of this meeting is approval for Eiríkr to establish an archbishopric in Denmark, there having been no previous archiepiscopal seat north of Bremen (*Knýtling*. Ch. 74). Finally, Eiríkr turns his path northward again and both emulates and exceeds his great predecessor-pilgrim once more by not only establishing a Norsemen’s hostel of his own in the town of Piacenza (*Plácencía*), but also donating some money in another town, Lucca (*Lúka*), to provide all Norse-speaking pilgrims there with a free helping of wine¹².

¹¹ It is probably Paschal’s predecessor Urban II who Eiríkr actually visited in Rome. See ÍF 35: 219 (footnote).

¹² Venice, Piacenza and Lucca, all Italian towns north of Rome, are on the pilgrim’s route between Scandinavia and Rome. Bari is not on that route, though it is the port from which pilgrims to Jerusalem left Italy to cross the Mediterranean. Perhaps the saga-writer garbles information from a variety of sources, possibly travel itineraries to Rome and Jerusalem. Alternatively, he may be modelling the route of Eiríkr’s Italian sojourn on that of Icelandic lawspeaker and scholar Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206), whose no longer extant *Flos peregrinationis* may have narrated at greater length than *Hungrvaka* does his journeys to Italy, which included a visit to Bari; see *Hungrvaka* (ÍF 16: 22, 35), *Haukdæla þáttur* (*Sturlunga saga* I: 60) and Kalinke 1983: 857 (footnote).

These details that enhance Eiríkr's image as even more magnificent a pilgrim to Rome than Knútr are consistent with his characterisation in medieval Scandinavia in general and this saga in particular: as Knútr is *ríkr*, 'great' and 'mighty', so Eiríkr is *góðr*, 'good' or 'holy'. Though one king's travel-narrative may emulate another in some details, the story of each must be told in a way consistent with their defining characteristic in the popular imagination. Some of the details can naturally be confirmed in the historical record, such as the establishment of the archdiocese of Lund in 1103 or 1104, during or shortly after Eiríkr's reign (Forte 2005: 372, Foote-Wilson 1970: 125).

The original holy Christian king of Norway exhibits his own kind of piety in deciding to make his pilgrimage to the south. In the two sagas that relate a narrative of Óláfr Tryggvason's survival of the great sea-battle at Svöldr, in which Óláfr is commonly supposed to have died, Óláfr rejects invitations to re-insinuate himself into the politics of the north, saying that he has clearly displeased God, whose will it is that Óláfr has now been deposed and defeated¹³. Asked in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* what he now plans to do, Óláfr answers that he wishes to travel to Rome, and after a short time he does so. Like Eiríkr *góði*, Óláfr is proficient at foreign languages, and his following swells as he acts as interpreter for others he meets along the way¹⁴. Adhering to his new desire to keep out of the politics of the north, Óláfr makes himself out to be a Norse merchant (*norænn kaup maðr*, *Mesta* 319). Once in Rome he visits the pope, and though he reveals his identity to the pontiff and shares all his plans with him, no absolution for Óláfr's former sins is mentioned, despite Óláfr's expressed belief that he is a disappointment to God. No further details are given and Óláfr travels on to Jerusalem without delay¹⁵. Pilgrimage is

¹³ These sagas are Oddr Snorrason's *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* and the large collection *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. The episode is told in Ch. 80 of the A-text of Oddr's saga (ÍF 25: 357) and in Ch. 267 of *Mesta*.

¹⁴ Eiríkr, like Óláfr, also visited the distant east, and in general proficiency at foreign languages is a fairly characteristic trait of eastern far-travellers in particular; the greatest far-traveller of them all, for example, the Swedish prince Yngvarr víðförli ('far-travelled'), puts his language-knowledge to use testing an eastern queen's own linguistic aptitude (*Yngvar*. 15; see also Shafer 2010a: 178, 186-87). Marianne Kalinke connects the prevalence of multilingual characters in *riddarasögur*, bishops' sagas, and kings' sagas with medieval Icelanders' preoccupation with fluency in foreign languages, citing both eastern and southern far-travellers (1983: 856-58).

