



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindadeild**

**The Miraculous Water of Guðmundr  
Arason and the Limits of Holiness in  
Medieval Iceland**

**Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs**

**Joel Anderson**

**September 2008**

Háskóli Íslands  
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**Medieval Icelandic Studies**

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## **Introduction**

One of the narratives relating to Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) reports that: “Marga lute toc hann þa upp til trv ser er enge maðr uisse aðr at ne ei~ maðr hafe gert aðr her a landi.”<sup>1</sup> This is not a difficult statement to believe. One of the most prevalent themes in all writings about Guðmundr is his somewhat anomalous practice of consecrating wells and springs throughout Iceland. According to his sagas, this water produced many miracles. Undoubtedly, it also raised many questions.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which Guðmundr’s fourteenth century hagiographers – particularly the redactors of *Guðmundar saga B* and *Guðmundar saga D* – incorporated the theme of Guðmundr’s holy water into their hagiographies. How did they justify and present Guðmundr’s water consecrations as righteous and holy? To what extent could they claim the holiness of wells and springs in far-flung locations throughout Iceland blessed by a charismatic and controversial priest / bishop? How did they deal with the doubts and criticisms leveled against Guðmundr’s water? How did they portray Guðmundr’s water as miraculous?

After surveying Guðmundr’s biography and the sources for his life, I will discuss the hagiographic and (potentially) historical dimensions of Guðmundr’s water consecrations. I will then consider attitudes towards the miraculous in medieval Iceland and how these attitudes relate to Guðmundr’s water. After briefly outlining the scope and variety of Guðmundr’s water miracles, I will expound on the ways in which the hagiographers dealt with and explained particular aspects of Guðmundr’s miraculous powers. In the second half of this thesis, I will discuss specific episodes and passages that were added to the B and D redactions of Guðmundr’s *vita* in an attempt to justify his miraculous water consecrations. Lastly, I will address three separate episodes of doubt surrounding Guðmundr’s water in the hagiographies, examining how these episodes do and do not allay the concerns and questions about the expansive limits within which Guðmundr and his hagiographers claimed holiness.

## **Guðmundr Arason and Saints’ Lives in Iceland**

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<sup>1</sup> Stefán Karlsson, ed., *Guðmundar sögur biskups*. Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ B.6. (København: C.A. Reitzel, 1983), 62.

The *First Grammatical Treatise* from the mid twelfth century contains the earliest description of renditions of Latin works in the vernacular. The First Grammarian mentions the existence of *þýðingar helgar* “holy interpretations.” Opinions differ regarding what types of works the First Grammarian might have been referring to in this passage. Some scholars suggest that they may have included full translations of saints’ lives.<sup>2</sup> However, in Old Icelandic, *þýðing* means something closer to “an explication or interpretation.” Thus, *þýðingar helgar* likely refers to brief interpretations of religious material, not full translations of *vitae*.<sup>3</sup> Foreign saints must have been venerated and invoked in Iceland in the twelfth century and beforehand, but the source material is lacking.<sup>4</sup> Medieval Icelanders would have been familiar with the universal saints through the liturgy and through the reading of saints’ lives on feast days.

Hagiographic writing in Iceland was not limited to translation. Nor was it limited to the vernacular. The monks Oddr Snorrasson and Gunnlaugr Leifsson both seem to have composed Latin *vitae* of the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason prior to 1200. In the field of the miraculous, two specifically-Icelandic miracles appended to *Cecilias saga* were said to have taken place prior to the adoption of her feast in 1179.<sup>5</sup> These miracles are contained in a manuscript dated to the late fourteenth century and have probably undergone significant revision between the time they were recorded and when they were appended to her saga.<sup>6</sup>

The cult of foreign saints served as a necessary precursor to the appearance of miracle-working Icelandic saints.<sup>7</sup> The first of these was Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland’s Medieval Literature*, trans. Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélagið, 1997), 127-128.

<sup>3</sup> Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson, and Vésteinn Ólason, *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006), 266 (Sverrir Tómasson).

<sup>4</sup> See Margaret Cormack, “Sagas of Saints,” in Margaret Clunies Ross, ed., *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 302-325, esp. 303, 312-313.

<sup>5</sup> See C.R. Unger, ed., *Heilagra manna sögur (HMS)*, vol. 1 (Christiania: Bentzen, 1877), 294-295.

<sup>6</sup> C.R. Unger, *Forord*, in *HMS*, vol. 1, vi. The recipients of the miracles were well-known persons from the end of the twelfth century: “Þórarinn Brandsson og hans kone Guðrún Óspaksdóttir samt deres sön Brand, der nævnes i *Laxdoela saga* cap. 78, den sidste ogsaa i *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I 217 og 218.” Unger, *Forord* xi. Brand Þórarinnsson is listed in a máldagi from a church at Húsafell dedicated to the Virgin and Cecilia. See Kirsten Wolf, ed., *Heilagra meýja sögur* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2003), 173. Peter Foote, ed., *Lives of Saints: Perg. Fol. Nr. 2 in the Royal Library, Stockholm*, vol. 4, *Early Icelandic Manuscripts in Facsimile* (København: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1962), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Diana Whaley, “Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops: Icelandic Variations on an International Theme,” *Collegium Mediaevale* 7 (1994/2), 155-184, esp. 156-159.

