

Margaret Cormack. *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*. Preface by Peter Foote. *Subsidia hagiographica* 78. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1994. 296 pages.

This book has been long in the making, and its author was considered something of an authority on the subject long before it appeared. It has been worth waiting for, and Margaret Cormack's reputation as a closet expert is gloriously vindicated by its appearance.

It was a monumental task to gather the information on saints and their cult in Iceland scattered in manuscripts and printed sources, in verbal and non-verbal forms (buildings, shrines, pictures and statues, church vestments), and to organize it in a way that makes it easily accessible to the historian, the literary scholar and the student of religion, the Scandinavianist and the non-Scandinavianist alike. It was not just a matter of becoming familiar with a great variety of source material and critical literature and digesting it for the reader in an economic and non-repetitive way, but of critically assessing the available information at every step, for the sources are often scanty and of varying reliability. In a country where so many records perished on account of climate, negligence, poverty, and minimal administrative structures, this task required informed judgement and an attention to detail at every step. Margaret Cormack is scrupulous in indicating what degree of certainty attaches to any piece of information, and she goes to a great deal of trouble in situating it in time, for the veneration of saints is not a static matter but evolves gradually; in Iceland it did not really take wings until the thirteenth century.

Her most important sources of information are the dedication of churches to particular saints as patrons and the church inventories called *máldagar*, which were published in *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. Although the *máldagar*, which were supposed to be read in public once a year, were essentially inventories of church property,

they also mentioned, as a rule, the patron saint(s) and stated on what days Mass was to be sung, which provides an indication of the relative importance of the saints in question. Most *máldagar* have only been preserved in seventeenth-century transcripts of collections made by fourteenth-century bishops, with the material being richer for the diocese of Hólar than for Skálholt. Another important source is saints' and apostles' lives and miracle collections, whether translated from Latin or (particularly in the case of Icelandic saints) collected on the spot; here, too, the *máldagar* supplement the information provided by preserved manuscripts by indicating what *sögur* existed in any parish. The same is true of pictorial representations of saints, only a few of which have survived as objects until today. The Annals, too, recorded events connected to the veneration of saints, and so did bequests in wills and records of vows for help in need, and finally prescriptive legal sources such as *Grágás*.

The book's centrepiece is the almost hundred pages of Part 2 (69–165), where the saints are arranged in alphabetical order. Each entry lists the feast days devoted to the particular saint (including All Saints and the Holy Cross) and the relative importance these are given in the calendar, the saint's position as patron or co-patron of various churches, the recorded existence of images or of writings about him/her, specific information about relics or the *cultus* associated with the saint, and finally the occurrence of the saint's name as a baptismal name. This is indeed an important indirect source, for while a church dedication may reflect a bishop's preferences (a Dominican bishop might push St. Dominic, a Norwegian bishop St. Olaf), the naming of children may be a straight reflection of grassroots popularity, even though family traditions were certainly more powerful than in modern times to prevent quick changes of fashion. The comments following each statistic weigh the evidence and draw in relevant scholarly discussion, all in a minimum of space, thanks to the smaller type used in these discursive parts. The reader will time and again admire two outstanding features of this book: on the one hand the caution and circumspection with which both the sources and their

assessment by scholars are treated, and the economical way in which evidence is presented and discussed; it is as if the author, in an act of intellectual lenten discipline, had squeezed all verbal fat from the body of her text without, for that matter, losing in stylistic grace. The saints are listed under their English name, with the Latin name given in brackets and the Icelandic names cross-referenced, and this will occasionally prove an obstacle to the non-English reader who may not know that Aegidius is to be found under Giles, Jacobus under James, and Blasius under Blaise; also the frequent abbreviation BVM for the Blessed Virgin Mary may not be familiar to everyone. Another English bias is that English translations of Icelandic sources are mentioned but not translations into any other language.

As was to be expected, the Virgin Mary and some of the apostles (St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John) held a central position, as elsewhere in the Roman church of the time. Among other saints remote in time and place, St. Nicholas was prominent, undoubtedly because of the transfer of his relics to Bari, a goal of pilgrimages for Icelanders, too. "Neighbours" and within living memory, so to speak, were St. Thomas Becket of Canterbury, St. Magnus of Orkney, and St. Olaf of Norway, whereas the "national" saints of Denmark and Sweden, Knud and Erik, apparently had no following in Iceland. There seems to have been an initial reluctance in Iceland to venerate King Olaf and some preference for Olaf Tryggvason, the first Christian on the Norwegian throne, but once Iceland was firmly tied to the Norwegian crown, there was no stopping the *cultus* of the former, and by the end of the fourteenth century he was, after the Virgin Mary and St. Peter, the third most popular saint in Iceland. No. 4 was Bishop Þorlákr of Skálholt, who had to await canonization until 1985, but proved very popular in medieval Iceland. According to Cormack's list, he was the sole patron of 18 churches and co-patron of another 33 and had images in 34 churches. Jón Ögmundarson, the champion of the diocese of Hólar, never really had a chance against him, and Guðmundur Arason, the other saintly Hólar bishop, was probably too controversial to be widely accepted.