¹⁵ The Uppsala manuscript of Oddr's *Saga Óláfs* relates Óláfr's journey to Rome, but makes no mention of the pope. Óláfr stays in a cellar and leaves only to hear mass and to conduct other essential business; after a year he leaves for Russia (see ÍF 25: 373).

certainly the basic motivation for Óláfr's journey to Rome, though his subsequent journey to the Holy Land and adoption of the monastic life there (in *Mesta*) make his pilgrimage more of a stop along a greater spiritual path than the spiritual fulfilment it seems to be for many other Rome-travellers, like Þorsteinn drómundr and Spes (see also below, 'Conclusions'). However, it is interesting to observe that while others travel to Rome for absolution for a specific sin, motivated by piety but also by simple human guilt (cf. Flosi, Spes), Óláfr claims to be motivated directly by God's will, and he travels south not to correct the specific wrongs he has committed but because God's plan for his life and career accommodate his human errors. I have elsewhere observed the same principle at work in saga-narratives of Óláfr's earlier childhood exile in the distant east, where God used heavenly portents to reveal to the royal court in Novgorod that the great Christianising king of the north would be fostered there: the exile is God's plan to protect the young Óláfr from sinful, violent enemies, and neither Óláfr nor his enemies nor even kidnapping pirates can prevent him from travelling where God wishes (Shafer 2009: 871-72). In this context it seems significant that Óláfr receives no absolution in his conference with the pope: Óláfr's southern exile and monastic life are his penance for his sins, and absolution of body and soul will presumably follow in Óláfr's final destination as a pilgrim, the Holy Land. More will be said below about royalty and nobility travelling for spiritual gain to both Rome and Jerusalem.

Other saga-characters travel to Rome in briefer accounts, though some common patterns and details nevertheless emerge. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, the Icelander Bjarni of Stokkanes goes to Rome to visit the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul (*Fóst.* 257). No desire for absolution is mentioned, however, and Bjarni dies on that journey. A pious purpose for this journey is implicit in his desire to visit the holy sites at which these two important saints are enshrined. Similarly, the title character of *Króka-Refs saga* takes a pilgrimage south to Rome late in life and "sótti heim inn helga Pétur postula" (*Króka* 160) – 'visit[s] the holy apostle Peter'. There he contracts an un-named illness, dies and is buried "á ríku munkaklaustri út í Frakklandi" (*Króka* 160) – 'in a rich monastery out there in France'. Once again, although no mention of absolution is made, the piety of Refr's motivation is evident. The location of the monastery of his interment in France is somewhat curious. Perhaps the distant south is rather indistinct

in this saga-writer's mind and 'France' (*Frakkland*) is just a place 'near Rome'. Following the main action of *Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggss*, the title character's one-time antagonist Bjarni of Hof, now reconciled with Þorsteinn, is said to become a great man of faith towards the end of his life. The narrative continues:

Bjarni fór útan ok gekk suðr ok andaðisk í þeiri ferð. Hann hvílir í borg þeiri, er Vateri¹⁶ heitir, ok er þat mikil borg, skammt hingat frá Rómaborg. (*Þorstein*. 78)

'Bjarni left the country and went south, dying on that journey. He lies buried in a city called Vateri, which is a large town a short distance this side of the city of Rome'.

In the context of Bjarni's late-life piety, it is clear that his journey south is a pilgrimage. The fragmentary version of the þáttur in AM 162 fol makes this more explicit, adding that in Rome Bjarni visits the grave of St. Peter (ÍF 11: 78, footnote). Stefnir Þorgilsson is one of Óláfr Tryggvason's Christian missionaries to Iceland, and thus his journey to Rome is a fairly unambiguous pilgrimage. However, the catalyst of his travel is sorrow at his master Óláfr's death: "Stefnir vndi eigi j Noregi eptir Olaf konung. Reð hann sik þa til suðr ferðar ok gekk til Roms." (*Mesta* 305) – 'Stefnir could not live contentedly in Norway after King Óláfr's death. He therefore decided to make a journey southward and travelled to Rome.' The narrative space devoted to Stefnir's pilgrimage, however, is as brief as this.

