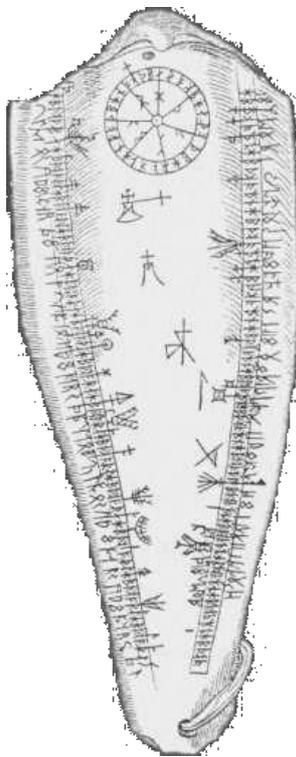


Primstav and Apocalypse

Time and its Reckoning in Medieval Scandinavia

Avery Powell



Master of Philosophy Thesis in Nordic Viking and
Medieval Culture

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO

Spring 2011

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salutations to ganesh

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IV

Summary

This work is intended as an exploration of methods of time-reckoning and conception in Medieval Scandinavia. In the main this is tied to the dynamism between a duality: that of the cyclical and linear models of time's progression. Involved in this study are sources verbal and pictorial.

Acknowledgements

I would like to claim that the genesis of this project was a midnight encounter with a heavily cloaked figure in a wide-brimmed hat, sporting a long beard and a single piercing eye. Alas such a heady beginning can not in truth be claimed. Rather the very first green shoot of an idea jutted out in between the rise and fall of a footstep as I stretched out a leg to avoid stepping on a slug. This thoroughly miniature Leviathan was not my muse, but in the moment it took to dodge his sliding path ideas of time that had been jostling in my head suddenly stood out in stark relief and I knew what tangled path I would have to tread. To commence this tally of thanks I would like, then, to offer gratitude to the Humble Slug, anonymous though it is, for the broken stride that fixed my train of thought. Swaying between solemn sincerity and sentiments no less sincere if less seriously conveyed, I would like to make mention of the gratitude due the following people.

First to my captain, Karl G. Johansson and his open door. Thank you for taking the time to make the study of the past as complicated and interesting as it is.

To my chief Terje Spurkland for forgiving the placement of motorcycle deathraces before runestones in my list of things to see on the Isle of Man. This list has been dutifully corrected.

To each of my friends, who each deserve to be named but in the interest of protecting the innocent will not be, thanks for all the counsel, the condolences and the companionship.

To my parents Buddy “B” and “Ma” Boatwright, for teaching me that self-worth could be found in something as simple as putting on pants every morning and still instilling the desire to accomplish so much more.

To my lady, Jamie Christenson, the reason I still smile, even among tombs and even in the face of the Apocalypse. This thesis and my life would be much grimmer without her and because of her I can say, without any gloom, but rather as a triumphant call to arms:
Memento Mori!

Avery Powell, 2011

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1 Introduction

Time has often been contended over. How it is spent and measured. Where it has been and where it is going. The ideas of time set the way the world is perceived. The reckoning of time can be seen as a method of controlling this. Who then sets the clock? The secular man who measures the eight slices of the sky or the cleric who rings the bells, counts the hours and orders the procession of the liturgy? What did the interaction between the two look like? To investigate this, the thesis will look at attempts to explain time in word and image. The definitions of *The King's Mirror* and the example of the primstav, as well as the mysterious sayings of the vǫlva in *Vǫluspá* and the imagery of the Last Day with roots in the Revelation of John will all be touched on in the progress of the survey. These are all ideas that are seeking explication in a society cycling towards Apocalypse.

The instigation for this study came from a chance encounter with a primstav. Turn the staff around and around and follow the cycling course of the seasons. Yet hop from tally to tally and trudge along after the parade of the liturgical holy days. Church time was supposed to be marked out linearly, a direct, unwavering, un-repeating march to Doomsday. Rural agricultural time seemed more like a turning wheel, or staff, revolving through duties that were the same year after year after year. What were the two models doing balanced on the same stick? To answer this question more sources than just the slender Primstav would have to be consulted, both written and pictorial. With every source considered however the question remained the same: how did practical time, which was reckoned for day to day use, and religious time, which ultimately eyes the line to the end of time, relate? The two were often twinned with the patterns, the cycle and the line, mentioned above; how then did they relate, and what does the interplay between the two reveal about conception of time in the Nordic Middle Ages, when the Primstav first branched out? The jostling of these paradigms, as well as an explication of each, is the recurring refrain in this chorus of source-voices, attended to with the goal of ultimately hearing whether the duet is a harmonic or discordant one.

Sources and Society

The grounding for this endeavor contains a diverse collection of sources though all serve as windows into the great hall of Time. Each is to some degree syncretic; it bears the imprint of cultural importations but also of native traditions and/or innovations. Thus, each source is able to cast a little light, in its own way, on the matters of both the conceptions of time and on a society in the process of international integration. Put more specifically most of the sources have either an origin in a clerical milieu or they heavily bear the stamp of the attitudes of the Church, these attitudes are tempered by external influences which is what makes them interesting here, but the dominant hand is a clerical one. Secular power may inspire some, but the techniques and language that is resorted to is that of the Church. The sources range from the early 13th century into the 15th century, a wide range of time but the sources definitely have a center of gravity in the 13th century, in terms of points of origin. This century and its environs will then bear the brunt of the study, the age of Sverrir and Hákon and the rise of Norway into the international community.

The primstavs will be my primary source for the research. The oldest Norwegian example in wood is from 1417 and is in the Folk Museum in Oslo¹. An older staff from the preceding type of the carved runic calendar tradition exists in Sweden and it dates from the 13th century. There is also a medieval tapestry with primstav symbols in Hakonshallen in Bergen. While the Norwegian staff is rather late through similarities with the Swedish example we can see developments throughout the period. As Hastrup extricates social and historical information from the Icelandic conception of the day² and its measurement so from the relatively 'simple' primstav I would like to cull information about the layers of history imprinted on the staves.

To aid in the investigation into the runic calendar, based in part on the liturgical calendar, *Calendaria* will also be examined. The *Calendaria* were documents that were used to elucidate the list of the feast days of the liturgical year. Also included in these sources would be the computes, as most of the cycle of feast days revolved around Easter it was

¹ Figures 2 and 3

² Hastrup 1985: 22

important to provide the information necessary for computing the feast based on the Pascha Moon, which required knowledge of the Golden Numbers, and then every feast in a month was given the requisite data to calculate that feast in relation to the Easter of that year.³ As the primstav were mainly records of the liturgical year, albeit only of the fixed dates not the mobile ones, those based on Easter, a comparison will be made to the uses of the *Calendaria* and also to the information that both they and the primstav give prominence to. *Calendaria* are also listed as tools for evangelization in certain treatises for missionary preachers.⁴ This is a function shared with the primstav, which perhaps could be seen as a popularization of the more rarefied *Calendaria*. Their form and function being similar to the primstav they will serve as explications for the wordless calendar sticks.

The *Gamal norsk homiliebok* is another auxiliary text source for the study of the Primstav. This collection of sermons is an excellent written source for what ideas of time were current among the Norwegian clergy and therefore expounded to their parishioners. The homilies also display continental sources which would also be highly useful for examining the influence that European ideas had upon Scandinavian world views and how these ideas were internalized, modified and related. The collection is dated to around 1200 and contains homilies based on the annual progression of feast days.⁵ They also contain sermons that can be used as the priest sees fit, with information both catechetical and admonitory. The homilies are made to be accessible with simple idioms and even native proverbs. This is a very important source then not only for the relation to the calendar and common theological thought but also as another example of syncretism.

There will also be included an evaluation of the primstav as simply art objects, created with aesthetic goals in mind. This can be seen as an auxiliary study to the main focus but it will be necessary to successfully treat the primstav as an artistically invested object to fully understand it and use it as a source for the greater investigation of time. In this way the calendar sticks serve as both remnant and text, as it will be examined both as an object and as a source to be read in a more traditional sense. The primstav with its conjunction of religious and rural time will be the cornerstone of the project.

³ Hughes 1995: 275

⁴ McNiell 1990: 180

⁵ Indrebø 1966: 39

The King's Mirror is another crucial text source. Known alternatively as *Konungs skuggsjá* or *Speculum Regale*, but in English as *The King's Mirror* this source dates to at least the middle of the 13th century.⁶ It is an example of an international genre known as the Mirror of Princes. This genre is dedicated to the education of princes, both in terms of moral and courtly behavior as well as in matters of statecraft. The purpose of the work is to give the prince the knowledge necessary to rule justly and ably. It was a wide ranging mirror that held up images for emulation or avoidance, both for a ruler and for the lesser folk. Through this mirror scrying was possible to also reveal the nature of the world and the customs and wonders of far-away places.⁷ *The King's Mirror* was intended to reflect the habits of a number of members of society. In *Konungs skuggsjá* the change of seasons and time reckoning is dealt with in the first section which contains advice concerning the natural world and mercantile endeavors within it. This would be a very interesting look into time as recorded in the period as it comes from what could be considered a secondary translation, a work then that has one foot in international currents and another in domestic traditions. In the words of Rita Copeland secondary translations:

Rather than representing themselves as translations in the service of authoritative sources, these texts claim for themselves (either directly or implicitly, through the irony of disclaimers) a kind of originary discursive status.⁸

This work is also aptly chosen as it is one written by an individual with a well-developed clerical education and yet is writing for a non-clerical audience.

In regards to time as represented in image and narrative an investigation which will spring quite naturally from the liturgical side of the stave, and the images that signify this, will be examinations of sequential art on altar frontals and wall paintings. In particular the thirty painted altar frontals of Norway that have survived and which date to the century between 1250 and 1350.⁹ These beautiful works, which have been preserved in remarkable numbers, relatively speaking, are perfect chances to investigate the way time was ordered on a regular basis: from their sequential narration to their non-temporal invocations of the

⁶ Larson 1917: 60

⁷ Larson 1917: 6

⁸ Copeland 1991: 95

⁹ This tally omits an altar frontal that is of a later date (1470).

eternal.¹⁰ The frontals, it goes without saying, are religious and the iconography and style are mainly continental imports but the selection of what is imported and in what context will be revelatory of Norwegian needs and proclivities. Also some iconography is homegrown, most importantly that concerning the saint-king Óláfr, and yet it is placed in the wider constellation of saints that light up the Universal Church. Óláfr is an interesting case of translation, both of a native ruler into international motifs but also a finite chieftain into the Eternal King.

Imagery is also the key to the Apocalypse. Here the complicated numerology and obtuse prophecy is replaced with visually striking portrayals of destruction and redemption. Some elements of these are not found in the account of the last days represented in the Revelation of John, for example Abraham's Bosom comes from the Gospels, and all of these motifs are here popularized in ways that this book, the definitive text for the Judgment Day at the end of time, never was. The Apocalypse and its associated imagery often served as the dominant motif on the principal areas of the Church: its great portal and its altars. Depictions of the Apocalypse also turn up in prominent positions in illuminated manuscripts extending their reach from the public into the private life of the well to do.

The Judgment Day that was to end time was used by the Church to imprint the present and to shape it in the Church's preferred model. It is in this use, as propaganda, that the image will be tackled, because it is here that ideas of time can be seen to be used as tools by one group to expand its worldview, or better, time-view, on others and how others could in turn use that idea of time for their own purposes and goals. The Church had long contained strains of millenarianism, that is the focusing on the end of days, but in the great Churches of this period they used that idea of the end of days to form the structure and attitudes of the present ones.

Time in Narrative would also need to be examined to see what ideas of time are contained within the sources and how the narratives themselves were constructed temporally. A case study of a saga would also hold interesting ideas of time as these were narratives with native modes of expression and focus but written by authors with an international education and outlook. The sagas could give another example of time as a meld of two sources of influence. I provide an analysis of *Gísla saga Súrssonar* and the methods of time-reckoning that are involved in moving the story along. This saga will be mined for info on how time is

¹⁰ *They are collected in Achen 1996*

ordered narratively and for the individuals it describes. The composer of this saga will reveal his understandings of time through his understanding of society and saga composing.

Elements of the study of this source and *Völuspá* would include investigations into two views of the past. Whether a lost Golden or Heroic Age was mourned in Scandinavia for instance, or, conversely the passing of a Dark Age celebrated, would indicate influences on how people in Scandinavia viewed the future.

To delve deeper into accounts of the Apocalypse and the progression of time the thesis concludes with an investigation into *Völuspá* as this might cast more light on the intersection of indigenous views of the flow and end of time and those of international origin to examine the nature of time conception in the medieval period. The account is of interest for a number of reasons. The shifting of verb tenses as the account progresses is one of interest both as a narrative device and perhaps as a broader notion of the roll of years and the interplay of past, present and future in prophetic vision and in the cosmos itself. There is also the passage that relates the story of the end of time in Ragnarøk and its rebooting.

Whatever the point of origin for the poem, whether in the primeval mists of antiquity or the turmoil of the Viking Age and the long conversion or not long before scribe put pen to the parchment that has been preserved in the Codex Regius from the 1270's it is an interesting source as its transmission into writing was done in a Christian context and yet it purports to tell of pre-Christian gods. The versions that survive to this day are products and therefore portals into a fascinating and productive milieu in which Christian education met native methods of rhetoric to produce a new corpus for the schools of Iceland in the Middle Ages.¹¹ Here is a perfect moment where time and translation meet, when traditions are mined to make explicable and memorable the knowledge needed by the upwardly mobile. Though some of these sources will lead into departures from the Primstav they will be organized as spokes around this central wheel and as such the inquiry will always return to this touchstone.

No society is a frozen diorama crystallized for easy conception by the student of the past. These various sources, coming as they do from different points in time of Scandinavian development, will reflect and illuminate the development that instead defines societies. The sources are also strong in that they reflect various levels of society. There are books for those with access to literacy and images for those who did not. Thus it will be possible to attempt a more comprehensive look at a changing society and changing attitudes towards time. Society

¹¹ See for example Nordal 2001

in this period has been classically categorized as divided into three estates: the clergy, the nobility and the peasantry. *The King's Mirror* holds this view, albeit with the addition of the fourth estate of merchants. This source, which holds in very high esteem an ideal of the harmonious interaction and balance between all parts of society, contrasts a past of discord and strife with a present of accord in an attempt to inspire the audience to maintain and foster that peace. This early view of a diachronic history, a procession from social disorder towards stability through the rise and integration of institutions that promulgate peace, will set the tone and serve as inspiration for the work.

In this way the sources chosen can come to represent a web between each group knitting the social classes together. Public and private imagery of the Apocalypse was promoted and produced by the Church for consumption by the nobility, and as an extension the king, as well as the people. The *Calendaria* and homilies were expounded from the pulpit informing the congregation of the view of time contained within. *Vǫluspá*, *Konungs skuggsjá* and the sagas were all produced in contexts of erudition and were made circulated amongst an expanding literate orbit. Finally at the center is the *primstav*. Produced under influence from the Church and yet with rural information encoded in as well, the calendar sticks serve as a bridge between all the groups: the nobility and clergy rising from and cohabiting with the farmers and at the same time trying to bring them into the fold of Christendom through familiarity with a simplified version of its calendar.

Historiography

1.1.1 General Theoretical Models

Time Sorted

To help sort through the myriads of mesmerizing mathematics responsible for time calculation and calendarian calibration two books were of particular use. E.G. Richards' *Mapping Time* provides a lengthy and detailed survey of how various calendars developed and how they function. It treats briefly with the Icelandic calendar and has a picture of a

primstav, though it is of post-medieval provenance.¹² Also consulted was the much more succinct *The History of Time* by Leofranc Holford-Stevens.¹³ This book also contains a wide variety of calendars from around the globe and through the ages but for such technical terms as Golden Numbers and Metonic Cycles and all the other High Time terms this book and *Mapping Time* are essential.

To move from the general inner-workings of calendars and their history to the specific manner of how time was ordered in the Middle Ages the cornerstone works in this field that contain succinct summary encapsulations of the big picture of time are two books by Jacques Le Goff and Kirsten Hastrup. Medieval time is given a thorough, if continental-centric, overview in the book *Medieval Civilization* by Jacques Le Goff.¹⁴ In the discussion of time he emphasizes the pessimistic traits of medieval time; the world is old and is soon to pass away, history is a record of the linear decline from old heroic greatness to an age of dwarfs and the only really hope is an out into eternal time; all of these are a product of a Christian tradition with experiences rooted in the Mediterranean world of Late Antiquity.¹⁵ This attitude as has been said will be evaluated in the course of the research.

Le Goff also mentions the use of time as a method of control:

The masses did not own their own time and were incapable of measuring it. They obeyed the time imposed on them by bells, trumpets, and horns.¹⁶

Also in the book is a delineation of time into rural, seigniorial and clerical time and notes that the three had marks of mutual influence, the lord's hunt amongst the agricultural-centric months.¹⁷ Finally there is a discussion of millenarianism, which is the belief that the end of the world is near and preparations for the afterlife must be made, either to ready oneself for the life to come or prepare the world for the New Jerusalem.¹⁸ His sources are mainly French, German and Italian with no Scandinavian references suggesting that it will be interesting to find variations and similarities between these views and those held in medieval Scandinavia.

¹² Richards 1998

¹³ Holford-Stevens 2005

¹⁴ Le Goff 1995

¹⁵ Op cit: 167-173

¹⁶ Op cit: 177

¹⁷ Op cit: 180

¹⁸ Op cit: 194

Narrowing even closer for a treatment on time specific to the region of Scandinavia is a fascinating article by Aron Y. Gurevich called ‘Space and Time in the Weltmodel of Medieval Scandinavia’.¹⁹ This article reviews the various paradigms of the medieval conception of time: its emphasis on personal and familial definition. The person living and acting in time was the definer of that time. Activities marked out the months, genealogical inheritance knit the past and present and future together. Time was also defined by its quality not just quantity, the bounty of a harvest was a molding influence on the preception of the time that it took to sow, tend and reap it.

Continuing this theme of Scandinavian, and specifically Icelandic, ideas of time and space in this period is the work done in Kirsten Hastrup’s book *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*.²⁰ She works her way from the hours of the day to the days of the week to months of the half-year or *misseri: sumar* and *vetr*.²¹ She notes a number of ego-centric features of Icelandic time-reckoning such as the use of the position of the sun in relation to landmarks one sees, for instance, and the time-references known as ‘meals’ because that was when people ate.²² She also, of particular interest to the project, discusses the names of the months finding economical, natural and cultural reasons for their naming.²³ There is also a discussion of chronology and history that includes brushes between an external, absolute Christian dating system and an indigenous, relative system based on the series of lawgivers.

There are several meetings of the two forms. Hastrup takes as an example Ari Thorgilson’s *Íslendigabók*, which refers to the death of the English King Edmund, the end of an age in England, as the beginning for an Icelandic age. The Icelandic age is relatively dated but through the death of Edmund it is tied to the absolute chronology based on Christianity’s time reckoning.²⁴ Finally there is an interesting discussion of *veröld*, the world or man-age which ties together “the world-space and the world-history in an unbreakable unity, a conceptual whole”.²⁵ Also “the ‘world’ was measured from the point of view of man, and on a

¹⁹ Gurevich 1969

²⁰ Hastrup 1985

²¹ Hastrup 1985: 19-25

²² Op cit: 22-24

²³ Op cit: 41

²⁴ Op cit: 47

²⁵ Op cit: 69

scale of qualitatively defined ‘ages’ bounded off from each other by their distinct properties.²⁶ This might be a link from the primstav to the macrocosm as conceptualized by medieval Scandinavians and both the systems of dating and the concept of *veröld*, as original concept and/or in relation to the Latin concept of 'Secula Secularum', are perhaps fruitful examples for the exploration of the interplay of native and imported methods of conceiving time.

Textual and Cultural Crossroads

At the beginning and throughout the course of the work the following books and articles shaped the ideas of cultural and textual convergence and confluence, the scope of these interactions marking out the parameters for the paper. Of sufficient importance to be mentioned first is a work of Guðrún Nordal that will be cited again and again in the course of the paper: *Tools of Literacy*.²⁷ This work though specifically dealing with the matter of skaldic poetry is still perched on an interesting fault line where international models meet local form. In pursuing how skaldic poetry relates to the construction of an Icelandic study of rhetoric and grammar, forms of learning imported from the Continent, the book can shed light on any and every focal point where syncretism is being developed between these two mighty forces. Also the work serves as an excellent touchstone for grasping an idea of medieval textual cultures, by describing the impetus for its development and the forms in which it takes.