(1133-1193). Invocations of Þorlákr were authorized by the *alþingi* in the early summer of 1198 and his relics were translated that July. Miracles resulting from his translation were read aloud before the *alþingi* in 1199 and his feast was established in the law. In the following year, the sanctity of a northern bishop, Jón Ögmundarson (1052-1121), was recognized. In the early 1200's the first miracles and *vitae* of Jón and Þorlákr were written.

By many accounts, a young priest named Guðmundr Arason was actively involved in the promotion of both Jón and Þorlákr's cults. Guðmundr was born in 1161 at Grjóta in northern Iceland. He was the son of Ari Þorgeirsson and Úlfheiður Gunnarsdóttir – Ari's concubine. After Ari's death in 1168, Guðmundr's care was turned over to his uncle, a priest named Ingimundr Þorgeirsson. Guðmundr was ordained a priest in 1185. The sagas describe Guðmundr's priesthood as a period rich in miracles. His consecration of wells and springs throughout Iceland also began during this time. The sagas depict him as extremely charitable and popular with the common people, who gave him the nickname *hinn góði*.

After the death of Brandr Sæmundarson in 1201, Guðmundr was elected bishop of Hólar. His episcopacy was characterized by violent conflicts with powerful lay chieftains, especially Kolbeinn Tumason and Sighvatr Sturluson. Like other European countries, Iceland was becoming increasingly centralized in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Centralized lay authority frequently confronted centralized Church authority in investiture-like disputes. During these armed conflicts, Guðmundr was often forced away from Hólar, but he remained alive thanks to the support of many powerful chieftains. Following an extended illness, Guðmundr died in 1237.

### **Sources and Previous Research**

In this section, I will give a brief overview of the primary written sources on Guðmundr that will be dealt with in this thesis. The *Guðmundar sögur* have been subject to significant paleographic interest.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed overview, see Margaret Hunt, "A Study of Authorial Perspective in Guðmundar saga A and Guðmundar saga D: Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop's Saga," PhD diss. Indiana University, 1985, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1986), 5-33. Stefán Karlsson, *Inngangur in Guðmundar sögur*.

The oldest written source on Guðmundr is known as *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*. The *Prestssaga* describes Guðmundr's early life and ministry (c. 1161 – 1203). It has been an extremely difficult text for scholars to categorize. The original text is no longer extant. An abridged version was incorporated into the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. A different version of the same material, which is probably closest to the original *Prestssaga*, forms the basis for Guðmundr's ministry in the A version of his life.<sup>9</sup> Scholars have suggested that the work must have been written soon after Guðmundr's death in 1237.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to a record of Guðmundr's early life and ministry, the text also contains annalistic notes, descriptions of Guðmundr's *in vita* miracles, and perhaps a short *þáttr*.<sup>11</sup> The story progresses chronologically and each chapter contains specific information, including: 1) where Guðmundr lived the previous winter and how many winters he spent there, 2) annalistic material (e.g. records of avalanches, plagues, and notable deaths), and 3) how old Guðmundr was. This organization has led Ólafía Einarisdóttir to suggest that the *Prestssaga* should be treated both as an annal and a saga.<sup>12</sup> This is a rather clumsy description; the *Prestssaga* is more of a chronicle of Guðmundr's life. Numerous similarities between the *Prestssaga* and bishops' lives have led Úlfar Bragason to suggest that the *Prestssaga*, “must have been understood and accounted for using a *gesta episcoporum* literary model.”<sup>13</sup> Since Guðmundr remains a priest throughout the saga, the label is not strictly accurate. Certainly, many features indicate that the *Prestssaga* cannot be understood as a proper saint's life. The annalistic material is not typical of hagiography. The *Prestssaga* also does not treat Guðmundr's posthumous fame at all; it ends with his voyage to Norway to be consecrated bishop.

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<sup>9</sup> This version is preserved in *Resensbók* (AM 399 4to). Stefán Karlsson's diplomatic edition of the A redaction, (published in *Guðmundar sögur biskups*), uses *Resensbók* as its primary manuscript.

<sup>10</sup> Úlfar Bragason, “Sturlunga's Text of *Prestssaga Guðmundar góða*,” in Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, eds., *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages. Papers of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Saga Conference Bonn / Germany, 28<sup>th</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2003* (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003), 483 – 490.

<sup>11</sup> Ólafía Einarisdóttir, *Studier i kronologisk metode i tidlig islandsk historieskrivning* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1964), 293-326. On the *þáttr*, see Jan Ragnar Hagland, “Ingimundr Prestr Þorgeirsson and Icelandic Runic Literacy in the Twelfth Century,” *Alvíssmál* 6 (1996), 99-108.

<sup>12</sup> Einarisdóttir, *Studier* 316-317.

<sup>13</sup> Úlfar Bragason, “Sturlunga's Text” 484. On the *gesta episcoporum* model in Iceland and Europe, see Peter Foote, “Bischofssaga” in *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1998), 40.