There are several Rome-travellers in the kings' saga collection *Morkinskinna* whose impulse to travel seems to be piety. These include Þorsteinn Siðu-Hallsson (*Morkin*. I 170), whose journey to Rome is mentioned in neither *Njáls saga* nor his own fragmentary saga but for whom piety is consistent with his generally upstanding character, and an Icelander named Þórarinn stutfeldr ('short-cloak'), who recites naïve but accomplished verses for King Sigurðr Jórsalafari ('Jerusalem-traveller', often rendered 'Crusader'). Like the similarly naïve Auðunn, when asked his plans Þórarinn merely responds that he intends to go south to Rome, and like Sveinn before him, Sigurðr approves and gives the Icelander

¹⁶ Which Italian town the name 'Vateri' corresponds to is unknown. Perhaps Viterbo or Vetralla is meant.

some money for the journey (*Morkin*. Ch. 72). The royal pretender Sigurðr slembidjárn (‘hack-deacon’?) travels abroad first to Rome and later to Jerusalem. The contemporary *skáld* Ívarr Ingimundarson describes his activities in Rome:

Vann Róms gøtu	‘The king of Þrændir
ræsir Þrænda	won himself fame
fæti farna,	travelling afoot
sás frama drýgði.	the roads to Rome:
Sótti siðan	then the army’s leader
ok syndom hrauð	sought holy places
hers oddviti	and shuffled off
helga dóma.	his sins.’
(<i>Morkin</i> . II 171-72)	

Like Flosi, Kári and the Danish kings, Sigurðr walks to Rome rather than sails there. The writer of *Morkinskinna* reports that when Sigurðr reaches Jerusalem he visits the sepulchre of Christ and all the holy shrines in Jerusalem, as is customary for pilgrims (*palmarum*), and another verse by Ívarr relates that the king’s sins are washed away in waters consecrated by God. Interestingly, the saga-writer remarks that due to Sigurðr’s visit to the holy sepulchre, he “keypði sér svá Guðs miskunn ok mikinn veraldar sóma” (*Morkin*. II 172 – ‘gained for himself God’s forgiveness with this, as well as much worldly honour’. As with his earlier royal namesake Sigurðr Jórslafari, the grandness of whose visits to Jerusalem and Byzantium results in accounts of later southern travellers being modelled on his, Sigurðr’s pious achievements in the south thus gain him temporal glory as well¹⁷ (see also below, ‘Conclusions’). It is also curious to note that Sigurðr finds absolution from sins in both Rome and the Holy Land; one wonders how many sins he could have committed in the interim between visiting the two locations.

In the final chapter of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Gísli’s widow Auðr and her brother Vésteinn’s widow Gunnhildr, wearied with the endless feuding that has not ceased with their husbands’ deaths, abandon Iceland. The saga-writer relates: “Þær Auðr ok Gunnhildr fara til Danmerkr í Heiðabœ, tóku þær við trú ok gengu suðr ok kómu eigi aprtr” (*Gísla* 118) – ‘Auðr and Gunnhildr travelled to Hedeby in Denmark; they received the Christian

¹⁷ The corresponding account in *Heimskringla* is briefer and quotes no verses (ÍF 28: 297-98).

faith and went south on a pilgrimage, and they did not return'. The words describing the ladies' journey are merely *ganga suðr*, and while the context makes it clear that their southern travel is pilgrimage, Rome is not named; Jerusalem is also possible. In neither this account, nor in the similar one of Guðríðr Þorbjarnardóttir at the end of *Grænlandinga saga* (Ch. 8), is any mention of absolution made. Other scattered references to journeys to Rome are likewise lacking in detail, often consistent with pious motivations but told with an abruptness or lack of context that precludes drawing this conclusion. The major character from *Ljósvetninga saga* Þorvarðr Höskuldsson, for example, is said only to go to Rome along with his kinsmen following his departure from Iceland due to some feud violence (Ch. 29). No explanation of his travel is given, and the only ghost of a motive is to avoid further violence with his enemies in Scandinavia. In general, pilgrimage to Rome seems a narrative strategy employed as an appropriate end to the life of a Christian saga-character in need of a suitably pious end to their life. Removing a character a great distance from the north is also an effective way of keeping them away from the scene of the remaining action.