Randi Eldevik's article “What's Hecuba to them?” also serves to evaluate the relationships of Medieval Scandinavians to cultural imports. In this case, specifically to the classic literature of Greece and Rome. Eldevik notes that the cultural exchange was a two way process, that Scandinavian authors began making allusions to Virgil and other Latin poets but that by having access to the international language of learning, Latin, their own thoughts and stories could circulate into Europe at large, she notes the Danish Prince Amlethus that would become known to the world as Hamlet.²⁸ She also notes that through conversion Scandinavia became at once heir to more than a millennium of accumulated cultural heritage but at the same time the latest developments in intellectual expression from

²⁶ Hastrup 1985: 69

²⁷ Nordal 2001

²⁸ Eldevik 2004: 346

across the continent.²⁹ The environment then was one of concurrent reception of modern thinking along with the hoarded treasures of a thousand years.

In the end Eldevik sees the Scandinavian authors of such works as the *Trójumanna saga* as choosing the models of antiquity that best suit their current artistic and intellectual concerns. There is, then, a twofold model of cultural absorption in the conclusion both of Christian Europe with its Greek and Roman past and also of Scandinavia with its expanded European heritage.³⁰ What she says about Europe in the eyes of the Scandinavians could serve perhaps for a model of the society the Scandinavians themselves were living in: it is a palimpsest

overwritten with scholastic philosophy, courtly urbanity and the latest trends in Christian doctrine, but with underlying texts still legible-- and among the earliest of these are the classical myths and legends.³¹

Eldevik focuses her article upon literature but perhaps understanding of time undergoes a similar process. Certainly as contained in literature it does. But as a separate discipline one can perhaps see native ideas of time remaining submerged or working in tandem with newly imported philosophies on the progress of time.

Another article that sheds light on the matter of cultural and textual exchange is written by Rudolf Simek “The Medieval Icelandic World View and the Theory of Two Cultures” found in *Gripla: Nordic Civilisation in the Medieval World* edited by Vésteinn Ólason. This article takes on the question of whether educated Icelanders had an interpretable world view and argued not only that they did but that it was by and large equal to that held by the rest of Christendom.³² The article’s conclusions helped elucidate the papers ideas both of society but of the attitudes of members of that society.

Art Historical Matters

Informing the art historical aspects of the present thesis is a diverse group of studies that survey the field from a wider European context to a much sharper focus on particular

²⁹ Eldevik 2004: 347

³⁰ Op cit: 354

³¹ Ibid

³² Simek 2009: 196

matters of interest to the paper. Of critical import to the current paper are two books by Micheal Camille: *Gothic Art and Image on the Edge*.³³ While these two works are very international in scope their broad engagement of the topics allows for easy applicability to more local phenomena. *Gothic Art* in particular is a wonderful survey of art in the High to Late Middle Ages. From various media of visual art it explicates a vivid world view for the medieval art producer and consumer. The book also dedicates a great deal of investment to understandings of time evident in art and its production. The other work is less universally useful but still contains much insight into the viewing and understanding of images in the Middle Ages, an extremely valuable feature for the writing of a paper where many of the sources are pictorial. An article that also explores the edges of both sources and society is Andrew Taylor's "Playing on the Margins" published in *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices* ed by Thomas J. Farrell.³⁴ This article argues for a unity of text and image and that the images are generated from within the mainstream of society, not from the edges.

What happens beyond, outside, and after time? This is the question of T.S.R. Boase's book *Death in the Middle Ages*.³⁵ This is mainly an art historical survey of the Death, Judgment Day and the various states attainable in the hereafter. A record is made in art of the development of iterations and augmentations of the initial belief in the survival of the spirit. Heaven and Hell as absolute destinations appear as well as transitive states like the tomb, Hades, Abraham's Bosom, and the later development of Purgatory.³⁶ The catalog reveals that the medieval imagination was obsessed with what was to come at the end of Time. The relation of this after-time to the common folk is twofold. The delights of the afterlife could serve as an opiate for people whose existence was one of difficulty, the hope to be remade as a new person 'more beautiful than the old'.³⁷ But the future reward of current suffering is just the other side of the notion that current luxury will meet with future punishment. In this way the common folk had a spiritual advantage over the nobility.³⁸ The Apocalypse could be revolutionary.

³³ Camille 1996 and 1992 respectively

³⁴ Taylor 1995

³⁵ Boase 1972

³⁶ Op cit: 21, 28, 46

³⁷ Op cit: 37

³⁸ Op cit: 44-45

Another treatment of time from with art historical references can be found in Søren Kaspersen's article "Narrative 'Modes' in the Danish Golden Frontals".³⁹ Kaspersen identifies three forms of time in Christian temporal conception: linear, instant without extension, and cyclic.⁴⁰ The first vision of time is the framework behind all Christian narratives: 'the fundamental story of Salvation, which stretches from the Creation to Judgment Day'.⁴¹ Every section of this universal history contains the totality of the full sequence. The second conception of time mentioned is the moment of eternity. This represents and the great constant beyond the vagaries of the physical world as well as the 'annulment of time and space by the intervention of eternity into the created world'.⁴²

The final way to perceive time he lists is the liturgical cycle of the year, the 'recurring remembrance of Christ's work of redemption. Kaspersen makes a distinction between this form of cyclic time and the classical conception of the same. Rather than a repetitive turning Kaspersen describes the liturgical cycle as something that "rolled" along the time line'.⁴³ In this way it is also separate from the agricultural conception of cyclic time described above. Central to all forms of time is the Passion of Christ, the culmination of his mission of universal salvation. This is the purpose of the progression of time, the moment that touched eternity, and that is re-enacted again and again (again and again bringing the mundane in touch with the divine eternal) in the Mass of the Church.

Liturgical Works

To the student of liturgical matters, be they of developmental or descriptive interest, a galaxy of works awaits inspection and review. Of particular interest to this topic, and within it to temporal matters, are the following works that explicate in particulars much of which is covered in general in the works cited above in regards to broad overviews of calendars and time-reckoning. Andrew Hughes' magisterial work *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office* provided the basis for explicating the intricacies of the liturgical year and offering discussion of its development.⁴⁴ The book is a thorough study of the manuscripts elucidating

³⁹ Kaspersen 2006

⁴⁰ Op cit: 110

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Hughes 1995

their organization and terminology allowing the reader to navigate these at times obtuse sources.

Bridging the art historical and liturgical world is a useful collection of studies that was edited by Eva Louise Lillie and Nils Holger Petersen called *Liturgy and the Arts*.⁴⁵ The various articles in this book informed and influenced the section on images and their communicative ability in terms of religious matters. For a student overwhelmed by the mechanics of the liturgy, presented exhaustively in Hughes' study, Eric Palazzo's work *A History of Liturgical Books* is a welcome succinct companion source.⁴⁶ This work's focus on the historical aspects of liturgical development is also a welcome aid to the other works focus on strict functions within the liturgy.

A final tome bears mention in this quick survey of sources employed in the construction of the paper. That is an anthology of articles called *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* and it is edited by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Heffernan & Matter 2001). The articles in this work broadly dot the field marked out above but also serve individually as spotlights on various particulars. Of primal importance to the present study are the chapters on art and architecture as well as one treating the relationship of the liturgy and vernacular literature.

1.1.2 State of Scholarship on the Sources

Primstav

For the most part the studies of the primstav have been either folkloric or technical. The folklorists are focused on the symbolism of the staves and the rituals and beliefs they denote.⁴⁷ The other side is focused on the level of science implicit in the understanding of astronomy sufficient to calculate the primstav's calendar.⁴⁸ In the first surveying of the field, the encyclopedic article of Hastrup on time-reckoning in Medieval Scandinavia, found in Phillip Pulsiano's *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, stood out as a quick summation of the purposes and ideas of indigenous Scandinavian time-reckoning. This article covers the

⁴⁵ Lillie & Petersen 1996

⁴⁶ Palazzo 1998

⁴⁷ Opsahl 1959: 8-10

⁴⁸ Hastrup 1993: 66

primstav as part of the wider discussion of calendars. In a similar vein is the article by Josephine Opsahl that is found in the *Rosicrucian Digest 1959*.

Heftier and earlier studies and investigations into the Runic Calendar at large and the primstav within that tradition are found in the compendium *Tidsregning*. Most notably the article “Kalendariska hjälpmedel” by Nils Lithberg details the wide history of the staves and their relatives in manuscript form.⁴⁹ The study passes out of the Middle Ages and into the revivals and antiquarian interests into the calendar sticks but it does detail the roots and origins of the runic calendars in Sweden and their development in the Middle Ages including into the Norwegian branch we know as Primstavs. Also in this compendium is the helpful article “Isländsk och medeltida skandinavisk tideräkning” by Natanael Beckman.⁵⁰ This article is far more wide ranging but it does shed light on the calendar that was inscribed on the sticks, both the native trends and the religious impulse for calendars to delineate the cycle of saints and to help calculate Easter.

More recently Herluf Nielsen’s book *Kronologi* provides an overview of the history of time and the unique developments of the calendar in Scandinavia.⁵¹ This book covers much of the same ground as Richards and Holford-Strevens but follows these patterns of evolution into the Runic Calendar and the Primstav and place these calendars into the larger international status quo of time-reckoning. While mainly focused on later almanacs Thorsten Levenstam’s *Almanackan som kulturbäre* does delve into the history of the almanac and this history leads him to the calendar sticks.⁵² This history is useful in finding reference for the various days recorded on the Primstav.

Konungs skuggsjá

The edition of the text that will be used is the Ludvig Holm-Olsen edition of *Konungs skuggsjá*.⁵³ The edition is based on the manuscript AM 243 b α , which was composed in the 14th century. The translation of *The King’s Mirror* that was used was a translation by Laurence Larson, this is based on the 1848 Christiana edition of the AM 243 b α

⁴⁹ Lithberg 1934

⁵⁰ Beckman 1934

⁵¹ Nielsen 1962

⁵² Levenstam 1984

⁵³ Holm-Olsen 1945

manuscript.⁵⁴ While an older translation of the text this work is sufficiently clear and the introductory essay is still unmatched in complete scope and thoroughness and will be used in primarily a consultative role as the primary focus is on the Old Norse edition mentioned above.

Most of the ink spilt on *Konungs skuggsjá* is focused on its political theory and ideas of authorship. Though Sverre Bagge has a book, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror* on the political historical attributes of the work his article on *Nature and Society in The King's Mirror* is a more useful touchstone for the current thesis as it delves into the meaning behind the winds and the animal exemplars that will be covered in the following discussion.⁵⁵ These two images Bagge argues are indicative of the social theory of the work. That is that it holds the harmonic against, and with advantage, the discordant. The troubles of the winds in winter are in parallel to the troubles of a misgoverned society. While still focused on political aspects this study is worth mentioning due to the overlap in material.

Matters of dating and authorship are the focus of articles by Eirik Vandvik and Andrew Hamer. Vandvik's "A New Approach to *The King's Mirror*" argues against the notion of a unitary composition by a single individual.⁵⁶ The diverse themes and, in his opinion, styles seem to suggest more than one author working at periods of time somewhat removed from one another. Hamer's "Searching for Wisdom: *The King's Mirror*" argues the opposite tract.⁵⁷ While acknowledging some dissonance in the text he believes that this is on the whole part and parcel with the larger theme of the work: the spiritual journey of the Son towards wisdom. Though the thesis is focused on but a section of *The King's Mirror*, and but a part even of that, in as much as it is relevant the latter hypothesis of a unitary program, if not indeed authorship, seems most acceptable.

Gísla saga Súrrssonar

The saga that will be tackled in the following pages is *Gísla saga Súrrssonar* a work that is one of the more famous of the Icelandic Sagas and as such has been the focus of much study. But as source for time-reckoning and attitudes for narrative time-construction the saga

⁵⁴ Larson 1917

⁵⁵ Bagge 1981 and 1994 respectively

⁵⁶ Vandvik 1971

⁵⁷ Hamer 2000

is fairly un-plumbed. The text that contains the work that will be utilized is Agnete Loth's edition of the text.⁵⁸ George Johnston's translation of *The Saga of Gisli* was consulted to aid in translation and is cited when skaldic verse is quoted.⁵⁹ This book's footnotes and concluding essay were written by Peter Foote which furnish details and analysis that are called upon in this section.

In regard to the composition of the saga and its various points of origin and redaction two essays from the book *Creating the Medieval Saga* edited by Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge are consulted (Quinn and Lethbridge 2010). "Editing the Three Versions of *Gisla saga Súrssonar*" by Þorður Ingi Guðjónsson and "*Gisla saga Súrssonar* Textual Variation, Editorial Constructions and Critical Interpretations" these two articles delve into the issues of the three various versions of the saga, one long, the other short and a third in fragmentary form. They help to come to grips with the hard textual issues of reading the saga and interpreting it.

Two works deal with the issue of time ordering in saga literature. A treatment of Icelandic Saga literature that argues for a linear model is found in Rosalie Wax's *Magic, Fate and History* (Wax 1969). This book, with a somewhat polemical purpose in attempting to prove a disenchanting Scandinavian world view,⁶⁰ looks at linear time as used in the sagas. Here Wax finds evidence of linear time as a literary style for the sagas and as evidence of a rational, empirically based understanding of the world. She suggests that it is in opposition to a cyclical time, which she identifies as 'magical' and thus inferior to the rational, empirical linear time.⁶¹ Her selective use of the sagas as ideals leaves the *primstav* as a potential counterpoint to her arguments, both in the prevalence of Scandinavian cyclical time and in the treatment of one vision of time as superior to another.

Time as constructed in the sagas is also treated in Sverre Bagge's *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla*. Here, as in Hastrup's discussion of chronology, time reckoning is divided into Absolute Time, abstract, based on external criteria, and Relative Time, based on internal reference points.⁶² The authors of the sagas were familiar with both

⁵⁸ Loth 1956

⁵⁹ Johnston 1963

⁶⁰ Wax 1969: 7

⁶¹ Op cit: 113,114

⁶² Bagge 1991: 49

and though capable of rendering dates in Absolute Time chose to use Relative Time. This was for a number of reasons. In the Icelandic family sagas 'time is inseparably linked to the rhythm of nature and activity linked to agriculture'.⁶³ In regards to the kings sagas, which he focuses more on, they did not represent 'general time' they were concerned with a single king's life and reign and this is evidence in the time within the saga referring to the protagonist and the events he is involved in.

When two figures are being followed an order of precedence is followed in the chronology of the story. That is the events relating to a king will proceed first and then if necessary the author will backtrack and relate the events that involve the other person that occur concurrently with the king's deeds.⁶⁴ He does note an interesting parallel between the native relative time and the learned chronology which is based on the life and reign of the World Ruler, Christ.⁶⁵ This is an interesting interplay of native and international chronology. In one way they've absorbed the Christian reckoning of time based on the incarnation of Christ but rather than replace native ways of keeping track of time there is recognition of similarities and reception of Christian chronology as a form of relative dating, relating to Christ's reign. Thus native means are applied to address international concerns.

Völuspá

The main reference source for the poem used in this study was the edition of the poems constructed by Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, in a publication from the 1980's which as the name suggests is a representation of the poem as found in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365).⁶⁶ As an English reference Ursula Dronke's edition of *The Poetic Edda* was consulted.⁶⁷ The introductory comments in each of these works was employed in the construction of the section that focuses on this Eddaic poem. Also of consular use is the edition of Hermann Pálsson that includes the text taken from Codex

⁶³ Bagge 1991: 49

⁶⁴ Op cit: 56-57

⁶⁵ Bagge 1991: 56-57

⁶⁶ Neckel & Kuhn 1983

⁶⁷ Dronke 1997

Regius, with some interpolations from the version of the poem found in Hauksbók, a prose translation and an introductory essay by Pálsson.⁶⁸

Völuspá is a well that many have gone to and drawn from and watered the whole scope of medieval studies with the captured findings. The study of time and its reckoning is no exception to this rule. Highlights from this broad scope of study, that directly influenced the writing of this paper are works by Jens Peter Schjødt's treatment of cyclic time in the poem, "*Völuspá*- Cyklick tidsopfattelse i gammelnordisk religion"⁶⁹, the nature of whether it is a Christian eschatological poem or something older is explored by Gro Steinsland "*Völuspá* – a Source to Norse Pagan Mythology or a Christian Revelation in Disguise of a Classical Sibylline Oracle?"⁷⁰ The matter of the origins of the poem are explored in Judy Quinn's article "*Völuspá* and the Composition of Eddaic Verse"⁷¹ and the interrelation of the macrocosmic and microcosmic in the poem as specifically relates to the first humans, the World Tree and Urd's Well is discussed in an article by Karl G. Johansson titled "Urds brunn – en källa till förkristen religion i Norden?"⁷² Each of these articles raises and explores issues that will be treated with in this chapter on *Völuspá* and its ordering of time.

⁶⁸ Pálsson 1998

⁶⁹ Schjødt 1981

⁷⁰ Steinsland 2008

⁷¹ Quinn 1990

⁷² Johansson 2000

2 The Mechanics of Medieval Time-Reckoning

Ný oc nið scópo nýt regin
Qldom at ártali
-Vafþrúðnismál 25⁷³

In the classical model medieval society is represented as tripartite, the three divisions, or estates as they are called, are defined as the peasants, the clergy and the nobility.⁷⁴ While this model may not be explicitly applicable anywhere, perhaps least of all Scandinavia, there are social groups who can be generally identified as employed in the labors of the three estates of Plow, Book and Sword. Broadly considered each had its own method of reckoning the passage of time and composing calendars. However these methods were not mutually exclusive, they could be imposed on other groups by force or necessity. Let us first take up each estate and their method of time-reckoning before considering how they effected the other estates and why.

The time-reckoning of the peasants is a rather difficult matter to speak of. Sources are generally written for, by and of the elite. However, if we look at time reckoning that is not specialized for the church or the ruling class but is rather pointed at rural or economical activities then these methods can perhaps be taken as reflective of the estate that collects “everyone else” in the social scheme. A method of time-reckoning independent of the needs of the elite, which can be considered as the native way, has as its basic focal point the *sólarhringr* or ‘day’ which was divisible in a number of ways. The main division is into halves as *dægr*, day and night, a feature which is to be mirrored on a larger scale in the ordering of the year. The day was also divided into *áttir*, s. *átt* ‘eighths’ of three hours each, these were the distance along the horizon that the sun would traverse in the course of three hours. Midway within these eighths were the *dagsmörk* ‘day-marks’.⁷⁵ The names of the

⁷³ Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 49 ‘New moon and dark shaped by the gods for men to reckon the years’ my translation.

⁷⁴ Le Goff 1995: 180

⁷⁵ Hastrup 1985: 19-20

day-marks include those with physical, social and foreign origin. They are *rismál* or *miðrmorgun* ('hour of rising' or 'midmorning', 6 a.m.), *dagmál* (day-meal, 9 a.m.), *hádegi* or *miðdegi* ('high day' or 'midday', 12 p.m.) *undorn* or *nón* (midafternoon meal or *nona* from Latin, 3 p.m.), *miðraptan* ('midevening', 6 p.m.), *náttmál* ('night-meal', 9 p.m.), *miðnætti* ('midnight', 12 a.m.) and *óttá* (the last part of the night, 3 a.m.). The ones that contain *mál* are social, those with *mið* are more astronomical.⁷⁶ *Nón's* presence in the list is interesting as it is derived from the ninth hour of the clerical day, the first of many examples of cross estate influence on time-reckoning. Also of note is that certain day-marks are not absolute astronomically, meal time is when it is time to eat, rising time is when one gets up, and as such are marked on personal rather than externally astronomic rhythms.

The seven days in turn makes up a week, fifty-two of which make up a year. The weeks then are mathematically linked to the year (a solar measurement) and are not fixed constituents of the next greater time unit the month (a lunar measurement).⁷⁷ The year is made up by two parts, in a way similar to the day noted above, a period of dark and a period of light, winter and summer. These two semesters of twenty-six weeks that combine to make up a year are called the *misseri*. Every seventh year an extra week was added to correct the calendar. Winter began with the *vetrnætr* 'winter nights' on a particular week's Saturday and summer was inaugurated with the *sumermál* 'summer-meal' or 'measure' on a Thursday. From the beginning of summer to the summer solstice the weeks were counted up, after solstice they were counted down to winter.⁷⁸

Laid over the turning of the *misseri* is the procession of the months. The names of the months are by and large economic and seasonal (for example *selmánuður*, 'shieling month', and *miðsumar*, 'midsummer') but the list also includes some with cultural origins (*ýlir*, 'Yule').⁷⁹ The idea emerges that the months indicated an almost almanacal cataloging of the yearly labors and important cultural events and festivals. Time was tied to work in the progress of the months, much like it was tied to the land in the turn of the day. But time was also sacral in its definition by ceremonial events. Eventually this way of tallying the months

⁷⁶ Op cit: 21

⁷⁷ Op cit: 25

⁷⁸ Op cit: 29

⁷⁹ Op cit: 31

was subsumed when the Church brought the Julian calendar into Scandinavia and the modern month names were adopted.