In Part 1 (5–68), after a historical introduction, the sources are presented systematically; they include, apart from those already mentioned, feasts (*gildi*), prayers, fasts, pilgrimages. The only small quibble I have in this section concerns a footnote on page 62, in the section on relics. While in instances where gifts to a church are mentioned, *smjör* is, as expected, translated as "butter" (e.g., on p. 79), in the case of the *smjör* blessed by Bishop Þorlákr and proving a curative long after his death, the modern rationalist interprets it as "consecrated oil" and adds "Conceivably in this case it was oil produced from his relics at the cathedral, rather than the oil he himself had blessed," which is not unlike driving out the Devil with Beelzebub or rather, denying one supernatural occurrence (which may not be recorded elsewhere in hagiographic literature) by explaining it with another (which had a certain tradition). The flanking Part 3 (167–233) is an alphabetic church index giving the location of each (with references to the very helpful map, on which one would only like to see, for easier finding, the subdividing lines of the quadrants drawn out not only in the areas covered by the sea but also on land) and, in abbreviated form, the *cultus* associated with that church up to 1400, the date of consecration when known, and the *máldagar* or other documents referring to the church.

The appendices contain some very useful items such as a list of Icelandic bishops and their terms of office (247–48), a glossary of Icelandic words used in the text, an explanation of "Prices and Currency" (249–50), and seven pages of emendations and additions to the handlist of "Lives of Saints in Old Norse Prose" that appeared, more than thirty years ago, in *Mediaeval Studies* (25 [1963]: 294–337). The bibliography, divided into texts and secondary literature, is extensive (253–73); among the abbreviations used, the reader may first be a little surprised to see Jón Helgason's (incomplete) edition of *Byskupa sögur* abbreviated as *Bs*, although it contains also other texts than *Þorláks saga*; the reason is that the author wished to keep *Bps* for the old nineteenth-century edition. There is also a general index and a list of manuscripts. Peter Foote's eight-page preface is probably aimed at the non-Scan-

dinavianist, but it is such a superb summing up of the first five centuries of Christianity in Iceland that no reader should skip it.

This is not a book many people will read from cover to cover. But with its painstaking and comprehensive scholarship, its compactness and clear organization, it is bound to remain an indispensable reference work for many years to come. The proofreading is more careful than in any other such work I have had the privilege to review (the only oversight I noted is on page 172, where "Aðalvík" is listed before, rather than after, "Ábær"), and the Bollandists deserve full credit for producing a book which is a pleasure to handle. A second volume covering the period from 1400 to the Reformation is promised; the sooner it appears, the greater the cause for gratitude among the community of scholars.

Hans Kuhn

Phillip Pulsiano, Kirsten Wolf, Paul Acker und Donald K. Fry, Herausgeber. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. Garland Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages 1. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 934. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 787 Seiten.

Das einbändige Werk, dessen Entstehungsbeginn auf das Jahr 1985 zurückgeht und an dem über 250 Wissenschaftler aus zwanzig Ländern mitgewirkt haben, umspannt ein weites Gebiet skandinavistischer Forschung. Selbstverständlich gibt es bereits mehrbändige Lexika, die auch den mittelalterlichen europäischen Norden abdecken: *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, sowie für den literaturwissenschaftlichen Bereich Simek und Pálssons einbändiges *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur*. In Programm und Format ist das vorliegende Buch jedoch eher mit einbändigen Nachschlagewerken wie dem *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2. Aufl. 1970) zu vergleichen, das seinerzeit Lübkers *Reallexikon des klassischen Altertums* (8. Aufl. 1914) nachempfunden wurde. Eine genaue chronologische Abgrenzung des Begriffs "medieval" scheint nicht angestrebt worden zu sein; der Schwerpunkt vieler Artikel zu festlandskandinavischen Themen liegt eindeutig im Spätmittelalter, und einige führen über das sechzehnte Jahrhundert hinaus. In Übereinstimmung mit den in Skandinavien gängigen Periodisierungssystemen wird andererseits die Wikingerzeit — besonders in den historischen Überblicksdarstellungen — nur begrenzt dem Mittelalter zugerechnet, die Völkerwanderungszeit schon gar nicht (vgl. "Medieval Denmark was founded by its early Christian kings", 127a; "The Swedish realm had developed during the end of the Viking Age and the first centuries of the Middle Ages", 630a).

Die im Vorwort angegebene Zielgruppe des Lexikons — in erster Linie Studenten, aber auch Wissenschaftler — läßt Referate der opinio communis mit weiterführender