3. 'Tourism'

There are even fewer and slighter indications of a motivation for travel to Rome that may best be called 'tourism'. Within saga-literature there is no more than a subtle suggestion, the voyeuristic desire implicit in the mention of St. Peter's Basilica in the accounts of travel to Rome by Bjarni of Stokkanes, Bjarni of Hof and Króka-Refr (*Fóst.* 257; *Þorstein.* AM 162 fol; *Króka* Ch. 20). This recurrence of one 'must-see' site in Rome in the three far-travellers' tales gives us one slender thread on which to hang the pseudo-tourist motivation. As noted in the introduction above, particular journeys to distant lands do often exhibit multiple motivations, and it must be acknowledged that here the two Bjarnis and Króka-Refr have certainly travelled to Rome for other purposes when this tourist impulse (subtly) suggests itself. Outside the purview of saga-literature, however, the 12th-century *Leiðarvísir* ('Journey guides') of the monk Nikulás of Munkaþverá provides some useful indirect support to this notion; his itinerary ultimately reads like a traveller's guide to the main tourist

attractions of that great city¹⁸. Nikulás not only lists many of the churches of Rome, together with their locations and descriptions of them, and occasionally the holy relics to be found there – which could be of interest to pilgrims and wonder-seekers alike – but he also includes some locations unrelated to the purposes of Christian piety in any way. Of secular locations, Nikulás writes: “Fra kirkiu Iohannis er skamt til hallar þeirar, er atti Deocleicianus konungr” (Nikulás 18) – ‘From John’s church it is a short way to that hall that belonged to King Diocletian’. He also mentions the Castel Sant’ Angelo (*Crescencius-kastali*) and, interestingly, the “kaup-hus Petrs postola hardla mikit ok langt” (Nikulás 18) – ‘bazaar of Peter the apostle, very great and large’. Churches and holy relics, whether the finger bones of the apostles who accompanied Peter to Rome or some of Mary’s breast-milk, attract primarily pilgrims, but large and impressive castles and markets will surely attract a more secularly curious, even pleasure-seeking sort of traveller. A market, of course, attracts all travellers in need of practical supplies, both pilgrims and tourists. This relates to the genre of *Leiðarvísir*. A travel itinerary will include information on secular sites simply out of practicality and thus dilute the work’s sense of piety; the sagas, crafted works of narrative literature, are more free to eschew practical matters and focus on their characters’ pious motivations.

Jerusalem exhibits better examples of ‘tourist’ far-travel, though they are still very few. Certain well-known sites in Jerusalem, like St. Peter’s in Rome, appear regularly in accounts of travel there – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Golgotha, the River Jordan – but perhaps the best illustration of ‘tourism’ is the behaviour of some of the Norsemen who travel there. Rögnvaldr Kali, jarl of Orkney, and one of his followers, Sigmundur öngull (‘fishhook’), not only dip in the River Jordan but swim across to the other side, as Sigurðr Jórsalafari says he did, indicating that to them the river is less a place of baptism than a swimming pool (*Orkney*. Ch. 88, *Morkin*. Ch. 78). Joyce Hill cites the Jordan-swimming feats of Sigurðr and Rögnvaldr as examples of the prestige-seeking focus of their southern pilgrimages (1993: 440, 445; see also Jesch 2006, esp. pp. 7-8).

¹⁸ The 12th-century monk Nikulás probably drew his information on Rome from both personal experience and previously-existing written accounts. See Marani 2009a (throughout) and Simek 1990: 264-67. The dating of the description of the Roman sites (and attribution of the writing to Abbot Nikulás Bergsson) is also problematic, and may have been written much later, during the time the sagas were being recorded. See Marani 2009b (throughout, esp. 655-56).