For the clergy time-reckoning was a way to sanctify time. Their day and year were marked out in the Liturgy. The day was divided into a number of offices, or services, the main ones were at sunrise and sunset with the day divided into hours for meditation and reflection and at night there were nocturnes and vigils. The basic schedule was as follows: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers and Compline, running from midnight to midnight.⁸⁰ On Sundays Mass comes after Terce. Holidays are further altered to accommodate the day's rituals and ceremonies that re-enact and re-present the event being celebrated. It is interesting to note, though, the basic agreement in the division of the day between the átt and the hour, in both schemes it takes eight of each to make up the day.

The Year was made up of two progressions of feasts: the Temporale, celebrating the life of Christ and the Sanctorale, venerating the saintly crew. The Temporale includes both movable and fixed feasts while the Sanctorale is entirely made up of fixed feasts.⁸¹ Both however serve to represent and relive the events they commemorate. Thus the seminal events in the life of Christ, the focal point of history, are carried out each year. Likewise the blood of the saints spilt in martyrdom or just in the span of years, serves to sanctify the days of the calendar. The cornerstones of the liturgical year are Christmas and Easter, dates for the other feasts of the Temporale are calculated in reference to these to dates.⁸² Easter is a movable feast and its calculation is the starting point for all the other moveable feasts as they are all in relation to Easter. For instance the quarentissima of Lent is forty days before Easter while the Ascension is forty days after.⁸³ Easter is celebrated the first Sunday after the first full moon (the Pascha moon) after the Spring Equinox.

In regards to Church time the method of constructing history should also be mentioned. Clerical historians conceived of history as progressing from the eternal to the eternal, which is from Creation and the beginning of time into the Apocalypse and the end of time. In between, which is to say between the Fall of Man and expulsion from the Garden into time and the Second Coming of Christ, runs all of human history which is the story of the

⁸⁰ Hughes 1995: 16

⁸¹ Op cit: 8

⁸² Op cit :4

⁸³ Palazzo 1998: xxiv

loss of paradise and God's plan for salvation and restoration of humanity to a state of grace.⁸⁴ The summation of this history and indeed the moment par excellence is the sacrifice of Christ to redeem the world. Christ's life provides the dividing point of history into B.C. and A.D. it also serves as the mold for the rest of history, before everything is prefiguration of the seminal promise of salvation and afterwards is the history of fulfillment. In the minds of the historians and chroniclers they were recording the final fulfillment of the great sweep of cosmic history, the last days of the World. They envisioned the world as having Six Ages, corresponding to man the microcosm's six stages of life, and held that the last had begun with the Christ's mission.⁸⁵

Another, perhaps perverse, way to measure time was through penance. For sins and transgressions major and minor forgiveness and correction were attained through doing penance. The history of penance goes back to the late antiquity but continued to gain clarification and expansion throughout the Middle Ages. Often the later versions of penitentials were produced to soften the harsher penalties of the earlier codes. Giving alms and fasting and going on pilgrimage were popular forms of methods imposed on the repentant sinner to scour the soul clean.⁸⁶ Each sin was equated to an amount of time to be spent praying or genuflecting or fasting and this amount of time often had an equivalency of money that could be given to the poor or to the Church. To a penitent the Church provided a calendar of pain and expense to restore him or herself to a state of grace. Often times the penances were tied to holidays, thus the calendar would be an important time-orderer to make sure the penitent acted in the appropriate manner in the appropriate time.⁸⁷

The nobles did not have a schemata as complete or as intricate as the other two groups. They were likely bound to the seasonal and economic rhythms like the peasants and the liturgical rhythms like the clergy. However they did have two ways of marking time of their own.⁸⁸ The first is that spring was the time to go to abroad. This would have been true for the merchant as well as the warrior. The summer was time of greatest activity for the farmer

⁸⁴ LeGoff 1995: 167-173

⁸⁵ Le Goff 1995: 167

⁸⁶ McNeill 1990: 232

⁸⁷ Op cit: 238

⁸⁸ Le Goff 1995: 180

and the campaigner, traveling over seas was easier and living in the field likewise. This would become more pronounced as the military developed into a regular fighting force and focus of power for kings and nobles. At the same time the other method of reckoning time was by tax day. The institution of taxes was an important way to control other people's time as they had to meet the demands of the king on his schedule but by putting in *their* time.

Some examples of interrelated time-reckoning have been given already but how else did these diverse methods work together? There are similarities to the cycle of time as represented by the rural and the liturgical modes of time-reckoning. In both, the circle of time is punctuated by events that require special actions on the part of the people measuring time. The farmer takes his flock to fold in the proper time and the priest celebrates the saint's day in its proper time and fashion. It is fitting then that both methods should be unified in the primstav.⁸⁹ This wooden calendar serves as both an agricultural and as a liturgical almanac.

On the liturgical side the dates are predominately taken from the cycle of saints, the Sanctorale, as a reusable calendar such as the Primstav can only usefully record the fixed feast days, which fall on the same day every year, that make up this half of the liturgical year, but it does contain from the Temporale the important day of Christmas. Here however it is not juxtaposed with Easter as in the Temporale but with the feast of Saint John the Baptist. This is because both fall on the old reckoning of the solstices of winter and summer respectively. It is true that Easter would not fit on a primstav because of its moveable nature but Saint John the Baptist's Day is actually more fitting on a calendar that turns in between Summer and Winter misseri and is therefore grounded at the two solstice celebrations. The *Gamal norsk homiliebok* in its sermon for St. John's day (June 24) draws attention to the connection between Christ's birthday in December and John's in June.⁹⁰ The waxing and waning of the daylight mirroring the transition from one mode of baptism to another.

On the Agricultural side of the primstav the saints' days mark out the labors and requirements of the seasons. This list of time sensitive farmwork includes such information as when planting and harvesting should be done and when the animals are fit for slaughter. These aren't given specific dates but general times when they should be accomplished.⁹¹ The days mark out the time when the activity should have been accomplished. For example at

⁸⁹ Hastrup 1993: 66-67

⁹⁰ Indrebø 1966: 105

⁹¹ Lithberg 1934: 90

what point of time in winter at which half of the supplies must be preserved if the household is to survive the days of dearth and come once again to the bounty of the spring. The two sides are mutually explicable: the saints' days serving as the markers for work and survival, and those activities serving as reminders for the observance of the days of feasting and fasting.

When it comes to time-reckoning an interesting model of knowledge acquisition emerges. The societal groups were rather inter-related and their views on time naturally became so as well. Nobles and clerics would rise from the ranks of the peasantry, and live closely with them, and so would understand their methods of time-reckoning. In this way the knowledge of time would rise up the social ladder. However, the groups at the top would need to make their time-scapes comprehensible to peasants: they would need to know when to pay their taxes and offer their tithes after all, when to pray and when to celebrate the feast days.

Moments out of Time

In some cases the Church establishes its authority over time by emphasizing and introducing instances that contravene normal time and introduce eternity. For example in the moment of transubstantiation Christ becomes present among the believers again. This links two worlds and hence two times. Christ as present in his flesh and blood, formerly the bread and wine, brings eternity and heaven into the Church and the linear time as understood by its teachings. The altar is the point of unity over which this mysterious miracle occurs, where the choir of the cantors is matched with a choir of angels and the nave opens onto heaven's fair field, as explained by Pope Gregory the Great,⁹² an important figure also in the later discussion of images. In the celebration of Mass the individual congregation is also tied into the Church Universal, both across Christendom and across time, the Saints are celebrants too.⁹³

What makes the Mass a bridge between these spaces and times is its form as a reenactment of the *Passio Domine*, the Passion of the Lord. In the performance of the Mass the clergy and the laity are to concentrate on the experiences and sufferings of Christ as he

⁹² Parker 2001: 273-274

⁹³ Op cit: 284

proceeded from the 'Triumphal Entry', through trials and tortures to the Crucifixion and thence through death into the Resurrection and 'Ascension'.⁹⁴ These meditations would facilitate the cleansing of the soul made possible through Christ's death, triumph over sin and resurrection. They would also emphasize through re-enactment that time was giving way to eternity, the moment of sacrifice is not symbolic, it is a repetition of the original sacrifice and it binds all the moments of Christian history together. This way the Church exerts control over the flow of time.

Also standing apart from the continuous flow of history is the epoch ending Apocalypse.⁹⁵ The imminence of this coming catastrophe would also enforce a worldview. Here a distinction should be made between capital 'A' Apocalypse which refers to the event which will end time and the genre pertaining to eschatological information and visions made up of texts known as apocalypses. Time is quickly running out for the individual in the Middle Ages, both personally through accident, disease or swiftly flying natural death and cosmically through the speeding return of Christ, who will usher in the Last Day of Judgment.⁹⁶ Both moments that bring an end to time instigate the advent of eternity which will be spent either in enjoying the rewards of paradise or suffering the torments of infernal damnation. To ensure a positive outcome before the final Judgment that assigns the soul to one fate or the other the mortal vessel of that soul, the individual in other words, is encouraged to follow the teachings and strictures of the Church. By breaching the concept of time with a cataclysmic end, the Church extends its control over the current present in which all believers live.

⁹⁴ Recht 2000: 70

⁹⁵ Camille 1996: 70

⁹⁶ Boase 1977:

3 Images Imparted

“Images”, the famous art historian Lou Reed once noted, “are worth repeating and repeating and repeating”.⁹⁷ Images can convey information in a very direct manner, as a representation of a narrative scene for instance. They can also carry many different layers of meaning, the scene can be a general one or with more interpretation can be seen as a specific one, the specific scene can further relate to other scenes or ideas through allusion. A 'simple' image can on close inspection reveal itself to be a rather herculean lifter of ideas. Images can shape opinions and attitudes, they can also remind the viewer of things learned in the past. Images can convey status and power, both in and of themselves and in their various functions. More prosaically they can serve as annotation or indexes, as they do in the Primstav for instance. The Middle Ages were a time rich in images. The Church and the Nobility used them to confirm their status and as tools of influence. As such they were strictly controlled especially in regards to the images bound up in the reckoning of time: figures of devotion, depictions of the Passion and portrayals of the Apocalypse were the past, present and future in the message of the Church.

Representational images in the Middle Ages could shape attitudes and beliefs in a variety of powerful ways. Perhaps the main two can be identified as informative and commemorative, however these are not mutually exclusive. The main distinction between the two is the novelty of the idea conveyed by the image to the viewer.⁹⁸ The informative side is one of education. It introduces new ideas to the viewer and encourages a modification of behavior, either in emulation or in rejection depending on the notion conveyed. For instance a cycle on a saint's mission would be intended to inspire the believer to follow the holy person's example⁹⁹ while a leering bust in church may be intended to enforce decorum in the congregational audience.¹⁰⁰ Informative imagery also establishes the visual vocabulary for the events and/or people depicted. This is of special interest in the cases where ideas of time are being conveyed, especially of those regarding the Apocalypse. The details may vary but

⁹⁷ Reed 1990

⁹⁸ Reht 2000: 92

⁹⁹ Achen 1996: 82

¹⁰⁰ Svanberg 1997: 494

the particulars remain the same, Christ returning in glory and the dead rising to meet their reward at the feet of the almighty judge. The idea of the end of time has a physical representation which, when viewed often enough, then becomes the mental picture for Judgment Day. It is through this medium of diffusing ideas that the Church effectively expanded its vision of time. Through exposure to visual depictions eventually everyone's vision of time became based on the images promoted by the Church.

Secondly images can serve as touchstones to memory, mentioned above as the Commemorative impulse. Here images serve to remind the viewer of certain ideas and narratives.¹⁰¹ These are the same as those conveyed didactically in the Informative manner but have simply been seen or heard of before and so the viewer has some familiarity with them. Lest the view of the mind's eye fade the image preserves the information contained within as readily accessible important knowledge for the viewer to reacquaint him or herself with each time it is viewed. This preservative quality of the image is interesting also for an investigation of time. In Augustine's words memory was 'the present of things past',¹⁰² the image more than reminded, it made constant that which was depicted. In this manner the timeless stories of the Bible and later saints were recast through depiction in the various mediums in which art manifested itself in the Middle Ages and became very much present once again. The past was made present by the image and the viewer was able to enter that time and even mediate these wondrous communions of moments. With the right amount of cash the viewer could have oneself entered into the sacred history found in the Church's iconography as a donor of a church, or decoration within a church.¹⁰³ But there was no money down required for the meditative mind that was encouraged to consider the events of Christ's life in works like the Franciscan treatise: *Meditations on the Life of Christ*.¹⁰⁴

Finally, there must be considered the status incumbent to images in and of themselves. Regardless of what they convey, images raised the profile of anything they adorned. While this does not perhaps relate to the meaning which they are intended to convey explicitly, this is a meaning that they convey even if just obliquely. They could convey authority and

¹⁰¹ Carruthers 1998: 76-77 and Clancy 1993: 174-175

¹⁰² Camille 1996: 83

¹⁰³ Op cit: 92

¹⁰⁴ Recht 2000: 80

prestige to books, buildings and people.¹⁰⁵ In some cases this was because they were indicative of the time and resources that the commissioner or patron could acquire for their production as well as providing an opportunity to artists and craftsmen to show off their talents and abilities.

Before moving on from the function of images to an examination of ways they were manifested and used perhaps it is appropriate to consider another facet of the nature of images. In the Middle Ages art and images were considered fakes and counterfeits. They stood in for the genuine article. Their noblest goal and achievement was as an imitation of nature.¹⁰⁶ This is mentioned because this view may seem to run at counter purpose to the earlier programs mentioned above as it seems to place an impediment between that which is represented and those who view it. However, turned another way this impediment becomes a spring board and though the image is between the viewer and the subject it stands there as an intermediary and not as an obstacle; the imitation is a window to see through, not a concealing curtain.

Within the Church images were used to make present religious ideas of the past and future but were also used to define in the present ideas about the flow of time past, present and future. To start at the end, the Apocalypse was the all-encompassing vision of the future. It found expression in a number of media: sculptural on the tympanum above church portals as well as painted in books and on walls throughout the church. Representations of this event provide both an idea and an image of time's end point and, in so doing, shapes the notion of eternity's imminence and the nature of that eternity: good for the just, horrible for the wicked.¹⁰⁷ The righteous souls rise up towards the raptures of Heaven while the hapless sinners fall into the grinding horrors of a waiting, gaping Hell. It is this section of scenes of the Last Judgment that allows for the most individualization. Christ in Glory is surrounded by the usual suspects of Evangelist stand-ins, angels, elders and other worthies. But Heaven and Hell can be shaped by local ideas of perfection and torment, the wonders and terrors are represented as best as can be captured by the imagination of the craftsmen who executed them. Popular models prevail in these registers as well of course, but there is more room, if still not much, for license to express what will best be able to excite the viewer than

¹⁰⁵ Clanchy 1993: 279-280

¹⁰⁶ Camille 1996: 47

¹⁰⁷ Camille 1996: 120

elsewhere. These images of the future, a future that would come soon and sudden, shaped the present. They were encouragement to behave in a way that would ensure ultimate redemption and avoid final punishment. The viewer of the tympanum was supposed to follow the redeemed dead believers into the holy city (the New Jerusalem), that is represented in the mundane world by the church building.¹⁰⁸

Devotional and liturgical imagery played a similar role in regards to the past. They made it manifest and encouraged believers into correct, according to the Church, behavior. In the instance of altar frontals, painted, carved and metal-worked, the imagery was often arranged around the events of the Passion. They could also include typological precedents from the Old Testament which point to Christ as well as portrayals of saints and moments in their lives, which occur in emulation of Christ's life and work. All of these bore witness to the veracity of the sacred, central moment that occurred at the altar when Christ became manifest in the Eucharist.¹⁰⁹ Here the images are commemorative in that they, like the Host itself, relive and bring into the present the events and characters represented. They are also informative as they explicate what is happening in the moment. The Church believed that it is through the images the faithful can access the eternal moment of Christ's sacrifice as through a window and through that same window Christ comes among them as well.

This intersection of moments is present in other objects of devotion as well. Through their icons, shrines and relics the saints become present in the lives of those who reflect on them and beg for their saintly intercession. They remain present in images to continue their function as intermediaries between mortal and divine planes. The saints do this by giving voice to prayers and by this same meditation helping the believer in order for them to better attune their own life into accord with God's will as his other servants did.¹¹⁰ Just as the promise of the future, as seen in images, was intended to change present behavior, so too were depictions of the past designed to affect their viewer's attitudes and conduct.

Text and Image can be mutually explicative. In an image a caption can explain the content or provide commentary or stand in for speech, among other things. Next to text an image can annotate or illuminate. Text and images can in these ways work in harmony but

¹⁰⁸ Parker 2001: 279

¹⁰⁹ Achen 1996: 30

¹¹⁰ Recht 2000: 215

can also work in juxtaposition, through contrast contain an idea larger than either could alone.¹¹¹ Text can describe a scene and so not require a picture but the image could just as easily replace the text. Images can place emphasis on certain parts of the text, for example in a chivalric romance if all the illustrations are of courtly life then the focus of the narrative has been shifted away from the battle scenes and other narratives of derring-do.¹¹² Images can also lead to revelation, they can guide the meditation of the viewer through the text and in so doing come to illuminate both text and viewer.¹¹³ Images can also perform as parodies of the text, mocking the sacred and the studied with playful perversions. Where the text pontificates the image deflates or illustrates in delinquent fashion. The image however does not overcome or overthrow the text but rather reinforces its centrality and authority by carrying on in the margins, marginalized in both space and idea.¹¹⁴

Images could also form more pragmatic relations with the text, as can be seen in the case of their use as indexes.¹¹⁵ In dry and wordy law codes and liturgical texts this system could be used to spice up the tedious task of finding ones place . What a particular section of a law relates to may be figuratively drawn in the margin next to the heading for that text. In the case of theft, for instance, a thief may be pictured strung up on the gallows and so the jurist can easily find his place.¹¹⁶ They can also serve merely to make a book look more authoritative by adorning its margins and initials. Rather than drab unbroken text, a book filled with floral sprouts and bursts and sporting figures of monsters and acrobats and whatever else the mind of the illustrator can conjure, appears more worthy and therefore more weighty.¹¹⁷

The primstav has an interesting place in this scheme. The images carved into these calendars appear to be commemorative, but of course could also be used informatively. Indeed if they were to be used as explicative of the course of the Sanctorale to the laity then this would be a very important function. They are a good example of how the Church

¹¹¹ Camille 1992: 20

¹¹² Eriksen 2009: 70

¹¹³ Clanchy 1993:288-289

¹¹⁴ Camille 1992: 20

¹¹⁵ Clanchy 1993: 291

¹¹⁶ Liepe 2009:31

¹¹⁷ Clanchy 1993: 280

popularized its ideas of time through imagery. With *Calendaria* expensive and confined to books the primstav served as an evangelical and educational tool that was cheap and relatively easy to produce. The *Sanctorale* that filled the cycle of the year was used as an instrument for preaching good works.¹¹⁸ The primstav may not even have been a novelty but rather an adaptation of a local calendar and almanac and so would have had an easier transition into acceptance. Thus it would have been particularly effective as it is easier to co-opt and convert pre-existing modes of thought than create new attitudes. However as a repetitive calendar this explicative use would quickly give way to commemorative use. The seasonal information would have this use primarily as well even if it was used to explain to the young people the nature of the progression of the year and the timeliness of certain duties.

By promoting this dual calendar of seasonal and liturgical information the Church was in some ways exerting control of or at least patronage over the labor side of the primstav. On many of the Continental calendars the signs of the months are depictions of the labors appropriate for that time of year, for example December can be denoted by depictions of a man chopping firewood or slaughtering pigs.¹¹⁹ When these images appear in Church architectural ornament they are associated with the Fall of Man as they are the labors that are the lot of humans inherited from their sinning progenitor Adam. Could the Church in the primstav be offering to sanctify the work that is the just punishment of the original disobedience? Too far a gamble perhaps, but by linking their *Sanctorale* to the natural rhythms of the year the Church seemed to endorse rural labor in an attempt to regulate these activities, to further inculcate and regularize the believers who lived in the Nordic lands.

In addition to their use by the Church, images were also used by the secular powers to establish their prestige and status and capture the imagination of their subjects. One way they did this was through the establishment and development of heraldry.¹²⁰ The nobility used heraldry to set up an extra-clerical liturgy and visual language. In some ways inspired by the pageantry of the clergy with their symbols and costumes the nobility attempted to establish a rival set of norms of their own. They equated the imagery with power and perhaps wanted in on the image-action. Their coats of arms advertised their identity and vouched for their status as one of the elite. In the same way images adorning books elevated their status, so too did

¹¹⁸ McNiell 1990: 180

¹¹⁹ Camille 1996: 95-96

¹²⁰ Clanchy 1993: 282

the creatures and devices of heraldry elevate the status and vouch for the validity of the authority of the individual who bore the image.¹²¹ Seals are similar as they introduce the person who marked them.