Stefán Karlsson has suggested that the original *Prestssaga* probably did have an extremely abrupt ending.<sup>14</sup>

Four different redactions of Guðmundr's saga (commonly designated A-D) were written in the fourteenth century. The "A" version of *Guðmundar saga* (GA) was probably written around 1320-1330. It is a kind of biography of Guðmundr's life with many different sources: annals, the *Prestssaga*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Hrafns saga*, and *Áróns saga*. The specific interplay between all these sources is complicated and many points are in dispute.<sup>15</sup> The chief manuscript, AM 399 4to (Resensbók), is dated to c. 1330-1350.

GB is preserved in a deficient mid-fourteenth century manuscript, AM 657 4to.<sup>16</sup> The sources for GB include the *Prestssaga*, *Íslendinga saga*, and *Hrafns saga*. The precise relationship between GA and GB is disputed.<sup>17</sup> Based on textual evidence, Stefán Karlsson has suggested that Guðmundr's friends and relatives were responsible for the composition of GB.<sup>18</sup> The B redaction probably represents the first attempt at composing a *vita* for Guðmundr.<sup>19</sup> However, GB has also been described as a deficient hagiography because its style is not consistent and its structure is not well-planned.<sup>20</sup> The B redaction contains a number of interesting passages whose sources have not been traced. These passages seem to be independently composed by the GB redactor(s). They include: 1) a prologue to the *Prestssaga*, 2) an afterword to the *Prestssaga*, 3) a prologue to the bishop's saga, 4) a description of the battle at Víðnes, 5) a description of Gyriðr's illness,

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<sup>14</sup> Stefán Karlsson, *Guðmundar sögur* cl-clii.

<sup>15</sup> See Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 5-16.

<sup>16</sup> Guðbrandur Vigfússon completes his edition of GB with AM 204, a collection of Guðmundr's miracles. All references to GB in this thesis are from Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson, eds., *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1858), 559-618. It must be stressed that this edition only prints those passages that are novel to GB; it does not represent the entire B redaction.

<sup>17</sup> Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Stefán Karlsson agree that GA and GB were composed independently of each other. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Formáli* in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1, lxiii and Stefán Karlsson, *Guðmundar sögur* cliv-clv. Björn M. Ólsen presents a different view. See Björn M. Ólsen, "Um Sturlungu," in *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenskra bókmennta*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: 1902), 290. Ole Widding has also criticized Björn M. Ólsen's views. Ole Widding, "Nogle problemer omkring sagaen om Gudmund den gode," *Maal og Minne* (1-2, 1960), 13-26.

<sup>18</sup> Stefán Karlsson, "Guðmundar sögur biskups: Authorial Viewpoints and Methods," in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson, ed., *Stafkrókar: Ritgerðir eftir Stefán Karlsson gefnar út í tilefni af sjötugsafmæli hans 2. desember 1998* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1998), 161.

<sup>19</sup> Böðvar Guðmundsson, Sverrir Tómasson, Torfí Tulinius, and Vésteinn Ólason, *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 2006), 258 (Sverrir Tómasson).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 161. See also *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, vol. 2, 259 (Sverrir Tómasson).

6) a dialogue between Guðmundr and the Norwegian Archbishop Þórir, 7) several new miracles. As I will discuss, many of these additions (especially the prologues, afterword, conversation with the archbishop, and miracles) convey interesting attitudes towards, and justifications for, Guðmundr's extensive water consecrations.

The main manuscript of **GC** is a seventeenth century paper copy, Stock. Papp 4, 4to. It seems to be based on a version of GB that is slightly different from the extant GB. Unfortunately, aside from a small section relating to Guðmundr's *translatio*,<sup>21</sup> the text has not been edited or published.

**GD** is preserved in a large number of manuscripts, which is perhaps an indication of its popularity. GD is the only saga of Guðmundr's life whose author is known with certainty. Arngrímr Brandsson names himself at several points in the saga.<sup>22</sup> Various annals report that Arngrímr was abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Þingeyrar. Arngrímr's primary source seems to be GC. Compared to the other redactors, Arngrímr takes far more liberties with his work – adding, rearranging, and commenting freely. His redaction of *Guðmundar saga* has been described as the “most hagiographic.”<sup>23</sup> This is certainly true in the case of its organization and style. At every turn, Arngrímr wastes no opportunity to portray Guðmundr as a saint. He also makes frequent reference to popular continental literature, especially the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great and Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*.

Two excellent dissertations comprise the bulk of research on the depiction of Guðmundr's sanctity to date.<sup>24</sup> The first is Margaret Hunt's “A Study of Authorial Perspective in *Guðmundar saga A* and *Guðmundar saga D*: Hagiography and the Icelandic Bishop's Saga.” As the title suggests, Hunt's dissertation focuses primarily on

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Foote, “Bishop Jörundr Þorsteinsson and the relics of Guðmundr inn góði Arason,” in *Studia centennialia in honorem memoriae Benedikt S. Þórarinsson* (Reykjavík: 1961), 98-114.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g. GD, 169. All references to GD in this thesis are from Guðbrandr Vigfússon and Jón Sigurðsson, eds., *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1858), 1-187.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 247.