Hill observes that the values of *Orkneyinga saga* ‘even as exemplified in the narration of the journey to the Holy Land’ run counter to the ecclesiastical prestige system in which Rögnvaldr was placed with the declaration of his sanctity in 1192 (1993: 446). Some of Rögnvaldr’s men seem to be in the Holy Land for nothing more than to drink. Two separate instances are related in which members of the jarl’s party are completely drunk. When Erlingr skakki (‘wry’) returns from town to the ship along the pier and is too drunk to recognise the cries for right-of-way by some of the locals, he ends up tumbling into the mud below¹⁹. In the second, more sinister episode, a group of Northmen are leaving the same town, all very drunk (*mjök drukknir*), when they notice that one of their companions, Jón fótr (‘foot’) is missing. They discover him the next morning, dead of mysterious wounds by the city wall (*Orkney*. Ch. 88). This drunken behaviour is not easily reconcilable with the intents and purposes of either pilgrims or crusaders, but it fits neatly into the pattern of behaviour associated with rowdy tourists. Perhaps it is in anticipation of just such fiascos that the Danish king and southern far-traveller Eiríkr góði warns the Varangians against excessive drunkenness (Saxo XII:vii). Incidentally, these northern travellers’ behaviour also recalls the Vínlandic verse of Þórhallr veiðimaðr (‘hunter’) quoted in *Eiríks saga rauða*, in which he complains of having sailed to Vínland expecting to find wine and having to drink water instead (Ch. 9).

The motivations of pilgrimage and tourism may be in the medieval pilgrims’ (and the later saga-writers’) mindset much less discrete than in the minds of modern readers, not unlike another pair of common far-travel motivations often associated with the same destinations, Viking raiding and trade²⁰. *The Canterbury Tales* splendidly show the literary possibilities of the boisterous, even profane behaviour of pilgrims en route. Nevertheless, if Nikulás includes secular places in his description of Rome simply because they are magnificent and there, effectively making second-hand tourists of his readers, it follows that some saga-writers send their

¹⁹ Blöndal and Benedikz cite R.M. Dawkins’ suggestion that the word Rögnvaldr’s verse reports the others on the pier shout at Erlingr, *miðhæfi*, is a Norseman’s mishearing of Greek *μή διάβει* (me diabe, ‘do not cross’). See Blöndal-Benedikz 155-56.

²⁰ See, for example, Shafer 2010a: 112-13. During the years described by the saga-writers, Scandinavians in merchandise-laden ships will often have sailed to lands prepared for either trading or raiding as the situation warranted. See Foote-Wilson 1970: 229, 248-49.

far-travelling characters to the most well-known and reputedly magnificent (albeit religiously-oriented) sites in Rome and Jerusalem to themselves vicariously experience these wonders, as well as to spark their readers' imaginations. This, in essence, is the tourist motivation.

4. *Conclusions*

In addition to the significances to their individual narratives of each of the examples of Rome- and Jerusalem-travel discussed above, some broader patterns can be observed. In the first place, it may be notable that many of the characters who travel to the distant south die there. Of Þorsteinn drómundr and Spes's decision to journey south to Rome to obtain absolution for the sins of their youth, the saga-writer narrates: "Settisk þá í sinn stein hvárt þeira, ok lifðu svá langan tíma, sem guð vildi skipa, ok endu svá sína ævi" (*Gret.* 289) – 'Then they each cloistered themselves separately in their cells, and lived as long a time as God had ordained, and so their lives ended'. Similarly, when Króka-Refr travels south to Rome towards the end of his life on what appears to be a pilgrimage, he dies and is buried in a rich monastery (*ríkr munkaklaustr*). Knútr, the illegitimate son of King Sveinn Úlfsson of Denmark, dies on his pilgrimage to Rome, during the lifetime of his father (*Knýtling.* Ch. 23). Bjarni of Stokkanes, the minor character in *Fóstbræðra saga* who makes a pilgrimage to Rome, dies on that journey, and his namesake in *Þorsteins þáttr stangarhöggs*, Bjarni Brodd-Helgason, also dies in the south. Finally, the two women who travel south at the end of *Gísla saga* are said never to return north after their pilgrimage (Ch. 38). In all six accounts the travellers' journeys to Rome are clearly connected with Christian piety: three of them either die or are buried in a cloister of some kind, while others spend time in Rome visiting holy sites. There are also examples of people travelling south to Jerusalem for pious reasons and never returning to the north. In the sagas that tell of his sojourn in the south as a monk, Óláfr Tryggvason is said to live out his days in seclusion and never return to the north (Snorrason 242-43, 259-61; Sturluson 368-70; *Mesta* Ch. 283). At the end of his reign as king of Denmark, Eiríkr góði plans a great expedition to Jerusalem, though his journey takes him first to Constantinople, in which he seems to be no more than a royal

visitor with no particular purpose to his visit there (see Shafer 2010a: 106). On the voyage from that great city to the Holy Land, Eiríkr reaches no futher than Cyprus (*Kipr*) in the Ægean Sea before he contracts a fatal illness and dies there (*Knýtling*. Ch. 81; Saxo XII:vii).