With images the king also gains a measure of immortality and omnipresence.¹²² In the manner of coins the likeness of kings validates transactions and guarantees the worth of the currency offered. The king is also drawn into the exchange as his face is transferred and so wherever the money is being used the king is there. In this way the king expands his authority through his own image. He attempts to take all trade under his purview by bringing it under his gaze looking out of his coins. Other images are also present to affirm the authority of the king, sacred symbols can be employed, and to identify him, coats of arms or other sigils.

In funerary and other memorial art the king, and other potentates, attempt to surmount the final limitations of their mortal frame, that keeps them in one place at a time and ultimately in one brief span of time. In funeral effigies the wealthy worthies compose their images in ways to prepare themselves for the resurrection of the dead.¹²³ They also often arrange themselves to take their honors and wealth with them into the next life. The bishop keeps his cope and hat, the ruler his crown, the warrior his arms. The Church's view of the end of time continues here to inspire the patrons to request these postures and imagery that adorns their coffins and in turn these images reflect back to further model the imagination of those left behind. This reflection is a good example of how images are self-sustaining and self-reinforcing. The origin is hard to find when images are involved, once they have entered usage they shape the mental pictures of events and then return as new expressions of an event or character.

The saint-kings of the Scandinavian lands were the subjects of interesting iconographic campaigns, linking the interests of the burgeoning Church and Thrones. As saints they appeared in the procession of other holy figures in the pictorial cast featured in Church art. As kings this elevation meant they still looked out on the countrymen they once ruled.¹²⁴ One popular motif of these kings (and indeed of other martyred saints as well) was

¹²¹ Clanchy 1993: 282

¹²² Camille 1996: 84

¹²³ Op cit: 91

¹²⁴ Op cit: 84

of them standing on the backs of those who caused their martyrdom. In St. Óláfr of Norway's case this is usually the heathen warrior who struck him down at Stiklastad,¹²⁵ in St. Erikr of Sweden's case it is a jester, representing those who mocked him before his beheading.¹²⁶ As with other martyr's those who struck down the saint did not triumph over the saint but rather elevated him to the final victory as one of Christ's own. In the case of kings it may be more important to depict the saint borne on the back of his persecutor to remind the viewer that the king has attained the true triumph rather than a defeat in perhaps ignoble death. It is from this elevated status that the eternal king continues his reign, ensuring the success and safety of his realm. In this way they are commemorative, the ruler from the past is made present, his gaze ever watchful. Here also they stand as representations of the powerful union between Spiritual and Temporal powers.

Iconographic depictions of St. Óláfr contain other interesting roles for the king to play. The king appears on a number of painted altar frontals from Norway, which are surveyed in detail by Henrik von Achen in his book on *Norwegian Medieval Altar Frontals in Bergen Museum*. On one of these frontals originally from a stave church in Årdal (Figure 1) dated to sometime around the year 1300 the martyrdom of the king makes up one of the panels in a series that also includes the moments of martyrdom of St. Lawrence and St. Catherine as well as the Annunciation.¹²⁷ These scenes surround the central figure of St. Botolf. The martyred saints play a number of interesting and complex parts in relation to the Eucharist. Óláfr's martyrdom is interesting because it is not a martial scene. Rather than on foot and armed the king is seated on a throne, dressed in the robes of state with the orb in one hand. His two assailants are not armored either but do stand on foot; wielding an ax and a spear one hacks at his knee, the other pierces his side.

In one way these saints are witnesses to the validity and efficacy of the Eucharist. They spent their lives spreading and glorifying Christianity in general but also specifically the Eucharist as a part of this, and as evidenced by scenes from their ministry displayed here, they often lost this life in fulfilling their goal.¹²⁸ Their presence on the altar would be a reminder to all who saw it that the Eucharist was worth the ultimate respect and sacrifice from great

¹²⁵ Svanberg 1997: 470

¹²⁶ Op cit: 475

¹²⁷ Achen 1996: 82

¹²⁸ Ibid

men and women of the past. More than giving witness to Christ and his mystic Incarnation in the Eucharist they also served as images, *imitato*, of Christ themselves.¹²⁹ Through their suffering and endurance they acted Christ-like which is what all should strive to do in their own lives, but is of particular significance since the Eucharist itself is an image of Christ. In such fashion the saints by following after Christ's footsteps become symbolic of this mystery as well.

The saints are guides to the miraculous Eucharist, serving as examples of right action and belief and as such examples they too become part of the communion. In another link to the Holy Communion the images of the saints, the great believers of the past, are at the celebration of the mass in the present, bringing the saints into the event as well.¹³⁰ This further places the Communion in a mysterious place beyond ordinary space and time, as noted above. The distinction between Heaven and Earth is dissolved in the Incarnation, which is possible through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, with the saints drawn in as additional witnesses. In this moment the distinctions between all the corners and times of the Earth are dissolved and the Universal Church united across space and time takes part in the re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ as one.

On the altar frontal there are interesting visual parallels between the scene of the Annunciation and the martyrdom of St. Óláfr which make up the left hand side of the frontal. The Annunciation is a direct parallel of the Eucharist as it is the initial Incarnation of Christ when Christ becomes flesh and blood. In the Eucharist this incarnation is repeated when the bread and wine are elevated in the Mass and 'Christ becomes flesh and blood with the words of the priest'.¹³¹ In both panels on the left hand side of the frontal a standing figure makes a gesture of offering or proposal while facing this figure another responds with a gesture of acceptance. In Mary's case it is the conception of the Christ Child, symbolized by the descending dove of the Spirit of God. In Óláfr's case it is most likely the martyrdom brought on by ax stroke and spear thrust. It is tempting to read greater significance into this parallel.

¹²⁹ Achen 1996: 82

¹³⁰ Op cit: 86

¹³¹ Op cit: 74



Figure 1 Årdal I, Årdal Church, Sogn og Fjordane, ca. 1300. Painted Altar Frontal. Bergen Museum, Bergen.

Perhaps this was part of a program to specifically tie the Norwegian King more firmly into Christian history. As it was St. Óláfr who was the King who was made out to be the agent of the conversion of Norway the King is often cast as another Christ.¹³² Note in his panel how he is enthroned with a crucifix topped orb in his hand and how he receives a spear wound to his side just as Christ did on Calvary. It might be going too far but could the saintly king be placed here tied to the Annunciation in a way replacing the Crucifixion that might be typically assumed to be depicted in this context, the sacrifice marking the culmination of the life began at the Annunciation and the principle event recreated at Mass? Is Óláfr's sacrifice standing in for Christ's? Written evidence for this view can be found in the very beginning of *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*. In this saga the eponymous king is said to have an analogous to relationship to his name sake Óláfr Haraldsson as John the Baptist had to Christ. Not only is he claimed to have baptized the saint-king but it is implied that he has grown lesser as the younger Óláfr has grown greater.¹³³ Even if this is not the case here it may be that in order to further his cult it was decided to be important to relate him to the conception of Christ, and through that to the Eucharist and the repeated embodiment of Christ.¹³⁴

To sum up before proceeding to other hypothesis of images and their uses, we have seen how images were an effective way to explain a worldview and to shape that held by witnesses. In the case of the Church images were used to advertise the beliefs espoused as orthodox and in this manner create a uniform set of beliefs. The images that relate to time

¹³² Morgan 2004: 60

¹³³ Jónsson 1932: 1

¹³⁴ For a detailed overview of St. Óláfr in art see Lidén 1999

particularly illustrate this point as the Church used scenes of both the past and the present to expand control over the daily lives of the faithful of all social strata. They can also be directly tied to the activities of the faithful as in the case of the primstav, which uses an almanac to explain the liturgical year and the liturgical year to gloss over the almanac. Images also convey power as can be seen in their use by both secular and religious authorities to expand their reach and establish their primacy. These two authorities can be unified in the propagation of images as they do with the saintly kings for instance but also to wrest some autonomy from the other as in the case of heraldry. In all of these instances however the creation and dissemination of images are all part of a program to shape the worldview through visual media and so expand the power of those who instigate the creation of said images.

There are a number of interesting hypotheses of images in the margins of texts and buildings. Some try to explain the images in isolation to the text or structure they support, some even read them as oppositional to those things, but some take the center and the edge as holistically part of the same program. Ideas from here could be used to decode larger attitudes of image making. If either were to be shown simply to illuminate function or with the possibility of introducing internal dissension the result would be quite interesting for a paper aimed at establishing 'official' programs. But even if the images were shown to be part of a program this would be all for the better as perhaps it might illumine other image systems.

The first aspect of these images on the margins to explore is their potential practicality. The views on practicality take the image aside from the text, the function may aid the purpose of the work but does not in any way affect that work. One function is merely to serve as decoration, as expressions of the artists wit and imagination.¹³⁵ Another possible function of these images is that they could serve the viewer as mnemonic devices. In texts dense in prose and dry fact that need quick recollection the surrounding imagery can act as place finders. The more vivid the scene the better for this purpose, hence the violence and sensuality of the margins. This can be reinforced when the image is not strictly distinct from the text but rather has some reference, often a sly one, to the text. But it is weakened by the repetition of imagery and motifs, or of their jumbling together closely. For the image to be useful as a place holder it should be vivid and unique.¹³⁶ Though in this case the argument for the use of illustrations as memory aids seems weak, meeting only half these criteria that of

¹³⁵ Taylor 1995: 20

¹³⁶ Ibid

their vividness, their use as mnemonic devices perhaps should be remembered when other images are considered, as attitudes may be shaped more by the remembrances inspired by images than by introductions to the same images.

The next aspect to explore is the idea of the image as undercurrent or even out and out rebellion. Famously represented as the Carnival side of life this hypothesis holds that in the margin the popular life finds expression beyond and even against that of the established elite at the center of things.¹³⁷ The topsy-turvy world at the edge has animals mimicking human behaviors, humans behaving poorly and everywhere the forms of the two are mixed and mingled. This parody edge flipping the natural order and mocking the legal one can be seen as a site of resistance to those orders. These images become signs of 'subversion or escape from the authority of the text'.¹³⁸ But the difficulty with the idea that the popular voice finds a place to call out on the margin of the book or the building is that by and large the composition of these works were highly controlled.¹³⁹ They were objects of commerce in which the patron exercised remarkable control and where though artists could show off; rebellion would mean a drying up of commissions. If this is Carnival it might be one captured by an observer from a high window not one down in the street.

Yet this parade may not be in opposition but in accord with the text. The riot around is a natural part of the text within. Not just as references by particular images to individual passages but as the whole series relates to the whole of the text. Here licentiousness isn't given license it is pushed out to the edge, marginalized in every sense of the word.¹⁴⁰ But this doesn't keep it from creeping back into the text by its humorous asides and juxtapositions. The completeness isn't there without the opposition. The victory is not won without those that are triumphed over. This is an important motif, as in the dark times of the last age of the world, the good were always under siege by the bad.¹⁴¹

The final explanation, borrowing as it does on the second, seems the strongest. Just as the world was conceived of as a whole so too would have been the page. What then did the

¹³⁷ Op cit: 23

¹³⁸ Taylor 1995: 26

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Op cit: 28

¹⁴¹ Camille 1992: 74

images on the edge say? Despite their apparently disruptive flavor it seems most convincing that they were there as reinforcements of the centralizing order. Thusly they serve as another example of the image as a thread of power that delimitates the bad from the good, and by extension, promising ultimate defeat of that evil.

4 The Material

Puzzling the Primstav

Layers and layers and layers are bound into the deceptively simple looking carvings that make up the corpus of primstavs. The Norwegian primstav is perhaps cut from a branch of a wide ranging tree which might possibly have roots in obscure antiquity and boughs shading a wide section of the North. The runic calendar on which it is based was a perpetual calendar that utilized a reconciliation of the tropical years and synodic months. From the earliest examples it served as an almanac for farmers as well as record of holy days, with the development of the primstav, the celebratory side of the calendar rose to prominence and the runes faded to be replaced with pictures denoting the festive day. The holy days are those of the Christian liturgy and agricultural information has taken on a dependent position to these, yet even so the primstav remains a tool for conversion both of ways of doing things and belief.

First an attempt to sketch the tree from which the primstav sprung. Behind the primstav spins the runic calendar, which is considered a perpetual calendar. A perpetual calendar is one that may be used over and over again, starting back up right where it left off.¹⁴² Turn and turn and turn and it kept time independently of astronomical calibration. The system that makes this possible is a form of time reconciliation known as the Metonic Cycle, named after the Greek philosopher and mathematician Meton though it was known before him by the ancient astronomers of the Middle East and others.¹⁴³ The cycle was measured out as a way to find an equivalency between the tropical year, based on the apparent course of the sun back and forth between the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer as observed in the lengthening and shortening of days, and the synodic or lunar months, based on the phases of the moon as it waxes and wanes.

The methods of time reckoning based on these governing lights, the sun and moon, are clearly disparate, as *The King's Mirror* says

¹⁴² Richards 1998: 118

¹⁴³ Op cit: 84

Peir hlutir er þar hefur þu nu um rætt þá eru þeir eigi allir iafnskiotir at vexti eðr þurd.¹⁴⁴

These things which you have now inquired about do not all wax and wane equally.¹⁴⁵

but through observation and calculation a period was marked out which measured the time it took for a new moon to fall once more on the same day of the solar year. That is to say that after a period of nineteen years, the length of this period, the new moon will once again be on the same day as it was at the beginning of the cycle. Expressed numerically the nineteen years have a total of 6940 days (rounded up) which is the same amount of days contained within the 235 months of the cycle. In fact there is only a difference between the two systems of two hours.¹⁴⁶ Due to this difference certain adjustments must be made periodically, an extra synodic month can be added once every three years.¹⁴⁷ However the use of the runic calendar did not depend on such intercalendations.¹⁴⁸ Every year had a golden number assigned to it which corresponded to its place in the nineteen yearlong rotation.

Interestingly enough, as this cycle was used to help calculate the Hebrew Calendar it was inherited by the Church as the method to determine the date for Easter, as the events commemorated by that week happened during the Jewish High Days of Passover. This was the commemoration of when the Angel of Death passed over the Hebrew first born prior to the Exodus from Egypt.¹⁴⁹ Easter is mobile because it is tied to the first full moon after the vernal equinox, which is called the *Pascha* Moon. This moon can appear anywhere from one to thirty days after the equinox and is thirty days before Easter.¹⁵⁰ Easter can then fall on any day between March 22nd and April 25th. This holiest of days serves as the anchor for half of the Temporale, the liturgical celebration of Christ's life, pushing out in one direction the days of fasting that precede it, most famously the Forty Days, or Quarentesima, of Lent, as well as serving as the beginning for the count down to the Feasts of the Trinity and of the

¹⁴⁴ Holm Olsen 1945: 10

¹⁴⁵ *All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.*

¹⁴⁶ Richards 1998: 84

¹⁴⁷ Op cit: 95

¹⁴⁸ Nielson 1962: 72

¹⁴⁹ Richards 1998: 345-346

¹⁵⁰ Op cit: 349

Ascension.¹⁵¹ Fittingly, then, Easter is not only of primal importance to the spiritual life of the believer but also serves as one of the two tent poles holding aloft the great canopy of the Calendar. The other of course being Christmas, which is rather a fixed day, both of these holidays and a few others, were candidates for the distinction of being counted the first of the year.¹⁵²

The beginning of the year in the runic calendar, however, was the first new moon after winter solstice, incidentally the 'prim' in *primstav* is from *primatio* Latin for first in this case referring to the first moon.¹⁵³ From the carved calendar's starting point at the first moon there begins a count of the seven days of the week, each would be marked with one of the first seven runes of the Younger Futhark runic alphabet. This is in parallel to the 'Sunday letters' found in the Latin form of the computus where the days of the week are represented as A-G, A being the first day of the year. This form of computus was runicized as early as 1228 in a Gotlandic Manuscript.¹⁵⁴ The carved staves may have developed as a cheap durable alternative to these manuscript calendars. The week, while starting on the same day throughout the year, that is from that first winter new moon, did not always start on the same day of the week each year which means that the week did not necessarily start on 'Sunday' every year. Whichever day of the week the year started on was the first of the week for every week of that year. In most arrangements of this calendar information was divided into three lines; the repetition of these seven runes, the week, took up one of these lines, most often the middle tier.

Above the line of the weekly count there were the symbols for the 'marked days'. These days could be days of ceremonial importance, roughly what might be termed holy, like the important local saint's feast days. Also they might be agricultural: when to plant or when to bring in the harvest. Often these two categories of days overlapped. Below the weekly line was a stratum for the Nineteen Golden Numbers, each year in the cycle was designated by one of these numbers. These were so-called because in the Middle Ages they were written in *Calendaria* with gold ink.¹⁵⁵ Here they were represented by each of the sixteen runic

¹⁵¹ Palazzo 1998: xxiv

¹⁵² Holford-Strevens 2005: 31

¹⁵³ Lithberg 1934: 77

¹⁵⁴ Nielsen 1962: 82-83

¹⁵⁵ Richards 1998: 95

characters of the Younger Futhark plus three special characters for the final three numbers: the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth years of the cycle. These runes had special names: *Arlaug*, *Tvimadur* and *Belgthor* respectively. They appeared on the calendar to mark when the new moons occurred during their year.¹⁵⁶ Where *Tvimadur* was carved that was where the new moons would occur in the eighteenth year of the cycle. These numbers were important as aids to the calendar stick users in finding out when Easter was for that year, since the moveable feast could not be carved into a permanent calendar. There is also, in many cases, a medallion included in the system. This could contain extra information like how much longer or less daylight lasted as the year waxed and waned or information regarding the shift in the moon's phases.¹⁵⁷ The calendar could be divided a number of ways. Either in halves with December 25th leading off the winter part and June 25th starting the summer, birthday celebrations of Jesus and John the Baptist at the old solstice days, or as four equal parts commencing with either Christmas or the First of January.¹⁵⁸

There are a number of examples of carvings based on this early form of the runic calendar. Most of these are of Swedish provenance and dating from the first few centuries after the end of the first millennium of the Common Era. The oldest preserved calendar in the form of a staff is Nyköping staff from around the year 1200 C.E. found in the town of the same name in Sweden. At the other end of development was the *Brevarium Scarense*, printed in 1498 C.E., this included a version of the calendar with Arabic Numerals replacing the runes for the Golden Numbers and Latin letters marking the days of the week.

Yet other forms of carvings predate even the Nyköping staff however. A curious example is preserved only in a 17th century woodcut by Ole Worm of a calendar that could come from the 11th century. It was perhaps carved on a porpoise's jawbone.¹⁵⁹ The runes are Norwegian in style but with some Northumbrian examples thrown in suggesting either an English or West Norwegian point of origin. Unfortunately the woodcut only shows a single side of the calendar, if there were carvings on the reverse side.¹⁶⁰ Though it could be true that this carving only contained half of a calendar. In general all of these carvings conform to the patterns described above. The staves by and large present their information in a linear

¹⁵⁶ Hughes 1995: 249

¹⁵⁷ Levenstam 1984: 106

¹⁵⁸ Lithberg 1934: 90

¹⁵⁹ See *frontispiece*, taken from *Ole Worm's Fasti Danici*, pg. 102

¹⁶⁰ Lithberg 1934: 85

fashion, from one end of the stick to the other, but some of the stones and the carving just mentioned have the calendar arranged in a circular form, spinning the days around in a loop.

This calendar with runes both English and Norwegian could demonstrate one connection between the runic calendar and an interesting cousin to the primstav: the clog almanac. The clog almanacs are a Northern English variety of Calendars that are made of four panels, bound together similar in fashion to that of a book, marking out days of religious and agricultural significance.¹⁶¹ The Clog Almanacs were divided into four: one part for each of the seasons. An interesting difference between the Nordic calendars, perhaps the carvers in the more temperate British Isles could measure out each season while those in the more extreme Scandinavian lands maintained the dipartite year of Light and Dark. The information recorded in the Clog Almanacs was also divided into the count of the days, again denoted by runes, though these would be of the Anglo-Saxon character, as well as pictures describing agricultural activities and holy days. Of course this carved calendar could just be part of a shared heritage that both the English and the Scandinavians inherited from early traditions. Clog refers simply to worked wood and so these are almanacs made of worked and fashioned wood.