<sup>24</sup> Besides these dissertations, other works that treat Guðmundr's sanctity include: Margaret Cormack, “Holy Wells and National Identity in Iceland” in Margaret Cormack, ed., *Saints and Their Cults in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 229-247. Marlene Ciklamini, “Sainthood in the Making: The Arduous Path of Guðmundr the Good, Iceland's Uncanonized Saint,” *Alvíssmál* 2 (2004), 55 – 74. Stefán Karlsson, “Greftrun Auðar djúpúðgu,” in *Minjar og Menntir. Afmælisrit helgað Kristjáni Eldjárn* (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1976), 481-488. Whaley, “Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops.”

a comparison of the narrator's perspective in GA and GD. She argues that GA is typified by indirect characterization and an indifference to overtly religious material, whereas Arngrímur serves as an interpretive, didactic, and religiously-oriented narrator in GD.<sup>25</sup> These differences are not particularly surprising. As a compilation with many different sources, GA seems to be an attempt to put together Guðmundr's biography. On the other hand, GD clearly represents a saint's life. A comparison between GC and GD may have proven more illuminating since both redactors were clearly working in the field of hagiography.<sup>26</sup> Hunt's dissertation includes an extremely useful chapter on the treatment of religious material in GA and GD.<sup>27</sup> While this chapter discusses Guðmundr's miracles, his water-miracles are not treated in any detail.

Joanna Skórzewska's "Constructing a *Cultus*: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources" is an in-depth study of the phenomenon of Guðmundr's saintliness. The dissertation includes discussions of Guðmundr's miracles – including water miracles – from his priesthood through 1400.<sup>28</sup> However, the scope of her thesis does not allow for a detailed study of Guðmundr's water miracles. This thesis will aim to fill that gap. My primary goal is to analyze how the fourteenth century redactions (especially GB and GD) deal with the theme of Guðmundr's vast consecrations of water. The GB and GD redactors were both treating historical memories of Guðmundr's holiness – as well as conforming to the generic demands of hagiography.

As I will discuss below, Guðmundr's vast consecrations of wells and springs throughout Iceland in many ways seem to be anomalous. The fourteenth century hagiographers needed to make a case for the holiness and righteousness of this practice. They accomplished this by adding a number of passages to their hagiographies – for example, a dialogue between Guðmundr the archbishop (GB and GD), new prologues and an afterword (GB), and new water miracles (GB and GD). This thesis represents the

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<sup>25</sup> Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 246-249.

<sup>26</sup> As with my thesis, the lack of a published edition of GC is regrettable.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-236.

<sup>28</sup> See Joanna Skórzewska, "Constructing a *Cultus*: The Life and Veneration of Guðmundr Arason (1161-1237) in the Icelandic Written Sources," (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2007), 85-95, 121-128, 130-132, 158-160, 197-205.

first in-depth study of these passages as they relate to justifying Guðmundr's vast consecrations of water.

I will also discuss the resistance to, and disbelief surrounding, Guðmundr's water consecrations. I will explore this subject as a consistent theme in Guðmundr's hagiographies. Episodes of resistance and disbelief include: a priest named Ljótr who makes disparaging remarks about Guðmundr's water, unnamed men who desecrate one of Guðmundr's wells, and a farmer who suggests that "Bishop Árni" banned the practice of seeking water from Guðmundr's springs. These episodes leave us with some difficult questions: was there large-scale opposition in the medieval Icelandic Church (or population) to Guðmundr's consecrations of water? Or are these episodes primarily literary constructions, reflecting the anxieties of the hagiographers?

The priest Ljótr ultimately repents his condemnations of Guðmundr's consecrations after Guðmundr's water revives his drowned son. Such miracles of revenge and repentance were common in European hagiographies as a way to expose and counter saints' doubters. However, I will show that other episodes of doubt towards Guðmundr's water do not have such clear-cut outcomes. These episodes present a more mixed portrayal of Guðmundr's water-miracles and offer a window into how far the limits of holiness could be claimed in medieval Iceland.

### **Hagiography, Historicity, and Guðmundr's Water**

The very end of the saga of Iceland's first saint describes the *translatio* of Þorlákr's relics into a shrine (*skrín*) built by the most talented smith in Iceland. Immediately afterwards, the saga draws to a close with a description of the "alls konar jarteinir" that occur at this shrine: "Þar fá blindir sýn, daufir heyrn, krypplingar réttask, líkþráir hreinsask, haltir ganga, vitstolnir ok djǼfulóðir fá fulla bót..."<sup>29</sup> The Gospel of Matthew describes Jesus' miraculous powers with a nearly-identical list: "et accesserunt ad eum turbae multae habentes secum mutos clodos caecos debiles et alios multos et proiecerunt eos ad pedes eius et curavit eos..."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ed., *Þorláks saga A* (ÞA) in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Híð íslenska fornritafélag, 2002), 99.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 15:30. All citations of the Vulgate are from *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1985).

This correspondence should come as no surprise to any student of hagiography. Since hagiographic conventions were ultimately derived from the perfect model of Christ's life on earth, the supreme parallel for all the miracles of the saints was the miracles of Christ.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, *Þorláks saga* is built on scriptural quotation and the fulfillment of scripture in Þorlákr's life is a constant theme in his saga.<sup>32</sup> The frequency of models and conventions in hagiography is well-documented and abundant. Hagiographers often described their subject's lives, deaths, and miracles according to a well-worn, established paradigm.