In each of these cases the character's death in the far south may simply result from narrative convenience, or, even more simply, from the saga-writer's belief that this was what actually happened. However, there may nevertheless be some underlying meaning, as there does seem to be a common element of fulfilment in these characters' deaths in the distant south: Scandinavians travelling to the distant south for absolution or another pious purpose have completed the final spiritual requirement in their lives and may then die in peace. Certainly in the cases of Þorsteinn drómundr, Spes and Eiríkr góði – and even the sulky Icelandic missionary Þorvaldr víðförli, who travels to the Holy Land and Byzantium and ultimately dies and is buried in a monastery in Russia – the far-travellers leave the north with the expressly-stated intention of not returning. Þorsteinn and Spes sell all their possessions in Norway and instruct others to look after their children and property as if they will never return (*Gret.* 91), while King Eiríkr proclaims explicitly he has no intention of returning from Jerusalem and arranges the royal succession when he departs (*Knýtling*. Ch. 79). Þorvaldr's original impetus to travel widely stems from his decision made in Norway to never return to his native Iceland (*Þorvald.* Ch. 10²¹). These explicit statements of intention to travel south to Rome or Jerusalem with no intention of returning may reflect what some historical pilgrims actually did. Several Swedish runic inscriptions memorialise people who travelled to and died in the distant south, such as rune stones at Broby bridge and Uppsala Cathedral (Jansson 72-73). A runic inscription now lost was recorded by the 17th-century antiquarian Mårten Aschaneus at Almarestäket, near Stockholm. In that inscription a woman named Ingirun is said to be planning a journey "east" to Jerusalem (Jansson 72). This inscription was ordered by its subject in memory of herself, prior to her journey to the Holy Land. If Ingirun had thought she was going to return, she would presumably have waited until she got back to bear the expense and trouble of having the inscription carved.

²¹ There are two markedly different versions of *Þorvalds þáttur*. This material is found in the version preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (ÍF 15₂: 49-89).

Spiritual fulfilment probably also underlies another, similar pattern linking some examples of southern far-travel. In this pattern violent or sinful characters give up their lives of violence or sin following their absolution in Rome or pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Like the pattern of dying in the distant south, the examples of this pattern are all related to Christian piety. The writer of *Orkneyinga saga* observes of Þorfinnr jarl Sigurðarson, who travels to Rome and receives absolution for his sins from the pope himself: “Lét hann þá af herferðum, lagði þá hug á stjórn lýðs ok lands [ok] á lagasetning” (80) – ‘Thereupon he left off warfare, devoting his attention thereafter to the governance of his people and the land, and on legislation’. The jarl even builds a fine minster in Birsay, the seat of the first bishop of Orkney. The later Orkney jarl who ordered the murder of the beloved St. Magnús, Hákon Pálsson, also travels to Rome and moves on to Palestine, where he bathes in the River Jordan. The saga relates:

Eptir þat vendi hann aprt til óðala sinna ok tók undir sik ríki í Orkneyjum. Hann gerðisk þá stjórnsamr ok friðaði vel ríki sitt. Setti hann þá í Orkneyjum ný lög, þau er bóndum hugnuðu miklu betr en þau, er áðr váru. Tóku við slíkt at vaxa vinsældir hans; kom þá svá, at Orkneyingar stunduðu á ekki annat en hafa Hákon at höfðingja ok hans afspringi. (*Orkney*. 113)

‘After that he returned to his realm and took upon him the ruling of Orkney. Thereafter he became a very able ruler and restored peace to his dominion. At that time he established new laws in Orkney which pleased the farmers much better than those they had had before. With this his popularity grew; it thus came about that the people of Orkney would have none besides Hákon or his offspring as their leader’.