These were the roots and the fellow branches of the primstavs but they were not the only influences on its growth, a strong sun also fell on this green branch as it grew: the light of the Church and its Liturgical Year. The Liturgical Year was recorded in manuals known as *Calendaria*. In their grandest forms these were month by month list of days; according of course to the Julian calendar's division and naming of the months. The Sundays were highlighted as were other 'red letter' days, a phrase still used today to indicate days of special importance, so called for the red ink employed to write them out, the feast days of the saints that were celebrated that month. Oftentimes the most important feast days were written larger than the rest of the counted days.¹⁶² Sometimes they were illustrated and in these cases various scenes depicting the activities that would be typical of that month could be seen at the head or foot of each page. These enterprises could be high or low, they could be a hunting lord in the spring or a peasant gathering wood in the winter months.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Op cit: 88

¹⁶² Hughes 1995: 100-101

¹⁶³ Camille 1996: 80

Calendaria were often included at the beginning of books both religious and secular, often with a computus for the calculation of Easter, an operation that could be done, in addition to the ways described above, by a calculation involving the Golden Number of that particular year.¹⁶⁴ These texts were counted as one of the great tools of evangelism by the preachers of the Middle Ages, in some estimations they were counted on par with the gospels. Their significance was dependant on the importance of the correct observation of the Liturgical cycle to the spiritual life of the converted. In the dizzying array of feasts and holy days celebrating the full life of Christ and the host of saints (some of whom had multiple days that commemorated their missions, Peter and Paul who had their own days and a day together for instance), it could be difficult for the newly converted to keep one's bearing and know when to fast, go to Church or perform other forms of devotional observance.

The Primstav then was the partly Norwegian development of the runic calendar. Unlike the relatively simple marks evident on the early pure runic calendar sticks the primstavs manifest the whole panoply of the liturgical procession in varied and vivaciously carved symbols.¹⁶⁵ While colorfully and clearly Christian, the calendar stick does hark back to earlier calendars in some ways. The classical form of the primstav is dual sided in imitation of the misseri, it is important to note that these sides were constituents of the whole rather than divisions of the same, summer and winter were twin building blocks for the year not split halves.¹⁶⁶ Unique in the runic calendar tradition, the Norwegian Primstav marks the season of winter as beginning on October 14th and the summer season on April 14th.¹⁶⁷ Typically the count of one season occupied one side of the stave and the reverse was carved with the opposite. On the 14th of October, St. Callixtus's day, and that of April, the day of Tiburtius and Valerianus, the stave was turned over.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Richards 1995: 95

¹⁶⁵ Lithberg 1934: 85

¹⁶⁶ Hastrup 1993: 65

¹⁶⁷ Lithberg 1934: 90

¹⁶⁸ Beckman 1934: 20



Figure 2 Primstav NF.1950-0032 winter side, 1417. Carved wood, 5.7 x 70.0 cm. Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo.

The features that would define the classical Primstav are already evident in the earliest primstav from 1417.¹⁶⁹ First there is the tally of the weekdays, little ticks repeating again and again, here they are all equal but later developments might feature more pronounced carvings for the seventh day which would be useful in easing the task of finding one's place on the calendar or a specific day. Above the ticks for the days is a line of pictograms marking the important days of the Sanctorale, the holy days of the saints, and a few fixed day of the Temporale: Christmas and Epiphany for example. Many of these symbols are easily recognizable by any student of religious art as they are the primary attribute of the saint whoever's day they mark. For example there are the book of St. Matthew, the knife of St. Bartholomew and the axe of St. Óláfr.¹⁷⁰ In Figure 3 below the knife that flayed St. Bartholomew is evident just right of the middle. A little further, past two treeish symbols is the open gospel of the evangelist Matthew. Other kinds of symbols could also tie into the name of the day, like the Cuckoo for the Cuckoo's Mass on May Day (Figure 3 far left) or the glove denoting the beginning of winter, and the attendant need for warmer clothing (Figure 2 first symbol on left). Many symbols are cryptic, buildings rise over the horizon here and there and abstract lines bifurcate and blend and branch in bizarre combinations. One hypothesis explaining these enigmas is that they are hold overs from earlier pre-Christian symbology.¹⁷¹ However, since the interpretation of these symbols, coming as they do without a written appendix, is dependent upon analogy and comparison to symbols that are known, they could be Christian symbols which did not survive in better attested forms.

¹⁶⁹ See Figures 2 and 3

¹⁷⁰ See Speake 1994 and Lanzi and Lanzi 2004 for complete compendium of saintly attributes

¹⁷¹ Opsahl 1959: 8



Figure 3 Primstav NF.1950-0032 summer side, 1417. Carved wood, 5.7 x 70.0 cm. Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo.

The pictorial carvings seem to fall in the category of Medieval Art known as ‘primitive’, in other words art whose creators were not professional artists who had been trained in Pan-European traditions.¹⁷² This lack of formal education does not mean that the carvers were unacquainted in broader Christian trends of iconography and symbology or were unsanctioned by ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁷³ They were just freer to draw on local imaginations and realities than those firmly grounded in international forms.¹⁷⁴ Within the Primstav both clear Christian symbology and local imagination are evident. The aforementioned saintly attributes fall into the first category of a lucid religious image programme. The latter category is evident in the Horn of Yule and the mitten for the first day of winter. Also the many trees and intricately limbed crosses and other geometric shapes that now border on the realm of ciphers. As typical of ‘primitive’ artwork the two layers are natural companions, standing side by side in the whole of compositions.

There was another way that layers were woven into this wood, which also speaks to the divide between pre and post Christian time-reckoning and the role of the calendar sticks in the period of flux. As seen above, with the conversion to Christianity two calendars met and had to make some attempt at accommodating one another. One point of this not yet covered is in the matter of months that marked out time in the two calendars. The imported calendar was known as the Julian calendar. Calculated under the auspices of the Roman dictator Julius Caesar and bearing his name as an attempt at reforming the old calendar used in the Roman Republic that had grown increasingly out of step with astronomical realities. The calendar was of fixed duration based on the transit of the Earth around the Sun: 365 days. The months

¹⁷² Edgren 2003: 301

¹⁷³ Op cit: 309

¹⁷⁴ Op cit: 320

were all either 30 or 31 days, except for February's 28 (or 29 on leap years). This was the calendar used by the emperors and the popes.¹⁷⁵ The Roman Church had used the calendar before as a tool of conversion, notably in the suppression of the Celtic Church, that had denied an episcopal organization to the ecclesiastical body and had celebrated Easter and Christmas and the other holidays according to their own reckonings.¹⁷⁶

The names of the months were of little applicable value. The old Roman system that predated Caesar's reforms, which consisted of naming the months for their numeric place in the roll, survived in the last four months of the year, though they counted from March rather than January. July and August celebrated the dictator and his famous adopted son. Only two month names have names with clear ceremonial attachments, though they were long obscure by the time the calendar came to Norway. January (*Ianuarius*) was named after the old Roman god of doorways who faced in both directions, fitting for the month that stood at the beginning of the year. February (*Februarius*) was named for the festival of purification that occurred at that time. April, May and June are obscure, they could be named after gods or goddesses; May and June may be called for elders (*maiores*) and youths (*iuniores*), but this would have meant little to the medieval Christian as well. Only March, Mars' Month, had any reference to human activity that still held relevance to the men of the North: it was the month when men the world over went to war.¹⁷⁷

The pre-existing calendar in Scandinavia was much less abstract, in several senses. For one the names of the months referenced the activities that were supposed to be taking place at that time, social or economic or otherwise. Hay-month (*heyannir*) when the hay was to be mown and Shieling-month (*selmanaðr*) when the lambs were led out to pasture were two economic months. The Jule nights (*ylir*) were celebrated around the great festival of midwinter.¹⁷⁸ Classically interpreted this calendar was based, like the Primstav, on two half-years, one half of the year, summer, was dedicated through name and activity to production of goods and supplies and public life, whether in thing-assemblies or in springtime warlike ventures. The other half, the winter side of the staff, was dedicated to consumption of those

¹⁷⁵ Holford-Strevens 2005: 31

¹⁷⁶ Op cit.: 32

¹⁷⁷ Levenstam 1984: 31-32

¹⁷⁸ Gurevich 1969: 47

acquired goods; to survive the dearth of winter, both physically and ceremonially ensuring the holistic survival of the people and their world.

This calendar featured more than economically inspired names for the months but the length and position of those months was determined by the economic activities that they encompassed. The labors that gave the months their name also gave them their definitions. Hay-month was not some astronomical period that encompassed the time for mowing, it was the time for mowing. The seasons of light and dark, governed as they were by the Earth's movement around the sun, predicated the nature of the work required but did not in turn govern the calendar. That was for the worker to do. The month's like the times of day were marked by the orbits of people, not celestial bodies. The time a person ate was mealtime (*dagmál* for instance) not the reverse. What the person did marked and measured the time, the wise person did the appropriate action in it's right season, working while the sun was up, cutting down the full grown hay, the calendar served as a reminder of the proper seasons. Time was not some external flow it was generated and given meaning by the people who lived it.¹⁷⁹

The switch to the Julian Calendar did not merely bring about a change of names. Nor did it simply clear-cut the forest of information inherent in the old calendar, breaking with the tradition of providing an almanac for farmers. It changed the very perspective of time. Celestial bodies served as the witnesses of time, the landmarks for its reckoning, not the people who lived the time. The absolute, empirical universe eclipsed the internal microcosm of personal experience. Similarly the Liturgical Year was governed by external and heavenly, though in this case divine as well as planetary, forces. Days in this calendar had strange, new significances that had to be internalized and understood. In an effort to preserve important meaning, and to facilitate acceptance of the new meanings, hybrid systems arose. The runic calendar can be seen as such a one and so too can the primstav.

The Primstav did not just communicate the intricacies of the liturgy, the new religious method of reckoning time, but by tying the liturgy to the agricultural rhythms of time, perhaps it preserved that lore and gave the Christian holy days new, more immediate meanings. The holy days at times brought abstention from work but they also marked when the harvest should be in, when the winter supply cannot be lower than half to last through to summer and so on. The Primstav in this way produced perhaps more than just a method for translation

¹⁷⁹ Op cit: 48

between calendar systems. It created a median of meaning where old and new forms were juxtaposed and created a new system for telling time. These narrow staves may be seen as bridges between a time system based on the external movements of the cosmos and one centered on the people living and working on the Earth. It allowed for those versed in the more people centric model to wean away into the impersonal, astronomic calendar that would dominate the future.

Time's Mirror: Konungs Skuggsjá

The *Konungs skuggsjá*, or *Speculum Regale* (or again *The King's Mirror*), is a didactic work belonging to the international genre known as the mirror of princes. This genre was a collection of advice to princes taken from history and religious and philosophic traditions. The representative works from this style typically contained educational information on matters moral and practical. Hypothesis concerning the date for its composition point to years across a range that stretches from the late 12th Century into the middle of the 13th Century,¹⁸⁰ that is between the milieu of King Sverrir's conflict with the bishops and the court of Hákon Hákonsson, where it has been suggested that it was used as an educational tool for a young Magnús Lagabøtr.¹⁸¹ The work survives in a number of manuscripts and fragments, one of the earliest and best preserved is the manuscript AM 243 b α from the last decades of the 13th Century.¹⁸²

The King's Mirror can be considered a secondary translation, as defined above, based upon its numerous re-imaginings and incorporations of pre-existing works: its treatment of the winds based on classical sources, two references to the Dialogues of Gregory the Great and the frequent Biblical references are just a few examples of the borrowings made by the compiler of the work. The author seems to be of a clerical background¹⁸³ and is conversant in continental intellectual trends as well as learning particular to Norway and its far flung island domains.¹⁸⁴ In the introduction the work is organized around occupational determinations. Information regarding particular social groups are linked together for the use of the prince and

¹⁸⁰ Vandvik 1971: 72

¹⁸¹ Hamer 2000: 47

¹⁸² Holm-Olsen 1945: XII

¹⁸³ Almazán 2000: 164

¹⁸⁴ Larson 1917: 9

for anyone seeking knowledge pertinent to their vocation and station. The work begins with the merchants and proceeds to the court, discussions of the clergy and the peasantry are promised but if they were included in the work they have not come down to us.¹⁸⁵ In the first section on merchants, an interesting beginning point for a didactic work as travelling was seen as an indispensable part of an education,¹⁸⁶ the author has several things to say about time and its reckoning.

Konungs skuggsjá, as a didactic treatise, contains a wealth of information about practical time reckoning. The driving motive of the treatise, it has been argued¹⁸⁷ and the work seems to support this,¹⁸⁸ is to provide the learner with the information necessary to be able to navigate and negotiate the wider world. That information is built upon being able to reckon time correctly. It is also no surprise (indeed it supports the above argument concerning the motive) that much of the information is tied to nautical navigation and the different length of the day in different parts of the globe is stressed in a number of places in the discussion on the knowledge needed of a merchant.¹⁸⁹ This all works to the effect of conditioning the student into being capable of reckoning time in an age with little recourse to mechanical methods of time telling and it was important then to educate a man to be fit to function in a position of status at home and as a traveler abroad.

Being able to tell time was also important because it was indispensable for a lesson that was both of extreme practical use and, in the hands of the composer, religiously themed as well: use time wisely, work and travel in their proper times and seasons. This eminently practical and useful bit of wisdom is colored religious both by the examples, which are almost like parables, that the author employs as well and especially as the admonitions and exhortations to follow the will of God in doing so.¹⁹⁰ What follows first takes up the discussion with the many examples of practical methods of time reckoning that the young student needed to learn before turning to the religious applications and implications of the

¹⁸⁵ Larson 1917: 6

¹⁸⁶ as has been argued in Hastrup 1985 and can be seen in, to pick from a source about to be considered, *Gísla saga* where the travels of Gísli and his brothers in law is an important part of their education and career (Loth 1956: 10-12).

¹⁸⁷ Larson 1917: 86

¹⁸⁸ Holm-Olsen 1945: 4

¹⁸⁹ Op cit: 11

¹⁹⁰ Op cit: 13

idea of ‘work in its proper season’ and wrapping up with a discussion of the interplay between the two ideas of time.

The mechanics of time-reckoning are dealt with in terms of winds, tides and finally with standard units of measurement mathematically divided from the turning of the Earth around the Sun. In the discussion of the winds, perhaps the most poetic portion of this dry and didactic treatise, the author follows the course of the horizon, divided in eight directions corresponding to the cardinal compass points, in a clockwise fashion, starting in the east. The winds correspond to that time of day that the sun passes through the slice of the sky from which they originate. Each wind is also personified as a chief, complete with attributes and character: the glorious east wind of dawn and west wind of sunset and the helmeted night watchman, the north wind.¹⁹¹ To examine but one wonderfully realized passage concerning one of these chieftains, the north wind:

En at miðri nótt þá tekr norðanvindr við rás sólar ok leiðir hana um fjalligar auðnir móti þunnhygðum ströndum, ok leiðir fram þykkvan skugga, ok hylr andlit sitt með skyjuðum hjálmi, ok boðar öllum, at hann er húinn til varðhalds yfir grönnum sinum með náttligri vöku, til þess at þeir taki örugga hvild ok hœga eptir dagligan hita; hann blæs ok vaegiliga með svölum munni í andlit sunnanvindi til þess at hann megi betr standask öflgan hita at komanda degi. Hann faegir ok andlit himins eptir brottrekit sky til þess at komanda ljósi megi sól auðveldliga senda varma geisla í allar aettir með hjörtu skini.¹⁹²

But at midnight then the north wind takes towards the sun’s running and leads her among desert mountains towards thin settled shores and leads her from thick grown shadows and covers his face with a cloud covered helm and informs all that he is ready to keep watch over his neighbors with a nightly vigil so that they may take secure and easy rest after the daily heat. He kindly blows with his cool mouth into the face of the southern wind so that he may better stand the mighty heat that comes with the day. He cleanses heaven’s face and scatters the clouds so that the sun, when light comes, may easily send warm rays in all directions with shining hearts.

¹⁹¹ Holm-Olsen 1945: 10

¹⁹² Op cit: 9

In the rotation of the winds a cyclic and geographically based conception of time becomes evident. All the directions are spokes on a wheel with a Norwegian axis. *Út*, to the sea, is the prefix for the western directions and *land* serves the same function for all the easterly ones.

The year is divided into twain as well based on these winds. When they have peace the seas then become calm and ways are open for travel and trade, the world is at peace and plenty in the joyous summer. But on the other side of this peace lies the winter, when storms break out and dearth stalks the land.¹⁹³ The tally of the winds is repeated at the end of the discussion of the knowledge required of the merchant. Here the winds are in their season of wintry warfare. Catching up with the former keeper of the night watch:

En þá er norðanvindr saknar þeirrar bliðu, er hann fékk af sunnanvindi, ok mildligra vingjafa, þá leitar hann at sinum fjárhirzlum ok hrósar þá þeim auð, er hann hefir gnógastan til, ok leiðir fram dökkvan skima með glaeanda frosti, setr á höfuð sér ískaldan hjálm yfir jökluðu skeggi, blaess striðliga at hagslfullum skyfjöllum.¹⁹⁴

But when the north wind misses the friendliness and the kind gifts which he was wont to get from the south wind, he seeks out his hidden treasures and displays the wealth that he has most of: he brings out a dim sheen which glitters with frost, places an ice-cold helmet on his head above his frozen beard, and blows hard against the hail-bearing cloud-heaps.

The striking image must have been important to be featured not once but twice, albeit in an inverse fashion: the periods of peace giving way to war, serving in fact as bookends for the whole discourse. Around the specifics of time and descriptions of the wonders of the world are two references to the traditional, geography based *solarhringr*, made especially vivid for better remembering. Despite the rich and evocative language used to describe the winds of the day and of the year, the author is not very deliberate or exact in his measurement here. The progression of the day is not numbered at this point. Likewise the seasons are not limited by particular days but by their own particular natures: summer being the time of plenty, winter being the time of storms, but this data is soon forthcoming in the course of the text.

¹⁹³ Holm Olsen 1945: 9

¹⁹⁴ Op cit: 36

The discussion of the tide is rather more exact. The tide is also divided into two, the rising and falling periods. But these are measured out with remarkable precision: seven days and one half hour in, seven days and one half hour out.¹⁹⁵ The day is then given its numeric divisions. First two 'days' (ON *dægrum*), night and day, are said to be twenty-four *stundir* 'hours'. Here we are to find that the sun courses through the eight portions of the sky, each requiring an equal transit of three hours.¹⁹⁶ Next the duration of the moon's waxing and waning, notice again the dichotomous division or rather put better: the equitable pairing of evenly matched parts, are given as both fourteen days and eighteen hours. Returning to the tides the author mentions the important phases in relation to these: new moon influencing high flood tides and strong ebb tides, the first quarter moon as appearing with low flood and ebb tides, the full moon also raising strong tides and low tides returning with the third quarter moon.¹⁹⁷

The year is taken up next after noting that it's long circuit is much slower than that of the moon's. The waxing of the year, from winter solstice to summer solstice, takes one hundred and eighty-two days, one 'half day' and three hours. The waning return to winter takes the same time but for the first time the author adds up the total circuit (the day is given at 24 hours but the 'half day' is never given at 12, the eight groupings of three are divided out of the day as well rather than added up into one) as three hundred sixty five days and six hours. The leap year is mentioned as the corrective mechanism that makes up for the problems arising from these extra six hours, giving the count as three hundred sixty-six every fourth year.¹⁹⁸ Finally the Hour is broken into sixty minutes, he uses the Latin *ostensa*. With this 'little hour' he calculates that as far north as he is the day waxes five minutes and a little extra a day, with equal parts going into the sun's course from the east into the west and the zenith northwards. But it is acknowledged that the sun's course follows different paths in different parts of the world, waxing and waning at different intervals.¹⁹⁹

These methods are ostensibly included in the discussion of the mercantile and seafaring class and yet in many regards reveal clerical influence. The care and exactitude

¹⁹⁵ Holm-Olsen 1945: 10

¹⁹⁶ Ibid

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹⁹ Ibid

with which the tides are treated and the exhortation to properly follow the seasons, more on this later, are made in order to better prepare the working man to get the most from his time and to safeguard himself and his precious property.²⁰⁰ However the eight groupings of three hours are the same for the clerical progression of the liturgical hours of terce, sext and nones, to name those of the diurnal period. Also in the computation of the year the length of time is first given in the form of the long hundred of 120. Later, however, an alternative method of reckoning the hundred is also mentioned, that of the 'Latin' decimal hundred of 100. This is an interesting passage:

En at bókmáli verða öll hundruð tircæð.²⁰¹

But in book speech²⁰² all hundreds are counted by tens.

With this hundred as the building block the length of the year is given a second time.²⁰³ The use of the Latin *ostensa* for a sixtieth of an hour has already been mentioned (though the correct term is *ostenta*).²⁰⁴ These examples are hardly surprising in a work of such international flavor, both through input and through the intent of shaping an audience capable of faring abroad to centers of cultured sophistication. But it is none the less interesting that the method of time measurement that the merchants depended on where in part clerically introduced. Earlier in the work the son is instructed to have God, the Virgin and his favorite saint as his first business partners.²⁰⁵ Business, as will be shown in more detail later, was done on the Church's time.