The *Guðmundar sögur* are no different. One of the first supernatural occurrences involves the sighting of a bird on Guðmundr's shoulder:

ok kemr Már bonde gangande til kirkiu. Eʒ er hann kom i kirkiu. þa sa hann at fugl litill flo upp af avxl G(uðmunde) preste ilopt. ok hvarf honum þa. Hann þottiz eige uita huat fugla þat var. þui at hann uar ouanr at sea heilagan anda.<sup>33</sup>

In all of the Gospels, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove appears above Christ after his baptism in the River Jordan.<sup>34</sup> As we will see, the appearance of the Holy Spirit during Christ's baptism was of central importance to Guðmundr's justifications for his vast consecrations of water before the archbishop in GB and GD. In addition to the model of Christ, the fourteenth century hagiographers (especially Arngrímr) make frequent attempts to link Guðmundr with more-established saintly figures, especially Ambrose of Milan and the Virgin Mary.<sup>35</sup> Franciscan and other mendicant spiritual currents (especially the ideal of poverty and *imitatio Christi*) that may have influenced Guðmundr and the depiction of his sanctity have also been discussed.<sup>36</sup>

The prevalence of models and conventions in saints' lives presents difficulties for modern researchers. Hagiographic texts must be read first as hagiographies, not as biographies or histories. As a genre, hagiography had a distinct set of objectives. First

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<sup>31</sup> Decima Douie and David Farmer, eds., *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis: The Life of St. Hugh of Lincoln by Adam of Eynsham* (Oxford, 1961), xiii.

<sup>32</sup> Reidar Astås, "Om bibelanvendelse i *Þorláks saga byskups*," *Alvíssmál* 3 (1994), 73-96.

<sup>33</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 69-70. Cf. GD, 13.

<sup>34</sup> "...et statim ascendens de aqua vidit apertos caelos et Spiritum tamquam columbam descendentem et manentem in ipso..." Mark 1:10. Matthew 3:16. Luke 3:22. John 1:32.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. GD, 17-18, 27, 38-39.

<sup>36</sup> Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Að kenna og rita tíða á millum: Um trúarviðhorf Guðmundar Arasonar," *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 229-238. See also *Íslensk Bókmenntasaga*, vol. 2, 258 (Sverrir Tómasson). Cf. Hjalti Hugason, "Guðmundur Arason: kynlegur kvistur úr röðum Viktorína," *Ritröð Guðfræðistofnunar / Studia Theologica Islandica* 17 (2003), 161-192, esp. 165-178.

and foremost, hagiographers intended to illustrate the exemplary behavior of their subjects. As Thomas Heffernan writes, “The lives of saints were sacred stories designed to teach the faithful to imitate actions which the community had decided were paradigmatic.”<sup>37</sup> In some ways, Guðmundr was a troublesome saint in this respect. While Guðmundr emerges from his hagiographies as a *vir dei* and a defender of the Church, the blow-by-blow descriptions of his bloody battles with chieftains in GA and GB cannot be immediately understood as edificatory. As I will discuss, his *in vita* miracles were also a source of controversy. Moreover, none of the *Guðmundar sögur* devotes much attention to what was supposed to be a medieval bishop’s primary duty – pastoral care. Margaret Hunt summarizes the situation well:

It is unlikely that [GA] was conceived of by author or audience as a didactic document. While Arngrímr does idealize Guðmundr and includes many overtly didactic passages, the depiction of a model bishop performing his daily duties is not included in GD... several *biskupa sögur* portray their heroes as objects to be imitated. Of the two functions of a saint, fostering imitation and admiration, Arngrímr seems to choose the latter... Guðmundr is consistently shown as a saint, and his elevation above the strictly human sphere reduces his role as a model for others.<sup>38</sup>

As elsewhere in medieval Europe, the authors of saints’ lives in medieval Iceland were churchmen familiar with current patterns of sanctity. Consequently, it is often difficult to separate the biography of, or attitudes towards, a saint from these patterns. From the perspective of the hagiographer, drawing parallels between his subject and other saints and using material from other saints’ lives was not literary theft. Instead, the substitution of motifs in hagiographies was based on a corporate understanding of the character of holy men and on the doctrine of *communio sanctorum*.<sup>39</sup> As Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12, all Christians – living and dead – share a spiritual union; the Church is one body. Therefore, the miracles performed by one holy man could also be duplicated and amplified by another. However, it is misleading to read hagiographic texts solely as

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5. I would argue that hagiographies were only didactic to an extent. The extreme ascetic practices of some later medieval saints led their hagiographers to draw a distinction between piety that should be wondered at and piety that should be imitated. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>38</sup> Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 205.

<sup>39</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography* 114-115.

constant repetitions of the same structures and motifs. Unique features do appear, as my discussion of Guðmundr's water blessings will make clear.