On the advice of their confessors, Þorsteinn drómundr and Spes resolve to live pure lives after their absolution in Rome (*Gret*. Ch. 92), and Flosi Þórðarson and Kári Sölmundarson, mortal enemies previous to their pilgrimages to Rome, make peace and even arrange a marriage between Kári and Flosi’s niece²² (*Njála* Ch. 159). All four of these examples give a powerful impression of lives radically altered following pilgrimages or absolutions in holy lands in the distant south. The two jarls of Orkney,

²² Lönnroth connects the marital link between Flosi and Kári’s families in *Njáls saga*, a link not reported elsewhere in saga-literature, with the saga’s general programme of rehabilitation of Flosi and his family (and descendants) at Svínafell (178-79).

one a voracious Viking and the other the assassin of a saint, devote their later lives to peaceful, administrative pursuits and die in their beds. Þorsteinn and Spes, adulterers and deceivers before, are convicted to change their lives for the better and purer, which only forgiveness from their sins by the church officials in Rome can affect. Flosi burned Kári's kinsmen in their home and Kári hunted down and killed most of Flosi's companions, yet the two end their lives on the most amicable of terms thanks to the pilgrimages to Rome they had been compelled to make. The implication of this pattern is clear and simple: the spiritually healing effect of travel to the holiest lands in the distant south has the power to make celibates of adulterers, and peacemakers of the most violent men. Þorvaldr víðförli, again, is an additional if somewhat weaker example of this pattern. Previous to his far-travel south to the Holy Land and Byzantium, Þorvaldr is twice criticized for being too violent a man. Afterwards, he is said only to build a monastery, die and be buried there (*Þorvald.* Ch. 10). Though it is not explicitly stated, this may indicate a change in his life for the more pious and less violent.

Saga far-travellers in other directions are known to die in distant lands or find their characters altered for the better, but any aspect of spiritual fulfilment seems significantly lacking. Yngvarr víðförli's death is a little like the southern examples in that his quest eastward is motivated at least partly by piety (see Shafer 2010a: 168-71), but his death is due to misfortune and seems a bit too premature to be a natural fulfilment of his spiritual life. He even describes his death as a plague God has sent on him in judgement for his sins, which perhaps implies that in dying he atones for those sins (*Yngvar.* Ch. 8). A characteristic example of death in the distant west may be found in the famous explorer/quarreller Eiríkr rauði. Eiríkr does manage to avoid the violence and quarrels with neighbours that have driven him from first Norway and then Iceland, yet despite this – and despite his son Leifr, who is the state-sanctioned Christian missionary to Greenland – Eiríkr dies an unconverted heathen (*Grænlendinga saga*, Ch. 4). While far-travel may have, in general, an ameliorating effect on violent or sinful people, it is far-travel to the south – and in particular piously-motivated far-travel to the holy lands of the distant south – that effects a complete turnaround in their lives, changing wretched sinners into a sociable, friendly or at least spiritually redeemed people.

The overwhelming impression of saga far-travel is that people travel primarily for pragmatic reasons (Shafer 2010b: throughout, esp. 13-14; 2010a: 273-75), and in their own way Rome and Jerusalem support this notion. For a person who is truly Christian, what could be more practical than to ensure one's place in the eternal kingdom of God and at the same time express allegiance and devotion to one's acknowledged spiritual – and to a large extent, temporal – lord? It has been seen that many of the pilgrims to Rome have an even more specific pragmatic reason for travel, making the journey to obtain absolution (from the best place one can) for often quite despicable sins committed. If one must obtain forgiveness for these acts to secure eternal life, the great expense and effort required to reach Rome is a reasonable expenditure on the spiritual balance-sheet. The same is true of the purifying waters of the River Jordan, though fewer pilgrims visit the Holy Land for absolution than visit Rome (see Shafer 2010: 119-34). This is one indication of the difference between Rome and Jerusalem as travel-destinations, despite their fundamental similarity as distant, southern, holy locations for pilgrimage. The centre of the vast spiritual and temporal infrastructure of the Roman Catholic Europe, Rome is associated with the practical spiritual benefits it can provide, mainly absolution. The Holy Land is more like the northern sites of pilgrimage associated with particular saints' cults, albeit the original, prototypical and most spiritually beneficial such site. If one can gain spiritual benefit, for example, from travelling from Iceland to Norway to worship at the shrine of St Óláfr in Niðaróss, how much more spiritual benefit can be gained from travelling the much greater distance to Jerusalem to pay homage to St. Óláfr's spiritual master, Christ?