Aside from cataloging different mechanics of time-reckoning the author includes a discussion in this part that reveals an interesting attitude towards time, and specifically its relation to work. After the first cyclic procession of the winds and the description of the season the author launches into a series of examples from nature on how to make the most out of the present weather conditions. These instances take the form of something that could possibly be described as animalian parables. In his discussion of the *exempla* in *Konungs*

²⁰⁰ Holm-Olsen 1945: 10

²⁰¹ Ibid

²⁰² *Latin*

²⁰³ Holm-Olsen 1945: 10

²⁰⁴ Larson 1917: second note on 95

²⁰⁵ Holm-Olsen 1945: 6

skuggsjá Vicente Almazán differentiates between these examples taken from nature, what he terms *similitudi*, and the exempla based on biblical or scholastic authority and personal experience. He claims that in the Middle Ages *similitudi* were regarded as an inferior variety of *exempla* and on this basis excludes them from his analysis.²⁰⁶ However, while they may not deal with lofty themes of justice and sincere repentance as he finds in the other *dæma* ‘cases’, they do have a lucid and intriguing programme all the same.

Fish swim out of the deep waters once the shallows are calm again in spring to bring about the next generation so that it may grow up before it is time to return to the strong ocean currents.²⁰⁷ Birds break out into song likewise at the approach of spring and they too rear their young during the plenty of the summer. Beasts as well stir and go out from their dens. The very world rejoices at the onset of summer, ice melts and plants grow.²⁰⁸ These are signs of the changing of the season; they are also the very things that must be taken advantage of in the short Nordic summer. At every step the unintelligent, even unclean, nature of these animals is mentioned and emphasized (*orein skepna* ‘vicious creatures’).²⁰⁹ But if they can take advantage of the proper season even more so then should the intelligent. That each example prominently features the procreation of creatures is also interesting. Is it a sign of the fruitfulness of doing the proper work in its proper season? Or does it reinforce the repulsive nature of animals by focusing on them only when they are rutting?

What follows may answer this to some degree, for a final animal, *ein litell maðkr* ‘a little grub’ is here included: *er maur heitir* ‘an ant’.²¹⁰ This creature, it is written, can teach much practical wisdom to thoughtful men, of all classes and callings.

Hann kenner konongom nær þeir skolu borger gœra eða kastala. Hann kenner oc bonnda oc kaupmanne mæð sama hætte. hvæssó ákaflega eða hværn tíma þeir skolu sína syslo framme hafa því at sa er retta skilning hæfir oc hyggr hann vanndlega at hans at hæfi þa ma hann mykit marca oc ðraga ser til nýtsæmðar.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Almazán 2000: 154

²⁰⁷ Holm-Olsen 1945: 8

²⁰⁸ Op cit: 9

²⁰⁹ Ibid

²¹⁰ Ibid

²¹¹ Ibid

He shows kings when they should build strongholds or castles, he shows farmers and merchants in the same mode how fervently and at what time they should conduct their business, for he who sees with right discernment and carefully considers his activity then must he much mark many things and so draw himself to usefulness.

It may be a low crawling thing but the attention the ant receives from such worthies as kings and merchant men surely elevates the little creature, as it does for all the animal exempla listed above. The final thought in this section, reinforces this notion. Because in the end the animals may only prepare for the seasons instinctively but the author of that instinct is God--capital H 'Him Who ordained'.²¹² The natural world, though seemingly repulsive, unclean and insignificant, is ordered to perfection by the Creator and thus is capable of being held up as worthy of emulation. This view is certainly Christian, but isn't strictly cloistered or elitist, as the source for authority is not the Church or books but is in the natural world that is observable to everyone. This is surely a form of the other kind of scripture: nature, where God's hand and will is revealed as surely as it would be in written texts.²¹³ Nature requires 'thoughtful men' to interpret at times, but the ant piling up the mound can be seen by any passerby and not just by the castle-building king.

Throughout the above examples there seems to be evidence for some form of blending between religious and practical knowledge and ideas of time reckoning. As early as the winds, parallels were noted between the rough equality of eight portions of the day corresponding to the eight canonical hours. The division of time is also full of references to the Latin notions of numbering and time ordering, bound up with and introduced by Christianity.²¹⁴ More powerfully the connection can be seen in the last part considered: the parables. Here the advice is to act according to each season for maximum chance of success in order to achieve a fruitful return crowning all endeavors.

But the advice is not left to stand alone on its own merits; rather it is reinforced with exemplar culled from natural creatures which are in turn given the full force of divine approbation. God is after all the author of the nature that is being cited here as evidence and thus it is God's will to act seasonably. As He structured nature to follow this stricture the merchant or laborer or traveler had better follow suit and do the same as the fish or the birds

²¹² Larson 1917: 92

²¹³ Camille 1996: 124

²¹⁴ Hughes 1995: 12

who mark the seasons. In *The King's Mirror* at least there is then no clear dichotomy of time between the mundane and the religious: the religious completely fills and gives meaning to the everyday work. Religion, or the divine, is the harmonizer and guarantee of success.

In this regards of seasonable work *The King's Mirror* espouses an attitude that is downright primstavish. The origins outlined above make this more than reasonable, as two cultural products the primstav and *Konungs skuggsjá* have a lot in common. They are both at least partially products of a clerical milieu but both maintain marked local influences, in their preeminence of the two seasons they both betray local ideas of time but their overriding idiom is Christian, whether it is the holidays on the Primstav or the copious examples of biblical knowledge in *The King's Mirror*, the first lesson of which is a brief musing on the proverb²¹⁵

Pat er uphaf spæki at ræðaz almatkan guð.²¹⁶

The beginning of wisdom is fearing Almighty God.

What is interesting here is how they both unify work and religion albeit in slightly different ways.

The Primstav accomplishes this as was seen above by identifying holy days with labors; *The King's Mirror* does the same in almost reverse fashion by stressing the importance of laboring and traveling in season as God's will. The unifying theme here is that both are interested in conducting the proper work at the proper time. The two sources seem to approach the unity of practical and religious time different: the Primstav from the idea that the religious can be explained by the practical while *The King's Mirror* appears to take the opposing view, but the end result for both sources is the same. The conception of time in these two sources seems to be that time is sacred, even when spent in hard labor.

To conclude the section on the King's Mirror it has been noted above that the work, while tailored for Norway is made of many goodly portions of international cloth. The first section, based on the activities of the travelling merchant, is largely defined by time. The framework of this section is by and large bound between two days, one in the summer and the other in winter, described as a cycle of chieftainly winds who alternate between peace (summer) and war (winter). Their ordering and division is similar to that of the *átt* and the

²¹⁵ Referencing Proverbs 9:10

²¹⁶ Holm-Olsen 1945: 3

hour, discussed above in the chapter on ‘The Mechanics of Time Reckoning’. This model was also seen to be very cyclic in terms of time reckoning and conception. This is followed by a rather exact and lengthy breakdown of time measurements and their relationships with one another. Tides, hours, minutes, days, years and months are all considered and locked into the system.

After this a series of natural exemplars are examined with the moral of all the stories being: do the right thing at the right time and season. Here the blend between religious time and practical time, as in the Primstav, become co-identified. By doing what is sensible and effective the merchant or traveler is behaving in a godly fashion as they are modifying their behavior to follow that which God intended for them to do naturally. In this way *The King’s Mirror* and the Primstav espouse similar ideas of time that seem in a large part to be in harmony. Time is marked out as holy and this truth fills up the work with meaning and reward.

Time in Narrative

In the exploration of time it would be amiss not to examine the nature of time in narrative elements. How a story is ordered and presented can give us immediate insight into how time was understood. Narratives can also preserve interesting references to calendars and methods of time reckoning. In pursuit of this and to examine more fully understandings of time *Gísla Saga Súrssonar*, that is *The Saga of Gísli Súrsson*, has been chosen as an exemplar for the purposes of a case study. This saga holds interesting information for tracing methods of time-reckoning and holds tantalizing mentions of both socio-economic and ritual calendars. Also the story of a few generations of a family can be used as an evocative parallel to the history of the universe. Out of this line of examination will proceed into the investigation of the great cosmic poem *Völuspá* and its views on narrative time. By exploring these two sources the full spectrum of narrative time should be examined, ranging from the microcosmic, the history of the lives of individuals, to the macrocosmic, the sweeping history of the universe. This should allow for the broadest possible survey of time conceptions in the Medieval Icelandic Literature.

4.1.1 Saga Source: *Gísli saga*

Gísli saga Súrssonar is an Icelandic Family Saga relating the life and family history of a 10th Century *útlagi* ‘outlaw’. The saga is found in three versions, commonly called the longer (S for ‘større’), the shorter (M for ‘mindre’) and the fragmentary (B for ‘brot’).²¹⁷ The oldest extant version of the saga is in the fragmentary AM 445 c I 4to from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.²¹⁸ Of the more or less complete versions of the saga, the one now styled as the shorter is found in manuscripts older than those of the longer version, leading to its alternate designation as the older version. The oldest of these is the preserved in the manuscript AM 556 a 4to dated to the fifteenth century²¹⁹ and an edition of based primarily on this manuscript will be used in the following discussion. This shorter version of the saga has a truncated introductory section in comparison to the longer version but a more expansively described thrilling conclusion.²²⁰

The narrative is peppered with skaldic verses that purport to be composed by Gísli himself. However these verses seem to display features uncommon in the 10th century and the material was most likely composed towards the end of the 12th century to accompany a now lost narrative concerning Gísli’s life and outlawry.²²¹ The origin of the saga is placed in the west of Iceland as the composer seems to have personal knowledge of the landscape of the area in which the saga takes place. This familiarity with the region, it is argued, also suggests a familiarity with sources that would have known stories relating to Gísli and his kin.

In addition to the poetry borrowed from an earlier source and personal knowledge the composer of the saga called on a varied and fascinating assortment of sources to inform and illuminate his work. There is ample literary borrowing, from other sagas and Eddaic material: in the parallels the compiler draws between a main character, Þordis Súrzdóttir, and the legendary Guðrún Gjúkadóttir.²²² Christian doctrine and belief is also evident in the interpretation of the figures of the good and bad dream women, which corresponds to various

²¹⁷ Lethbridge 2010: 127 for the sigla see footnote 12.

²¹⁸ Ibid

²¹⁹ Loth 1956: v

²²⁰ Lethbridge 2010: 129-134

²²¹ Johnston 1963: 115

²²² Op cit: 119

mystic texts where otherworldly knowledge is imparted by supernatural women.²²³ This can also be seen in the treatment of Gísli as a proto-Christian, it is claimed that after visiting Denmark he gives up the old sacrifices, and in the ultimate conversion of the widows Auðr and Gunnhildr in Hedeby and their pilgrimage to the south. There are also echoes of pre-Christian belief in the saga. The dream women while being familiar as Christian good and bad angels at times seem to wear the guise of pre-Christian spirit women like the *fylgiur*, *dísir* and *valkyriur*. In this matter, however, as in the depiction of ritual celebration at the Winter Nights and funeral practices seem to be illuminated and illustrated with the composer's own imagination and invention.²²⁴

A final interesting element seems to be current events. At the time of composition a spear was gaining notoriety for its participation in a killing and a subsequent battle. The spear was claimed to be the famous *Grásiða* 'Greyflank' which Gísli is said to have used to kill Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson. Also around the same time a contemporary outlaw was operating in the same area that had been Gísli's old stomping grounds. The adventures of this outlaw and bloody work of this spear would have provided a catalyst for reminiscences of the older outlaw and could work as a source to color the narrative of those adventures with immediate, authenticate detail.²²⁵ With all these diverse ingredients the resulting work is an interesting blend of native and international, current and antiquarian and provides an excellent window on Iceland of the 13th century, which was also subject to all these influences and impulses. It also makes for an interesting parallel in syncretism with the *primstav*.

The mechanics of narrative, how the story moves and is built up, can reveal much about ideas of time and how it is reckoned. The narrative of this family, which is the framework for a narrative concerning one of its heroic scions, begins on the macrocosmic scale. The very first line of the saga shows this:

Þat er upphaf á sögu þessi, at Hákon konungr Aðalsteinsfóstri réð fyrir Noregi, ok var þetti á ofanverðum hans dögum.²²⁶

²²³ Johnston 1963: 121-122

²²⁴ Ibid

²²⁵ Op cit: 130

²²⁶ Loth 1956: 1

When this story begins King Hakon Adalsteinsfostri ruled over Norway and was near the end of his days.

This line uses world history as a germ for the story that follows. King Hákon is ideal for this purpose as he was fostered by an English king and through this connection points to an even greater international scope. This method for zooming in from the macrohistorical down to the microhistorical is an interesting feature of medieval storytelling. Even when the micro level is not as small as it is here, larger events may be used as references for a point of origin. This can be seen in *Íslendingabók* which, like *Gísla saga*, also follows a path of history from England to Norway to Iceland. This path is particularly useful because it can be back tracked into universal history which is measured in relation to the regnal years of the Lord Jesus Christ. The saga is not dated absolutely, the such-and-such year of so-and-so's reign, but with relative means that do give a general idea of the historical setting and its place in context with larger happenings.

The lack of precision in dating the origin is in keeping with the general absence of definite or even relative time references in the early part of the work. The entire Norwegian prehistory passes in this manner broken only by vague *her eptir* 'here after' or *eigi langar*²²⁷ 'before long' and *lidnar varu iii nætr*²²⁸ ('three nights passed', a number that seems to be forgotten when the action progresses). The trip to Iceland is the first measured event at *c. dægra* 'one-hundred half-days'.²²⁹ Here the hundred is the long one, made up of 120, and the day as we know it is made up of the two time units mentioned several times above. Roman numerals are used but to denote native numbering systems and to group native units of time reckoning. Native and imported time and numerics are intrinsically bound up at this point when a genealogy is recorded for the settlers Þorbiorn and his family encounter. While not a definite date, this is almost a second genesis for the story: here is a second, external relative system of dating, based on the lives of these men and women, is referred to in order to give some bearings for the narrative of the story in time.

This method of reckoning time in the lives of generations of people has been argued to be a more native form of counting time than an absolute tally of years. The argumentative line goes further to reason that this was the natural method of time-reckoning for people with

²²⁷ Op cit: 2

²²⁸ Op cit: 3

²²⁹ Op cit: 5

more interest in relations (both temporal and genealogical) than absolutes.²³⁰ This method is hardly unique, however. The Bible is replete with genealogies, some with more and others with less numerical absolutism in dating. This method of history time-telling was probably never the only method used in Iceland for that matter. There were remembrances based on the terms of who was serving as lawspeaker for example and by the time of writing there were even more alternatives,²³¹ for instance the regnal years used in the text above. That this method was used here seems to be more for the benefit of other themes and motifs than as an instance representative of disinterest in accurate dating on the part of the author in particular, or the society as a whole.

The presence here of a genealogy serves to answer the ‘who we are and where we come from’ questions that are at the forefront of so many of the *Íslendingasögur*. The proliferation of historical figures serves to ground the narrative more firmly in Icelandic history rather than to loosen that hold. The descendants of these tallied folk who knew their pedigree would be able to give the story more credence if it had the proper ancestry in place. This method also plays into themes of inheritance and acquisition that pop up time and again in the saga. Grudges are inherited, loyalty is inherited, even character traits are inherited, as surely as the infamous sword *Grásiða* is inherited. Moreover it works with the whole point of the prehistory: a generational stage setting that plants the seeds for the later events and conflicts of the narratives. In the contentious life of his namesake and his own actions in defense of his sister’s honor Gísli sets a pattern that will be followed and warped throughout the saga leading ultimately to his death. The genealogy marks here the end of the year-less account and the beginning of the cycle of the seasons.

For the life of Gísli and his adventures after settling in Iceland, the heart of the saga’s account, a number of different measurements of time jostle about. By far the most predominant of these is the one that is based on the seasonal progression. All four modern seasons are mentioned: *vár*, *sumar*, *haust*, and *vetr* ‘spring’, ‘summer’, ‘autumn’ and ‘winter’ respectively. None-the-less, pre-eminence is still given to *sumar* and *vetr* above all the rest. In keeping with this the *misseri* are present while the ‘year’ is not. The progression from one

²³⁰ Hastrup 1985: 47

²³¹ Ibid

year to the next is described as: ‘*Nú líða missarin*’ or ‘now the misseri turn.’²³² The calendar is still ordered in halves or rather two parts. Also of importance is that it is in winters that the most detailed and fixed count of time is given: the length that Gísli survives as an outlaw. He spends three winters hiding, and three more traveling about the countryside looking for help in the first six years of his outlawry.²³³ At last, when all the time foretold to him is spent (he dreams of seven fires and is told they stand for the seven years he has left to live) the time is again counted in winters, *liðnir draumavetr*²³⁴ ‘the dreamed of winters have passed’. The most crucial and thrilling part of the story is the outlawry of Gísli and so it is fitting that this is the section most carefully numbered. As this is the case it speaks to the preeminence of seasonal time, and perhaps in this sense to winter in that time, as the method for measuring out time. Related to this broad seasonal calendar are a few specific dates which are mentioned that pertain to the activities that arrange the social-economic calendar.

Those mentioned are *fardögum* ‘moving days’, *stefnudögum* ‘summoning days’ and the local thing. Moving days are in May and are the time when one can legally change residence or move from one dependency to another.²³⁵ Summoning days occurred a fortnight before the spring thing. The eponymous summons to court was delivered to a man involved in a case civil or criminal that would be heard and ruled upon at the thing.²³⁶ The local thing, which met at Þórsnes and was held in the spring, is itself mentioned several times in the saga and is the scene for such critical events as the first sign of strife between the brother-in-laws, the outlawing of Gísli and the murder of Þorkell Súrsson by the sons of Vésteinn Vésteinson. Finally, a single time-sensitive economic activity is mentioned in the saga: *heyverk* ‘haymaking’. While this is background information and is not given a temporal place, for instance ‘at the time of haymaking’ or ‘in the autumn when it was time to mow the hay’ it does provide a temporal demarcation point for the story. Since haymaking is going on the reader knows that it is late summer or autumn when this part of the saga occurred. Also the text says specifically:

²³² Loth 1956: 14

²³³ op cit: 36

²³⁴ op cit: 58

²³⁵ Johnston 1963: 73

²³⁶ op cit: 82

þat var einn góðan veðrdag at Gísli lét alla menn vinna heyverk²³⁷

It was a good weather-day that Gísli sent all men to work at haymaking

The timeliness of the activity is then stressed by the mention of the fair weather tying the work to the season.

There is also present in the saga several references to a ceremonial calendar in this life of Gísli. At the beginning of the *vetrnætr*, ‘the winter nights’ or the winter half of the year beginning in the modern month of October, a great series of feasts and sacrifices are held. At this time the saga relates that Þorgrímr holds the *haustblót*’ or ‘autumn sacrifice’ to Freyr.²³⁸ But Gísli on the other hand, no longer a practitioner of the *forna sið*²³⁹ or ‘old religion’, has given up the sacrifices but keeps the feasting custom, and it is to these feasts that Vésteinn comes to visit and is killed in the night with the forged anew (as a spear) Greyflank. Interestingly it is on the eve of these nights many years later that Gísli himself is killed. An economic function has been suggested that might perhaps have enabled the grand and magnificent festivities: the slaughter of livestock at the beginning of the winter *misseri*, to provide food and reduce the number of animals that will need to be maintained through the dearth of the winter months.²⁴⁰

After the death of Gísli the progression of seasons ends once more. Much like in the prehistory of the work time is again indistinct and vague. In another interesting reversal of previous features there are several seedlings of genealogies given. Subsequent generations are not given but progenitors are: namely Ari Súrsson and the siblings Geirmundr and Guðríðr. Bergr Vésteinsson is not specifically mentioned as founding a family in Greenland but he is said to prosper there before his untimely death and so this cannot be ruled out. The saga has passed out of personal history and rejoined that of generational deep time. More on the implications of these shifts, and the escape from time by the pilgrims, will be said later. Interesting to note here though, is the tie between these shifts in time and the passage into and out of Iceland. It is the Icelandic passage that begins the count of seasons and it is an Icelandic one that occurs after the end of this. The time of transit is given rather precisely

²³⁷ Loth 1956: 12

²³⁸ op cit: 24

²³⁹ op cit: 38

²⁴⁰ Johnston 1963: 73

twice in the text, once for the first voyage and again when Gísli and his brother and brother-in-laws go abroad to gain wealth and fame.²⁴¹ On this voyage Norway is a port of call and regnal time is once again checked revealing Haraldr Gráfeldr to be on the throne. Time frames the story of Gísli but so too does space, Iceland is the focal theater of action for all central actions and as such it holds time in its borders, the two concepts are closely related in the model of the world.²⁴²

In terms of the present study an interesting question presents itself: what can the saga say of the primstav and/or what can the primstav say of the saga? If the saga can provide evidence of similar time sensitive events and activities as the primstav this could draw the primstav tradition deeper into history, since the saga predates all our surviving examples of the primstav. Also the saga and primstav draw on similar sources or perhaps better traditions: Christian learning as well as native models. There are some interesting commonalities that can then be noted. The most notable shared characteristic is that of the predominance of the two seasons, summer and winter. The beginning of the winter nights that feature prominently in the text is on the Primstav noted as October 14, when the winter side of the calendar begins. This is St. Callixtus' day,²⁴³ an obscure pope-martyr, and was not as of as great significance as the saga writer attaches to the time, otherwise the day was important because this was when the beginning of winter was marked out. However the Primstav pushes the winter slaughter back to when the world is sufficiently frozen to preserve the meat, though this would be a regional date based on local climactic conditions.