One of the most prevalent themes in all writings about Guðmundr is his consecration of wells and springs (*brunnar*) at which people were healed.<sup>40</sup> The use of holy water for a number of purposes is well-documented throughout the Middle Ages. Baptismal water played a symbolic purifying role for Christians. Early medieval documents testify to the use of holy water for blessing farms, houses, and healing the sick.<sup>41</sup> Hincmar of Reims (d. 882), Pope Leo IV (d. 855), and Regino of Prüm (d. 915) all mandated that priests bless water in their churches each Sunday and sprinkle the congregants with it. Theoretically, this blessing sanctified the water, regardless of the quality of the priest who performed the blessing. However, as I will discuss below, Guðmundr's hagiographers were eager to show that Guðmundr's blessing was more powerful than others.<sup>42</sup> In Iceland, Þorlákr himself was said to have consecrated water for healing the sick.<sup>43</sup> *Hungrvaka* describes a missionary bishop from Saxony named Bjarnvarðr who consecrated widely: "Hann vígði marga hluti þá er mÄrg merki hafa á orðit, kirkjur ok klukkur, brúar ok brunna, vÄð ok vÄtn, bjÄrg ok bjÄllur..."<sup>44</sup> While this passage hints that Bishop Bjarnvarðr may have been the first to bless wells throughout Iceland, the use of alliterative pairs suggests that the author was primarily concerned with poetic effect, not historicity.

Compared to these brief descriptions, Guðmundr's relationship with consecrated water is an extremely varied and extensive theme in his sagas. He blessed wells and springs, sprinkled holy water where it was needed, and consecrated a tub of water for healing the sick. Many of these uses were completely orthodox. The idea that water somehow connected with a saint can heal the sick is a very common hagiographic motif. Christ gave living water to a woman in Samaria;<sup>45</sup> St. Benedict, St. Anselm, and St.

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<sup>40</sup> See, among others, *Guðmundar sögur*, 72, 101, 103, 109-110 and GB, 611-612.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2000), 416-417. Ch. Daxelmüller, "Wasser: Volkskunde," in Gloria Avella-Windhalm, et. al. eds., *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 8 (Zurich: Artemis, 1980 – 1999), 2062-2064.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. GD, 18-19.

<sup>43</sup> ÞA, 60-61.

<sup>44</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ed., *Hungrvaka in Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Híð íslenska fornritafélag, 2002), 12.

<sup>45</sup> John 4:5-15.

Dunstan all drew healing water from a rock;<sup>46</sup> a spring that flowed from the spot of St. Óláfr's martyrdom cured many ill people.<sup>47</sup> The practice of seeking holy water from a spring, by itself, is by no means unique to Guðmundr's *cultus*. Wells associated with saints' cults were sites of pilgrimage in Ireland, England, Germany, and Scandinavia throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup> Some early medieval synods expressed concerns with such holy wells, but this concern was generally directed against the pagan worship of water and other primary elements.<sup>49</sup> Margaret Cormack has surveyed the evidence and found no indication of wells and springs being venerated as a part of pre-Christian religious practice in Iceland.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Guðmundr's consecrations of wells and springs cannot be understood as an attempt to incorporate pre-Christian holy sites into orthodox Christianity. Guðmundr's water-blessings seem to be acts of original sanctification.

If the blessing of holy water and the veneration of saints' wells were both commonplace in the Middle Ages, what, if anything, was unique about Guðmundr's water-consecrations? In my opinion, the uniqueness lies in the *extent*. The distinguishing feature of these wells and springs is that Guðmundr consecrated them throughout the land. Unlike the European holy springs that often sprung forth from the sites of martyrdoms, Guðmundr's springs were extremely loosely connected with a specific event. Guðmundr did not do anything particularly memorable at these places; he merely blessed the water. These sites then became permanent features of the medieval Icelandic landscape. The fourteenth century hagiographers insist that Guðmundr consecrated springs everywhere he went and that this water was capable of producing miracles. The hagiographies give the impression that nearly every farm in Iceland possessed a local site where Icelanders could travel to obtain holy water which might cure their ills. In this way, Guðmundr's wells seem to have replaced the role traditionally occupied by relics. If we are to believe the fourteenth century *vitae*, people did not have to travel far to visit one of Guðmundr's springs in the hope of miraculous healing.

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<sup>46</sup> Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event 1000-1215* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 169. These miracles are modeled on Numbers 20:8-13, which describes Moses drawing water from a rock. See also the use of holy water for healing the sick in *HMS*, vol. 1, 197.

<sup>47</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965), 405.

<sup>48</sup> Daxelmüller, "Wasser. Volkskunde" 2062-2064.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2064. Cormack, "Holy Wells" 233-234. As I will discuss below, the accusations leveled against Guðmundr's water by a doubting priest are in a similar vein.

<sup>50</sup> Cormack, "Holy Wells" 229-233.