There is another interesting difference between Rome and Jerusalem as pilgrimage-destinations, one previously noted and discussed briefly by Sverrir Jakobsson (2005: 162-80, Icelandic, and 365, English summary). The numbers and types of people making pilgrimages to the two locations powerfully suggest that Rome is presented as the 'common' or even 'second class' destination, while Jerusalem is the more exclusive, more noble or royal site. Of the twenty-four pilgrims to Rome indentified above, seventeen are neither nobility nor royalty (five are women), and of the seven nobles or rulers who visit Rome, five ultimately travel on to Jerusalem. These royal and noble characters' progression from one city to the other also suggests the spiritual hierarchy between the two cities: while

common people like Auðunn and countless other Icelanders may conduct pilgrimages as far as Rome, royalty and noble rulers like Rögnvaldr jarl Kali and King Sigurðr Jórsalafari may go all the way to the source of Christianity itself. The most notable of these royal pilgrims who ‘graduate’ from Rome to Jerusalem is Danish King Eiríkr góði, the only saga-character to make two separate voyages to the distant south for pious purposes. Eiríkr’s two voyages add a dimension of spiritual maturity to the hierarchy: he is not a commoner when he first travels to the south, but he is young and spiritually immature. Only after he has ruled Denmark with holiness for many years may he make the pilgrimage to the ‘higher’, holier location, Jerusalem. It is thus not only social position that may determine which holy destination one may make a pilgrimage to, but also maturity of spirit. The basis of this perceived relationship or hierarchy between Rome and Jerusalem lies, naturally enough, in the relationship between the spiritual ‘fathers’ of the two cities, St. Peter and Jesus Christ. As St. Peter was the servant and even subject of Christ, so the spiritual centre of which he is the original head and progenitor (the popes being his direct successors) is the proper destination for those who are servants and subjects in the temporal world. The Holy Land, once the home of Heaven’s king, is the proper destination for kings.²³ The sagas make this clear in their occasional references to people going to Rome and visiting the shrines of the apostles Peter and Paul; those who go to the Holy Land are said to wash in the waters of the River Jordan, which Christ himself has consecrated (cf., for example, Áslákr hani’s reprimand to Sigurðr Jórsalafari, *Morkin*. Ch. 84, and the *skáld* Ívarr Ingimundarson’s verse describing Sigurðr slembir’s dip in the Jordan, *Morkin*. Ch. 92). A notable exception to this trend is Örvar-Oddr, who is neither noble nor royal, nor especially spiritually mature when he washes in the holy waters of Jordan

²³ Additionally, there is probably an element of glory-seeking with respect to Jerusalem that is absent from Rome as a far-travel destination. See, for example, Shafer 2010a: 116-20, 129-31. Fighting against Saracens in defence of the Holy Land, naturally, is an activity more appropriate (literarily and historically) to Scandinavian kings and rulers than to commoners. By contrast, in some of the examples of Rome travel we have seen (e.g. Spes, Flosi), there seems to be a distinct element of true humility. There is also a historical dimension to the hierarchy between the two cities: not only would Jerusalem have been more difficult and more expensive to travel to than Rome, thus reducing the numbers of travellers there to wealthier Norsemen and their retinues, but, as noted above, the historical situation in the Holy Land necessitated a different kind of pilgrim, more battle-ready and willing to turn from pilgrimage to crusade as necessary than the travellers to Rome.

(*Qrvar* Ch. 17); Oddr, however, is unique for other reasons, not least of which is his 300-year lifespan. Legendary heroes from the pre-Christian period aside: Rome is the place for ordinary Norsemen to find spiritual fulfillment, and Jerusalem is the place for kings.

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