Haymaking is marked on the primstav. Both when the labor should be done and when the fodder should still be half unused to make it through the winter. Moving days are absent as are Summoning days. Though the absence of these can be explained by the nature of the primstav; because this calendar is focused on religious rather than secular temporal obedience and on local society and custom. The primstav then seems to measure up poorly to the saga, but perhaps this was to be anticipated, the broad themes and principles, however, of both saga and primstav seem in general accord. There is economic continuity and the preeminence of the seasons. There is no expectation of cult continuation and so the differences between

²⁴¹ Loth 1956: 5 and 10

²⁴² Hastrup 1985: 67

²⁴³ Levenstam 1984: 109

observations at the start of winter are to be easily accounted for. And the primstav is not a secularly legal tool to be consulted for dealings of property and legal cases at the thing.

Another source already examined that may be brought into an interesting comparative dialogue is *The King's Mirror*. What was striking was the copious amount of winter seafaring. Gísli and Vésteinn are out on the North Sea in the early days of winter and lose their ship on the first leg of the journey, before sailing even further on to Denmark before knocking off for the season. Also the final movements of the epilogue apparently take place in winter, here, as we have seen, someone even goes to Greenland. While not making too much of the point it is interesting that the author of the saga ignores the common sense found in the advice in *The King's Mirror*. This text is almost contemporary to the saga, being of but slightly later providence, and its admonitions against winter voyages can hardly be novel and surely would have been current at the time. Indeed its belief in proper work at a proper season is clearly found in Gísli's haymaking making its absence in his sailing all the more pronounced.

In regards to the other great pole of the paper, the apocalypse, there is an interesting reading of *Gísli Saga* that will now be expounded upon. In service to this reading it will be argued that the narrative of the saga treats one man's life as a microcosm. There is a Norwegian prehistory of the family that has a macrocosmic start and is recorded in a mostly timeless fashion that explains where the man comes from and what makes him who he is. There follows the main focus of the narrative: the life and times, with special focus on the years as an outlaw, of Gísli in Iceland. In these stages are sown the seeds for the conflagration that will bring an end to life and narrative: the rocky relationship between the brothers Gísli and Þorkell and the difficult matters of suitably marrying their sister Þórdís off to a suitable match. Complications arising from these bring first the outlawry of Gísli and finally his death. Then there is a brief narration of what comes after Gísli: matters relating to him are resolved in aftershocks of violence and finally in characters settling in Greenland, flourishing in Iceland and Norway and even converting to Christianity and going on pilgrimage to the South (Rome, Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostella, etc.).

In many ways this processional of time in the saga may be paralleled in the broad notions of development in the Christian macrocosm. There too is found a timeless beginning in the prehistory as well as a cosmogony to get the ball rolling. There is a generational period where long genealogies are built up explaining where people come from. After this there

follows the grand sweep of history during which events occur and conflicts build that will eventually lead to the abrupt conclusion of that history and the very World itself. These dramatic days are foretold (which in this purpose is as good as retold) and finally after the dissolution of the world there is regeneration and fulfillment in a New World. More than just these parallel models are shared between narratives. Common motifs illuminate them both: the silver offered Auðr to betray her husband, for instance, mirrors that which provoked Judas to betray Christ, though the amount is doubled and the offer is refused in the case of the saga.²⁴⁴ The saga is also tied to this grand narrative through its initial reference to macrocosmic time by dating itself by means of the reigning Norwegian king.

In this parallel system then the death of Gísli would be rightfully considered to be apocalyptic. This is also evidenced by the pattern of events: prophetic dreams, both baleful and hopeful, foretell the event, the desperate and vivid final fight and its aftermath. In Gísli's dreams he receives premonitions from two supernatural women, one is fair and the other is quite foul. They measure out his life and finally predict and describe his death, but in divergent fashions. The good dream woman waxes paradisiacal:

Hingat skaltu, kvað hringa
 Hildir at óðar gildi,
 fleina þollr, með Fullu
 fallheyiaðar deya.
 þá muntu, Ullr, ok ǫllu,
 ísungs, fé i þvísa
 þat hagar okkr til auðar
 ormláðs, ok mér ráða.²⁴⁶

Hither,²⁴⁵ when death's heavy
 Handblow has unmanned you,
 Said then that sweet lady,
 Shall the valkyr bring you.
 Adder's earth and other
 Old rich treasure told here
 And my self you solely
 Sovereign shall govern.²⁴⁷

while the bad dream woman promises gore and death in battle:

þvá hugða ek mér Þrúði
 þremia hlunns ór brunni
 Óðins elda lauðri
 aúðs mína skǫr rauða
 ok hyrkneifa hreifa
 hǫnd værir því bandi

I dreamt the dread goddess
 Drenched my head in redness,
 Froth of fires of Othin
 That flows where the blows fall.
 Goddess of hands were hidden
 Of hawk-track fire, brackish

²⁴⁴ Loth 1956: 56

²⁴⁵ *To a beautiful hall*

²⁴⁶ Loth 1956: 54-55

²⁴⁷ Johnston 1963: 48

báls í benia éli
blóðrauð vala slóðar²⁴⁸

Sword-loosed tides swept round them
Stained them deep with wound rain.²⁴⁹

When it comes to fated death the vision of the paradise attainable through proto-Christian good works is clearly Gisli's preference:

‘at láta leiðask forna sið ok nema enga galdra né forneskiu ok vera vel við daufan ok haltan ok fátœka ok fáráða’²⁵⁰

‘That I should leave behind the old faith and to take part no more in sorcery nor witchcraft and to be well disposed towards the deaf, lame, poor and helpless’

The bad dream woman, heavily cloaked in allusions that cast her as any number of figures from the old religion, if not indeed as the very personification thereof, will not let him go to his reward without first tasting valiant, bloody death. This motif is explored by Peter Foote in his essay on the saga:

Some reminiscence of the angry *dis* or *fylgja* may also appear in Gisli's bad dream woman. She comes to torment him because he adheres to the good dream woman, and, like the author of the prose, the poet of the verses doubtless reckoned that Gisli had given up sacrificing. The idea is an analogue of that in the story of Thidrandi.

What cannot possibly have a pagan origin in these tales is, of course, the duality, the hostility between separately personified spirits, representing pagan and Christian, bad and good.²⁵¹

The story of Thidrandi mentioned in the text by Foote refers to a young man whose father has stopped sacrificing. On the occasion of the winter nights, the same time Gísli is killed, when the sacrifices should be held the young man is murdered by vengeful *dísir* while good women, symbolizing the new faith look on ready to spirit his soul away.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Loth 1956: 59

²⁴⁹ Johnston 1963: 52

²⁵⁰ Loth 1956: 38

²⁵¹ Johnston 1963: 122

²⁵² Ibid

The end of a cosmos is foretold in symbols and in mystic visions, like in the Book of Revelations and in such transportations as Who-nows. The End is a significant part of the whole and to understand the whole and act accordingly and as such it is helpfully revealed to all. This is also the way the premonitions serve Gísli. He is able to see through certain situations, knowing Auðr would not betray him for example and knowing the particulars of his death. He is also able to modify his behavior because of the good dream woman's admonitions. Thanks to his visions he is able to face his end heroically, properly and virtuously, just as readers of the apocalypses should be able to prepare for the great Last Day.

The final battle of Gísli, while perhaps not corresponding to the form of the Last Battle of the Apocalypse, serves in fact a similar function. Parallels between the details of Gísli's last fight and that which will occur at Armageddon are not immediately obvious and so any that could be suggested would probably be rife with quicksand speculation. But if the particulars do not agree the functions do neatly correspond. The thrilling defense of Gísli that concludes with his death is the end of the world that the story has been following. One man (and his wife and foster daughter armed with clubs) fights with fifteen assailants. Gísli lays eight low (and Auðr thumps the attacking captain pretty hard). The Action is devastating. Gísli, disemboweled, hurls himself at his foes, killing one more and then dying himself. Here the keeping of time stops. There are no more transitive times only 'a little while' and once it is said to be 'evening'. But with the death of the hero and his entombment in eternity the story has also been buried in timelessness. In regards to owing one last sacrifice it is interesting to note his manner of death was disembowelment, a prominent method of sacrificial killing and dismemberment, as is the time of death which has already been mentioned.

The saga, though out of time, is not out of events to cover: New worlds arise to replace the old. Much of this epilogue is generational. There is still the final fallout of Gísli's death to deal with. Þórdís tries to take revenge for her brother's death by attacking the captain who has come for his reward and bears Gísli's sword, and then promptly divorces her husband who has been hounding Gísli all this time. There is more winding up with the flight from Iceland which leads the refugees straight to Ari's reappearance in Norway and his taking revenge for the death of the other brother, Þorkell. Finally the survivors are each given a place to start anew. The last surviving son of Vésteinn goes to Greenland, the foster children stay in Norway and Ari goes to Iceland where a son of Súrr finally prospers in that island.

The fruitfulness of these survivors is summed up in the fate described for Gísli's foster-daughter Guðríðr: *margir menn frá henni komnir* 'many people are descended from her'.²⁵³ In this manner the story starts over with new people, generational history has once more been regained.

But the story also takes a very different turn with Auðr and her sister-in-law Gunnhildr. These two widows go to Hedeby in Denmark and there they convert to Christianity, the first direct mention of the faith in the saga. They then go South (presumably on a pilgrimage to Rome or Jerusalem or any of the major holy sites that dotted Christendom at the time) and do not return.²⁵⁴ In a rather terrestrial way they are making their way safe to the other shore, by dedicating the rest of their lives to that of a peripatetic Christian. After all the shocks and horrors they have known they are making their way to peaceful paradise, in the welcoming arms of the Church and its Lord.

Both impulses, however, the generational and the transcendent, are grounded in the apocalyptic tradition: something must come after the 'final' end: nature and narrative after all abhor a vacuum. The prospering of the survivors after a tragedy is a common enough solution, plus it puts down roots that ensure the survival of the tale. Also after the fiery fury new green growth naturally pops up and grows thick to replace that which was lost. In terms of an apocalyptic reading, however, the conversion and subsequent departure from the narrative and its world is the more fitting of the two. After the end of the world the New Paradise arrives and what better place to find that in the transient microcosm than on the road to Jerusalem or Rome?

To wrap up the discussion of *Gísla saga* it has been suggested here that the saga is an excellent blend of impulse and source making it an interesting foil and parallel for the primstav. The narrative creates a striking progression from timelessness, anchored on historical and genealogical time, to time and back again. Within the period when the passing of time is noted and recorded a variety of methods are used, mainly seasonal but also social, economic and ceremonial. These methods of time reckoning and the attitude towards them led into dialogues between sources already considered: namely the primstav and the King's Mirror. Then, drawing on the overall structure of the saga's narrative temporal progressions,

²⁵³ Loth 1956: 68

²⁵⁴ Ibid

and elements employed in the course of that narrative, parallels were drawn between the microcosm of the saga and the macrocosm of universal history for an apocalyptic reading of *Gísla saga*. This revealed, it was argued, attitudes about the Last Days as, while certainly cataclysmic and grim, necessary events for the arising of a new world and the salvation of mankind. Pursuing this cosmic model and time in narrative, let us now summon the *vǫlva* and turn to the Eddaic poem: *Vǫluspá*.

4.1.2 *Vǫlva* Vocalizations: *Vǫluspá*

Vǫluspá is an Eddaic poem concerned with the cosmological history of the universe presented in mythic form. The poem is found in two manuscripts: the Codex Regius (GKS 2365) and Hauksbók (AM 544 4to), and sections are found in a number of quotations in *Gylfaginning* from The Prose *Edda*. The edition that was consulted for this thesis is that of the Codex Regius manuscript. The meter and structure of the poem conforms to the standards of *fornyrðislag*, the most common of forms in the Eddaic corpus. In the Codex Regius manuscript the poem appears as the first poem and serves in some way as a great scene setter for all the mythological poems that follow, it is the great corner and capstone of the collection. The poem's origins are a tad obscure as neither the author nor the date of composition is definitively known.

The narrator of the poem is an ancient seeress or *vǫlva*, called upon to give an account of the universe to Óðinn. Through either her memory or via prophetic vision she relates a cosmogony and proceeds to describe a cosmology. She relates a primordial past and series of creative acts that bring about a golden age for the gods and the universe. Next she proceeds to the events, such as the Aesir-Vanir war, that bring discord trouble into the world. Then comes the turning point, the death of Baldr and the revenging of the deed, when the verb tenses of prophecy change from past to present.²⁵⁵ This leads down a slippery, degrading slope to Ragnarøk and the dissolution of the world. But the poem does not end there, the prophecy continues with survival of a few and the advent of a new green, paradisiacal world

²⁵⁵ Thorvaldsen 2006: 948

and the arrival of a new all-powerful Lord. Even with this idyllic conclusion, however, the final stanza details the approach of apocalyptic heralds.

Dating *Völuspá* (in time, not romantically), indeed this holds true for most of the Eddaic corpus, is a tricky proposition to satisfactorily answer. The very nature of the poem's composition is rather difficult to explore. Some hold forth an older date and a compositional process occurring during the period of shifting sands during the age of Conversion.²⁵⁶ Others believe its composition barely predates the first surviving example of its recording, which is in Codex Regius dated to around the middle of the 13th century.²⁵⁷ With no authorial attribution, a medium that prizes conservatism and even antiquarianism and as such preserving older forms in younger poetry it is impossible to be completely definite on this point. Likewise the impulse for its composition is clouded and obscure.

A variety of hypotheses have been advanced on this point as well: from a gloomy, late heathen milieu just being confronted with Christianity to thoroughly Christian motives, each matching the views discussed above in regards to moment of composition. Within this latter type of impulse as well different opinions abound: whether the poem serves antiquarians and rhetoricians in expounding a number of myths and stories that explain the meaning of the mythological kennings key to composing the prestigious art of skaldic poetry²⁵⁸ or whether the poem was part of an apocalyptic tradition, a popular genre throughout the Middle Ages.²⁵⁹ A Christian context for composition seems more likely, and more agreed upon, and within this spectrum the apocalyptic reading of the poem is the most intriguing for the purpose of this paper and will be examined in the following.

What can be said of compositional context is that in the period leading up to the composition of the Codex Regius scholarly interest grew in building up a vernacular corpus of poetry on which could be based a curriculum for the study of rhetoric, an impulse which can be paralleled on the Continent.²⁶⁰ This corpus could serve the student interested in advancing his career, in the clergy and/or at court, through the art of skaldic poetry, in praise poems or in

²⁵⁶ Dronke 1997: 99

²⁵⁷ Fidjestøl 1995: 160

²⁵⁸ Nordal 2001: 279-281

²⁵⁹ *On this point I am much obliged to Karl G. Johansson who let me read an article of his on the subject in its manuscript form*

²⁶⁰ Nordal 2001: 279

expressions of religious feeling. Whether or not the poems preserve *the authentic air of antiquity*, they do serve a function in Christian society, which makes sense given that this was the society wherein they were expressed and preserved and this is the society that this paper is pursuing after all.

Völuspá contains quite a copious amount of pre-Christian lore in its verses but this lore is given distinctly Christian forms and functions; as can be seen in the foretold new god that arrives after the events of Ragnarøk for instance. There are also similarities that it seems likely would only be accessible through the literate tradition imported with the Church: that is, parallels to the apocalyptic tradition. A notable example of this is found in the relations between *Völuspá* and the pronouncements of that other famous seeress recorded in the *Tiburtine Sibyl*.²⁶¹ The latter text was written in the late 4th century in Greek but was soon translated and became popular across Christendom and remained so for the whole duration of the Middle Ages, it was most likely known in Iceland in the period that saw the composition of *Völuspá*. Both texts, the *Sibyl* is made up of prose and poetry, feature ostensibly pre-Christian prophetesses which are consulted by male powers to reveal the mysteries of time. The visions both have are similar in structure: nine worlds and nine suns delineate each text respectively and in interpretation-- both revelations give insight into the history of the Christian universe from creation through several stages to recreation. *Völuspá* accomplishes this by veiling, in typically obscure apocalyptic fashion, the nature and meaning of the work in pre-Christian myths, fulfilling both an academic and religious function. In this manner the poem and the *primstava* have much in common compositionally, both are predominantly Christian constructs, and yet they are given form and indeed life through native adaptation.

Time in the narrative of *Völuspá* is a very different thing than in the narrative of *Gísla saga*. After all the framing space, that is the world, of the two works is almost completely different. The gods neither sow nor reap. When the gods are all in assembly there are no precursor summoning days. It would be interesting to see whether if Frigg should wish to move out of Fensalir she would have to wait for the legal moving-days. At a cursory glance it would seem as though the poem was as timeless as the undying gods or the ever renewing world-tree. But one of the great works of the gods in the creative period is the ordering of time:

²⁶¹ On the comparisons between the two texts I am particularly indebted to Johansson's manuscript.

Pá gengo regin ǫll á ʀeçstóla
ginnheilog goð, oc um þat gættuz:
nótt oc niðiom nǫfn um gáfo,
morgin héto oc miðian dag,
undorn oc aptan, árom at telia.²⁶²

Then went all the gods to the judgment
seats, the holy ones, and took counsel
together: night and waning moon names
they gave, called morning and mid-day,
afternoon and evening, the years to tally.

The gods while un-aging are the great arbiters of time. The poem is about deep time, not eternity, there is a beginning, a middle and an end, though at both start and finish there is a reach for the infinite. The notions of time, like the content of the poem, is simply cosmological, it is fully macrocosmic in scope. How then does time in this macrocosm work?

In some ways it can be treated as linear. There is a beginning and a series of events, while sometimes these are obscure they do tend to lead from one to the next, and then finally to catastrophe and completion. This perception of time is in line with that mapped out in the Bible and accepted by the Church. World history is seen as a process of losing paradise (founded in eternity and itself timeless) passing through the plan of salvation and finally regaining paradise-eternity after the end of time in the Last Judgment. This would be in parallel to the Sibyl as the two series of worlds and suns pass by one after the other. Each of the systems is interpreted as stages of being or development in the cosmic history: creation, golden age, decline, etc.

A model similar to the progression that is found in the poem is the concept of the Ages of the World. Various given as seven or six but still mirroring the nine worlds of *Vǫluspá*. Despite the lack of numeric coincidence between the two series of periods there is a general agreement to content and pattern of development. The Ages of the World correspond to the Ages of Man, youth, maturity, senility and so forth.²⁶³ The stages in *Vǫluspá* can be seen as detailing the same periods of growth, zenith, decline and final collapse, both for humanity (and the gods) and the world in which they inhabit. As an example from the time of decline strophe 45 lists *sceggǫld*, *scálmǫld*, *vindǫld* and *vargǫld*²⁶⁴, ‘ax-age’, ‘sword-age’, ‘wind-age’ and ‘wolf-age’ respectively, these terms ring faintly familiar in as conceptions paralleling that found in the Ages of the World. In *Vǫluspá* as in the Ages of the World the status of the world and the condition of morality in man is intrinsically linked.

²⁶² Neckel/Kuhn 1983: Strophe 25

²⁶³ Le Goff 1988: 180

²⁶⁴ Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 10

The poem has also been seen, however, as cyclic.²⁶⁵ The world of the primordial beings ending with the death and dismemberment of Ymir giving rise to the world exists through and is described with all its features and intrinsic order in the bulk of the poem finally passing in a terrible conflagration but giving away in turn for a new, green world to rise in its place until the coming of the final God. This view of a progression of stages, each turning into the other, is largely in parallel with the cycle that was observed in *Gísla saga*. This model of time-reckoning as has been seen is viewed as the native and authentic conception of how time was perceived to move in Scandinavia.

Perhaps some reconciliation is possible between these two seemingly opposed visions of time construction. For this attempted time reconciliation to succeed a hybridization of the two models is required and time is then considered to move along like a ‘rolling log’. It turns around and around but moves forward all the while. Out of the primordial eternity it starts to move. Time rolls on through the various worlds and stages of past, present and future and deposits itself back into eternity. In this it shares characteristics with the liturgical time mentioned above: each cycle repeats itself but brings the whole grand drama closer to a close.²⁶⁶ Of these three understandings of the construction of time in the poem, each teased from broad overviews of the narrative development and movement, perhaps one can be found to be most satisfactory by a closer look at some features of the text.