This represents the inverse of typical patterns of devotion to a saint. Devotion to most European saints was focused on an ecclesiastically-monitored shrine, where miracle cures could be witnessed and recorded by churchmen of unimpeachable reputation. The miracles attributed to the translation of Þorlákr are described as being witnessed by bishops and powerful Icelandic chieftains.<sup>51</sup> While miracles were increasingly taking place away from a saint's grave in the later Middle Ages, Guðmundr's springs throughout the land represent an *extreme* diffusion of the idea of a "sacred place" where miracles might occur. The fourteenth century hagiographies thus claimed holiness within very generous limits. They would have to answer questions about pushing the boundaries of what could be considered holy. As Guðmundr explains to the archbishop in the B redaction:

... [óvinir mínir] segja brunna þá, er uppsprettur eru, eigi helgari, þótt ek krisma eða sýngja yfir guðs orð, en aðrir þeir er ekki er yfir sýngit, en þeir kalla mér guðlastan í at gera slíkt, ok gangi þar yfir fénaðr ok illkvikvendi síþan.<sup>52</sup>

The historicity of the phenomenon of Guðmundr's wells is an open question. The textual tradition presents insights and difficulties. It seems likely that the *Prestssaga* was composed around 1240 by someone who knew Guðmundr well. Guðbrandr Vigfússon was the first to suggest that Lambkár Þorgilsson, a close follower of the bishop, was the author of the *Prestssaga*, based on Lambkár's presence at various events in Guðmundr's life.<sup>53</sup> This attribution remains entirely speculative. As I discussed above, the *Prestssaga* is only loosely based on hagiographic paradigms; it is perhaps equally concerned with "historical" or "annalistic" material. Even in the context of hagiographic paradigms, Guðmundr's sanctification of wells and springs throughout Iceland seems to be largely original. For these reasons, it seems likely that the "historical" Guðmundr did consecrate wells and springs widely. However, it bears repeating that our versions of the *Prestssaga* are a fourteenth century redactions, not the original text.

The continuous popularity of Guðmundr's springs is much more in doubt. Approximately seventy-five years passed between Guðmundr's death and the writing of

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<sup>51</sup> ÞA, 86-89.

<sup>52</sup> GB, 577.

<sup>53</sup> Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Formáli* in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1, lix-lx.

the *vitae* (GB, GC, GD), whose narratives depict miracles at Guðmundr's wells in the early fourteenth century. In one miracle, Arngrímr attempts to bridge this gap:

[Þorgerðr] hafði verit hjá Guðmundi biskupi, þá er hann var í Odda hjá Sæmundi... Þá er hún var fimtög at aldri ok þrim vetrum meirr, tók hún augnaverki... varð hún með öllu steinblind, ok stóð með því um xxx ára. Hún hafði hjá sér dagliga vatn Guðmundar biskups, ok bar þat upp í skoltana, ok þóttist linan af fá, er kalt var; ... Margan tíma sótti ek, bróðir Arngrímr, henni þetta vatn í mínum barndómi, þvíat hún var með feðr mínum fimtán vetr, ok þar andaðist hún, sem hún hafði lxxx ára ok þrjú ár. Fékk hún sýn sína á Guðmundardag, ok var skygn, svá at hún sá mann á hesti um hálfjórðungs veg; prófaði þetta faðir minn ok margir aðrir dugandi menn, en hún lifði tvá vetr síðan.<sup>54</sup>

Arngrímr thereby establishes continuous devotion to Guðmundr's water from the bishop's lifetime to his own day and represents himself as a first-hand witness to its miraculous powers. In a similar spirit, the redactor of GB includes a few water-miracles that are dated to the early fourteenth century and sworn to by contemporaries.<sup>55</sup>

Viewed in the best light possible, these miracles indicate that a small cult around Guðmundr's water perdured from the mid-thirteenth century through the early fourteenth century. However, the evidence for such a cult is limited to the *Guðmundar sögur*. No laws or diplomas address the topic of Guðmundr's wells. In fact, as Joanna Skórzewska has pointed out, the non-saga evidence for Guðmundr's *cultus* (e.g. church dedications, images, *máldagar*, etc.) is very limited.<sup>56</sup> Margaret Cormack doubts that the anniversary of Guðmundr's death was ever adopted by the general assembly, since Guðmundr's feast / mass is not mentioned in any manuscripts relating to Christian laws.<sup>57</sup> The evidence for the veneration of the wells is restricted to the fourteenth century redactions and the folklore and place names (pl. *Gvendarbrunnar*) from later centuries.

This thesis does not aim to document the extent of Guðmundr's water *cultus*. Instead, I will focus on how the fourteenth century hagiographers dealt with the issues surrounding Guðmundr's vast water consecrations and their accompanying miracles. These consecrations and miracles were well-represented in the written tradition

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<sup>54</sup> GD, 169-170.

<sup>55</sup> GB, 616.

<sup>56</sup> Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cultus* 210-218.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1994), 20.

(especially the *Prestssaga*) that the *vitae* –writers constructed their hagiographies around. In certain areas, Guðmundr’s wells may have survived in historical memories and traditions among contemporaries in the early fourteenth century. The sanctity of holy water was well-established in medieval-religious thought. Could consecrated water be an agent of divine grace, capable of producing a miracle? Of course. What about the water in wells and springs throughout the Icelandic landscape blessed by a charismatic and controversial priest / bishop? Guðmundr’s hagiographers needed to deal with this question.