One particularly interesting feature of the poem that may reveal insight into both the time within the narrative as well as in the above discussion of time models may be found in the changing tenses of verbs in the poem. The poem, it has been observed, features action on a number of levels.²⁶⁷ There is the framing environs wherein the *vǫlva* pronounces her visions to the questioner. Within these visions are the scenes that constitute them, the scope of which are universal. If the audience is included, as Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen does in his article on the double scenes of *Vǫluspá*, basing this on the direct address of the *vǫlva* to the observer, then that is a third layer to the poem. A layer that is, as such, a strange mediation between real world and mythic and draws the reader or the listener part way into the mythic world. The changing tenses in this case act as vehicles that move the audience through time

²⁶⁵ Schjødt 1981:

²⁶⁶ Kaspersen 2006: 110

²⁶⁷ Thorvaldsen 2006: 944-45

(and to some extant spaces) raising and lowering them through the other two levels of the work.

This blended time seems familiar to another type of liturgical perception mentioned above: the moments of mass mingling ordinary, momentary time with celestial eternal time. Though here it is less potent or world changing and is instead merely skating between poetic even revelatory time and observational, receptive time. However this sort of time manipulation does seem to add extra evidence point to the notion that the text is a work by a Christian, indeed clerical author, as this type of mystic time is also well-evidenced in visionary genres dealing with the supernatural or eschatological matters, for instance in the company of John the Revelator the reader is whisked into apocalyptic time and space or, as has been shown above, viewers of religious art can be transported back to the moment depicted.

Leaving this and focusing directly on the two proper layers of the narrative itself there is an interesting play on verb tenses. Put simply there is a shift between the past and present, with some of the latter being indicative of the future. The shift serves to heighten the sense of drama towards the end of the poem (which is as well the end of the world),²⁶⁸ but this is not the only, nor, it seems, proper function of this shift of tenses. Rather the transition seems to serve as a grounding of the declamations of the *vǫlva*, and by extension her audience, in the flow of time recorded in the visions and as such lends much more definition to that flow of time as the mythic events depicted in the prophecy are no longer in a fictive past and present but in periods of historical time.

In the framing sequences the primary verb change is in the cognitive action verb that refers to the *vǫlva*'s perception of events namely: *sjá* 'see'. Thorvaldsen suggests the switch is somehow related to the nature of the performance of the piece. But he also suggests, and this seems more likely, that the switch refers to the time of the vision.²⁶⁹ When this verb is in the past tense (the other cognitive action verbs: *vita*, *muna* ('know' and 'remember' respectively) are always present tense²⁷⁰) the *vǫlva* is either referring to her long founded memory or past visions she summoned and experienced, even if she is just turning from them

²⁶⁸ Thorvaldsen 2006: 948

²⁶⁹ Ibid

²⁷⁰ Ibid

to relate what she has witnessed. When it is in present tense then it is just a case of seeing and reporting in the same moment.

On the interior level, that is the action taking place within the visions, the transition of verb tenses hangs on a single transformative instance: the deaths of Baldr and Hǫðr.²⁷¹ The killing of Baldr and the killing of Hǫðr in revenge mark the dawn of now. This moment is also the beginning of the end. The acts of creation and heroism are all now in the past, the future is one marked by total decay and at last death. Malevolent supernatural forces gather, poison drips and at the same time morals among mortals degrade into decadent, violent debauchery. And then Ragnarǫk runs loose: curtains for the cosmos. Of course the poem doesn't stop there but with the matter having run thus far the 'time' of the poem is clearly in its final stages.

In the last strophe the vǫlva says she can see the dark dragon coming before she sinks away.²⁷² This is the end of the End. Like most Christian understandings of world history this world is in the last act of its great drama. The arrival, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is the summation and total of a grand cosmic plan, the turning point (much like Baldr's murder) of the whole history of the cosmos: all the prophecies of the Old Testament are complete and on his Ascension the world is left with the promise that he will be back soon for the final judgment. In the model of the Ages of the World, the world is in the last stage of life--senility: fragile, decayed decrepitude, the end is coming very soon, death for the fretting player on the world-stage and the End of Time for the cosmos. Personal death and universal dissolution were very present in the mindset of those who truly believed that they were fated to live their lives in the Last Days before the imminent Second Coming.²⁷³

Which of the models sketched out earlier does this transition of verb tenses seem to support then? By and large this shift seems to fit the notion of linear time governing the universe best. Time is seen to move forward and the change from past to present is irrevocable and the narrative then continues to proceed on to a close. Moreover it serves to reinforce the historical nature of the work: the vǫlva is grounded in a point in time and the progression of events then conforms to the general, Christian, understanding of world history, albeit on display here with different stage dressings. Certain features notwithstanding (i.e.

²⁷¹ Neckle/Kuhn 1983: 7-8

²⁷² Op cit: 15

²⁷³ Camille 1996: 91

repetition, poetic devices and the new world, which will be evaluated more thoroughly shortly) cyclic time simply does not seem to fit in this depiction of cosmic time progression.

The new world, seemingly a reboot of the current one is instead something quite new and eternal, rather than the growing and decaying world of today. The dragon that follows its description does not menace its green growing idyll but rather our own shadowed times. The nine worlds cannot even be said to roll into one another but are more like pearls on a string: globular, certainly and connected, but proceeding one to another not one repeated and renewed again and again along the course of the chain. In this respect *Völuspá*, both for the *völva* and the Universe, seems to be heading down a hard line into the future.

Another piece of the puzzle that is the poem to consider is this new world that arises after the End of Time: what then is its nature? Some have interpreted this transition as the passage between the old to the new (Christian) belief systems.²⁷⁴ This seems unlikely as the historical point for the poem indicates an established Christian milieu rather than one standing on the balance of formal (capital 'C') Conversion. Most often this is seen as analogous to the Christian paradise, an idea which would match with the above analysis. However, for a new world it certainly carries a lot of baggage from the old one: from tables, games and other gold detritus lying in the grass to buildings that have associations with Óðinn which are rebuilt after the final furious conflagration of Ragnarøk.

Also conspicuously absent is any mention of human beings returning or sharing an inheritance in the new world; only gods come back to the good, green earth. Else Mundal claims that the final strophe brings human back, the dead safely ensconced in the pinions of the dragon that is seen flying towards the *völva* in the sixty-sixth strophe.²⁷⁵ But given the complete stylistic differences between this part of the poem, with its evocative imagery of dark dragons and darker hills, and that of the post-Ragnarøk world makes this final strophe seem completely out of sorts with the sunny strophes that proceed it and rather more in keeping with the mode of the dark and dangerous strophes of Ragnarøk. This combined with the fact that the *völva* sinks promptly upon this report suggests that instead this strophe functions, as noted above, as historical placer and is a blending of the two levels, visionary and vision are united and the whole world is in trouble.

²⁷⁴ Dronke 1997: 99

²⁷⁵ Mundal 1989: 221-222

Though the return of the corpse plagued dragon seems unlikely, perhaps there is another explanation to ease the troubles caused by the absence of any resurrection of the dead in a Christian eschatological treatise. Could there be a case of euhemerization at work at this point of resurrection in the poem? The gods reduced to magic mortals at the coming of the True God. Baldr harrows Hel for his brother who killed him, humans may be considered as fratricides, Christ being both God and brother human. The poem may offer other examples to support this reading. In the introductory strophe the descendants of Heimdallr are directly addressed.²⁷⁶ The elaborately segregated view of the cosmos found in other mythological texts is not found explicitly present in the poem. The first humans, possibly named for trees, occur right before the world-tree is introduced.²⁷⁷ Human failings and diabolical powers are vividly interlaced in the run up to the final battle.²⁷⁸ Everywhere the poem turns, humans are, if mentioned at all, in close association with the mythic. Perhaps the association is complete all the way to the point of mutual identification between mortals and mythic beings. If this was the case, then the picture of the new world would be the revealed, all-powerful God coming down to be with Baldr living amongst his brothers in Gimle. All the players would be present then in a scene quite reminiscent of Christian post-apocalyptic visions: God the Father and the Son with all the blessed living in a New Jerusalem.

Again then it seems that Christian time and motifs would be strengthened by this, but here the remnants of the past yet linger. The strophes describing the new world also seem to be very melancholic.

Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni
iorð ór ægi iðiaqrøna
falla forsar flýgir qrn yfir
sá er á fialli fisca veiðr

She sees rise up another time
earth out of the sea, evergreen
waterfalls fall an eagle flies over
that which on the mountains catches fish

Finnaz æsir á Iðavelli
oc um moldpinur, mátcan, døma
oc minnaz þar á megin dóma
oc á Fimbultýs fornar rúnar

Aesir meet one another at Iðavelli
and about the mighty Serpent²⁷⁹ converse
and call to mind great events
and the Mighty god's ancient runes

Þar muno eptir undrsamligar

There they shall after find wonderful

²⁷⁶ Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 1

²⁷⁷ Op Cit: 5, also see Johansson 2000 for more on the relations between the macrocosmic and humans.

²⁷⁸ Op cit: 9-11

²⁷⁹ literally 'World-thong', a name for the World-serpent

gullnar tǫflor í grasi finnaz
þærs í árdaga áttar, hǫfðo²⁸⁰

golden game pieces in the grass
that their kin in antiquity had

The inhabitants of the new world seem to pine for the lost world when they remember the great adventures of the past and the ‘ancient runes’. Then they go about rebuilding the fallen halls of their ancestors. The nature of what survives is mainly associated with past times and the wonders of the ancient past: their game boards and other lovely craftwork, suggests that the golden age, wherein they originated, has returned. It is at the rediscovery of these objects that the backward looking yearning stops and paradisiacal descriptions also peter out with the declaration just before Baldr’s return from the lands of the dead:

Muno ósánir acrar vaxa,
bǫls mun allz batna²⁸¹

Unsown harvests shall grow
misfortunes shall all be remedied

Baldr is back and creative activity starts anew, but it is at first re-creative: rebuilding the aforementioned hall. Also interesting in the new world is the curious *hlautvið*²⁸² or ‘prophetic wand’ of strophe sixty-three. Of what use is prophecy, either in future vision, present right counseling or past remembrances (which often help with the other two) in a realm founded in eternity? The phrase seems obscure; it could mean that the wand has prophetic powers, like the ones enumerated above, or that it simply was prophesized about. If the latter the mystery deepens and leaves the scope of the present paper, if it is the former then the problem above remains for the bright, New World.

The conditions of the new world mentioned above seem to be consistent with a cyclic understanding of time. The world passes through decay and final destruction and then only revolves back to where it has already been: the lost golden age. The wheel keeps spinning through both the generation (through parts of previous worlds) and the dissolution of the world. While there is in this case an apparent cyclic view of time the rest of the evidence considered above points to a linear conception and construction of time. The presence of

²⁸⁰ Neckel/Kuhn 1983: 14, strophes 59-61

²⁸¹ Ibid: strophe 62

²⁸² Ibid: strophe 63

both, though acknowledging and indeed emphasizing the predominance of the linear ideal, seems to suggest the progressive cycle or ‘rolling log’ mentioned above: a rotational, cyclic understanding of time but one at the service and demands of the ideas of linear time.

Like the cycle of the liturgy found in the turning of the primstav which is based on it, the cycle repeats but moves forward towards completion, that is eternity. The poem reflects this by bringing the cycle and the vision to a finish at the same moment: the arrival of the all-powerful, righteous Lord and his never-ending reign. This is where the universe and the work is rushing to the whole time and once it is reached there is nothing left but for the poem to snap back to the vólva and the present time and the approach of the arriving catastrophe.

To review this section on narrative time: the poem *Völuspá*, with its cosmological scope, has been examined for notions of mythic and prophetic time to see how time was conceived to work on an universal scale. The time scheme then displayed predominant Christian time workings and these were also presented as linearly imagined. The structure of the stages of the world is ordered in ways similar to both of those found in the schemata displayed in the nine suns of the *Tiburtine Sibyl* and the Six Ages of the World. The world and its inhabitants grew, achieved lofty heights but were corrupted which led to decay and dissolution before a new world comes to replace the old. This was reinforced by the verb shift from past to present, which places frame and by extension audience in the last days, where most medieval historians and theologians would place their own time. Slightly undercutting this forward momentum was the conception of the new, post-apocalyptic world which was studded with left overs of the old world that had fallen into fire and the imaginative return of the glory of the golden days of yore. But this cycle seems to only propel events into the final arrival of Eternity and its all-mighty Lord, following the line into timelessness.

To wrap up these twin chapters on time in narrative it would be interesting to look at what the two sources reveal about each other. The pairing of the two, saga and poem, is admittedly fortuitous but that does not preclude it from being fruitful. The microcosm of *Gísla saga* does roughly match the macrocosm sketched out above in *Völuspá*, lending support to the apocalyptic reading that was attempted above. In both sources timelessness gives way to time which fades back into timelessness. The saga, however, is much more cyclic than the poem. The first generation matching the next generation’s name, for instance and the cycles of vengeance that drive the story along, even in the space of one’s man life the

wheel of fortune turns again and again and again. Linear time is superficial in this narrative which plants brothers, scatters them and kills them before finally bringing a third brother to Iceland to prosper at last. The Apocalypse in both narratives is a bracing account of doomed but dramatic defiance and brutal consequence. It is followed by a period of winding down and transformation before a general completion of all action, to the south and the advent of the new God.

Interestingly though the world of Gísli is not burnt away there is less repeat of the old world and earlier motifs than in *Völuspá* where the new world literally rises again from the sea. While there are retreads to Iceland and Norway they are by new people in new places plus the scene expands to take in remote Greenland and the far off southlands. Of course with the exception of the south-faring pilgrims these movements are but a way to segue back into cyclic generational time. Only with the Christian pilgrims is there a gleam of eternity slipping into the finale, other than Gísli going on to his eternal reward of course. Also an interesting contrast can be found in that it is corruption that brings the end in *Völuspá* while Gísli's death, on the spiritual level, comes about from his discovery of virtue. Perhaps in a corrupt world this is what dooms him. These comparisons are not meant to lead in to any sort of discussion concerning matters of influence flowing either way, only that as two different narrative types a comparison, merely for the sake of inquiry, made sense given that they were presented here side by side.

5 Conclusion

The path just followed, though faring wide, was picked with care. A broad, though certainly not complete, picture of time reckoning and conception in the Scandinavian lands in the High Middle Ages was sought and a variety of sources were consulted. The narrow line between practical, observable time and religious and apocalyptic time was picked out in each source, inspired by the two types of information recorded into the Primstav. Tied into these two understandings of time, and evident as well in the Primstav and the other sources, were the differing ideas of cyclic and linear time and various attempts to reconcile or dispute the differences between the two. What was initially described was a divide between the two paradigms. A division that existed between a way time was measured out in *ættir* and economic activity and seasonal cycles on the one hand and time measured in hours and in the stately pomp of the liturgy. Beyond the brick-a-brack of time measurement there seemed to be a fundamental difference between time that rolled on and on and a system based on contravening time in art and image and apocalypse.

What was observed was that despite an initial hypothesis of opposition, based on superficial understandings, a slow blend of the practical and religious was present in fact and use. Religious time permeated and defined meaning in practical time, which came to be but a servant or support of Religious time. Thus, while circles may be observed and do support ideas of cyclic time, locally developed, they spin along in all these sources in ways underpinning and even moving forward the great line of Christian.

The first source reviewed was the prime mover and spoke of this paper: the Primstav. The Primstav's descent was traced from the runic calendar sticks and the liturgical year, both religiously motivated means of telling time. Included in this religiously punctuated year was information that constructed an almanac of seasonal activities. The rotation of the seasons was observed in the ordering of the calendar sticks and there was no need to take recourse to knowledge about the movements of astronomical bodies in order to set the calendar. When the tally on one side had all been counted out then the calendar was turned over. While religious dates filled the calendar with striking symbols these were presented in a practical form, which means the proper time for observance of the special days was recorded in those easily recognizable symbols.

The cohabitation of these ideas of time and its reckoning was not a juxtaposition of models but a matter of co-identification between them. Religious time was made practical and accessible via association with almanac information. Likewise the agricultural activities that were placed in proper season by this almanac became identified with the days and feasts of the Sanctoreale (and select examples from the Temporale), one could almost say became sanctified themselves through this religious association. The turns of the seasonal sides made an easy pairing with the cycle of the liturgy and as such were pulled into the sacred history that was rolling along to the Apocalypse. This interplay between the methods of time reckoning was also observed in almost all the following sources that were considered.

In the *Konungs skuggsjá*, that didactic treatise composed for the education and edification of princes, practical time reckoning mechanics were first considered and enumerated upon. The livelily represented wind-chieftains elucidated the old *átt* system of time reckoning as well as mirroring the liturgical days and offices of the hours. The treatise also included descriptions in numeric quantity and interrelation of the various time units: month, day, year etc. beginning with a discussion of the progress of the cycle of the tides. This makes up a series of highly practical and mechanic, local notions of time, flavored though it was with references to international models and arrangements. This is all in service of, among other things, allowing for the accomplishment of voyages and once those voyages are completed then to be able to comprehend foreign systems to which travel has introduced the student. This information enables the student to be able to do proper work and travel at the proper time at home and abroad.

It is in the list of natural exemplars that the proper uses of time, the measurement of which *The King's Mirror* had just been described, that ideas of religious time are introduced. These parables, taking the divinely ordered natural world as their inspirational starting point, sought to persuade the student on the necessity of following the proper season in all his endeavors. The gears of the clock may be practical but their turning must be with all Divine sanction and as such observed with religious care. This was compared to the Primstav and found to be similar: they each brought the two times together in harmony-- practical time being, for lack of a better word, practical but also religiously mandated.

To better come to grips with attitudes of time and its reckoning two very different narratives were chosen for investigation: *Gísla saga* and *Völuspá*. Narratives betray ideas of time in their structure and in the matters they record. *Gísla saga* was seen to give abundant

evidence regarding both systems of time ordering. On the practical, mundane side it described a life ruled by seasonal changes, mainly between the *misseri* of summer and winter, as well as being ordered along social and economic calendars. These practical matters were compared to the primstav to see if there was any overlap, any evidence for the economic activities of the primstav in the ideas of time reckoning found in the saga. The dipartite structure of the year was a shared feature, as well as some of the economic activity (though there were some discrepancies in regard to the time of the autumn slaughter). This can be seen perhaps to suggest a consistent agricultural reality from the time of *Gísli saga*'s composition to the time of the Primstav's carving.

The saga also depicts a world structured according religious principles of time ordering. Viewing the microcosm of the text as constructed in parallel to the generally understood macrocosm, the life of Gísli can be magnified to universal proportions. From timelessness on a stage that is gradually being defined from international to a local, Norwegian scope the story develops into a time governed by the above mentioned practical principles of time-reckoning and finally descends, with Gísli's death, back into eternal timelessness. Gísli's life is lived at once in both practical terms of time and on religious levels of time. Mundane mechanics are at work but greater by far is the all organizing schemata of religious time.

Pursuing this macrocosm even further into a different form of narrative (that of Eddaic poetry) the cosmological poem *Völuspá* was reviewed. With its general apocalyptic tone and universal scope this poem was reviewed to better understand notions of religious time. This is the only source considered that has little to nothing to say about practical models of time-conception, though this actually helps to better examine religious constructions of world-historical time which have held the upper hand in the balance of blending seen throughout the sources considered. In *Völuspá* the universe is described as possessing a predominantly linear progression. The poem stretches from timeless creation through the vicissitudes of marching time and rises back to glorious eternity. Through nine worlds of development and decay the poem courses.

This corresponds with many examples of apocalyptic literature as well as the Christian conception of the Six Ages of Man and the World. The poem plays with time in its switches of verb tense and its movement in between deictic levels. *Völuspá* concludes with a vivid description of the Last Days and the New World that will arise to replace the old one that was

burnt away in the final conflagration. Revolving within and moving forward along with this linear motion is a great cycle that indicates that this New World has regained the Golden Age that the other, older world had lost. The macrocosm in *Völuspá* then can be seen to elucidate Christian ideas and roughly correspond to the narrative cosmos constructed within *Gísla saga*, giving credence to the apocalyptic reading which was attempted of that source.

In fin, in the sources reviewed a blending is evident between practical and religious time. The modes become co-identified in the service of advancing the acceptance of religious ideas of time. Practical time is used to explicate religious time and vice versa. Permeation of everyday time with religious themes and end-of-time visualizations ordered lives and narratives as every source has testified. In the turning of the Primstav, agricultural and liturgical time were bound together not in uneasy tension but in mutual support. In *The King's Mirror* properly seasonal action, which is temporal, is a duty mandated by God. Gísli Súrsson lived by the calendar of seasons but his life became structured with apocalyptic understandings and underpinnings in the saga that tells his story. *Völuspá* describes a cosmos that is rolling forward into infinite eternity that will fall under the rule of the all-mighty Lord. To answer the question of how do the two forms of time-reckoning co-exist, one word would be: inextricably. Practical and Religious time are as bound together as the layers of wood in the plane of a primstav.

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