### **Debating the Miraculous in Medieval Iceland**

*Íslendinga saga* is one of the oldest texts that suggests ambiguous attitudes towards Guðmundr’s miracles during his time as bishop. In the midst of their battle with the bishop, the author describes a conversation between Guðmundr’s enemies, the chieftans Arnórr and Sighvatr:

Arnór mælti: ‘Í sumar hefir mér verið kvellingasamt en er mér komu orð Reykdæla að þeir þyrftu liðs við, hóf af mér allar vomur svo að eg kenni mér hvergi illt.’  
‘Það mun þér þykja jartegn,’ segir Sighvatur.  
Arnór segir, ‘Slíkt kalla eg atburð en eigi jartegn.’<sup>58</sup>

In context, this is clearly an underhanded wisecrack directed at Guðmundr. Arnórr’s response differentiates between what a sensible person would call an event and what Guðmundr would likely call a miracle. Arnórr describes a series of events that are implicitly *contra naturam*. There is obviously nothing about the prospect of fighting Guðmundr that should have cured his illness. This passage gives us an opportunity to reconsider the meanings of *jartein* in medieval Iceland and how this discussion might relate to Guðmundr’s holy water. *Jartein* literally means a “proof or token.”<sup>59</sup> The oldest extant Icelandic manuscripts translate *miraculum* into *jartein*.<sup>60</sup> In the context of saintly miracles, a *jartein* is proof for the suppliant of the miracle and all witnesses (including the readers and listeners) that the saint has been favored and granted power by God.

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<sup>58</sup> Örnólfur Thorsson, et. al. eds., *Sturlunga saga* (Reykjavík: Svart á hvítu, 1988), 261.

<sup>59</sup> The origins of the word are disputed. See Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (Reykjavík: Orðabók Háskólans, 1989), 430.

<sup>60</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, *Inngangur* in Sverrir Tómasson, Bragi Halldórsson, and Einar Sigurbjörnsson, eds., *Heilagra karla sögur* (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskola Íslands, 2007), xlii.

In this passage, Arnórr suggests that even an incident of unexplained healing can be regarded as an *atburðr* “something that happens,” not a proof of God’s power. Peter Foote regards this passage as symbolic of secular attitudes in medieval Iceland.<sup>61</sup> Arnórr’s words represent less of a challenge to Guðmundr’s personal holiness than to the ideologies he represents - which see signs of God’s power in daily life, especially in matters of sickness and health.

The following passage from the miracles of Saint Martin seems to similarly distinguish *atburðr* and *jartein*: “En til þess at þat er synt, at þetta varð fyrir iarteinir Martini en eigi atburð, þa kom sia en sama rid aprt i heradit a þeim misserum, sem Martinus andadiz...”<sup>62</sup> However, the distinction is somewhat equivocal. In the miracles surrounding this same passage from *Martins saga*, the translator repeatedly uses *atburðr* where we might expect *jartein* (if there was indeed a very clear distinction between the two). For example, after Martin turns back a great serpent from a river, “Allir undruduz, þeir er vid voru staddir ok sa þenna atburð.”<sup>63</sup> As the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* notes, *atburðr* encompasses not only “events” but also “supernatural occurrences.”<sup>64</sup>

In the D redaction of *Guðmundar saga*, Arngrímr includes the same conversation between Arnórr and Sighvatr in order to show “...hversu illgjarn andi gladdist í þvílíkum gjörðum ok gabbaði...”<sup>65</sup> Compared with *Íslendinga saga*, Arngrímr’s version of the dialogue uses specific terminology to distinguish between miracles and events: “‘Þat muntu kalla jartegn,’ segir Sighvatr. ‘Nei,’ segir Arnórr, ‘þat kalla ek merkiligan mótburð.’”<sup>66</sup> The word *mótburðr* is attested in few other places, but it seems to clearly indicate a “coincidence” (presumably without any supernatural influence). For example, compare the use of *mótburðr* in this passage from *Árna saga biskups*:

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Foote, “Secular Attitudes in Early Iceland,” in *Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies* (Odense, 1984), 46.

<sup>62</sup> *HMS*, vol. 1, 628. See Sverrir Tómasson, *Inngangur in Heilagra karla sögur*, xliii-xlv.

<sup>63</sup> *HMS*, vol. 1, 629.

<sup>64</sup> James E. Kirk, et. al. eds., *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog / A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, 1 bind: a-bam (København: Arnamagnæanske Kommission, 1995), 682 .

<sup>65</sup> GD, 113.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

Sá mótbuðr varð ok at Jón erkibyskup dauðr ok í jörð grafinn í Skörum í VestraGautlandi. Neytti hann þess þjónustu ok líkflutnings aptr til stóls síns sem áðr gerðiz formaðr at flæma hann frá stóli lifanda.<sup>67</sup>

Guðmundr's hagiographers refer to the miracles at his wells and springs with wide-ranging terminology: "dásamligir hlutir,"<sup>68</sup> "heilagar jartegnir,"<sup>69</sup> "jartegn,"<sup>70</sup> "mikill tákn,"<sup>71</sup> "merkiligir atburðir,"<sup>72</sup> "stórgerðir atburðir,"<sup>73</sup> "atburðir."<sup>74</sup> It is not clear that the word *jartein*, in and of itself, indicates that a particular incident was valued as more miraculous than others.<sup>75</sup> In at least one example from GA, *iartein* is used to refer to particularly atrocious deeds. After Sturla and Sighvatr castrate two priests in front of Guðmundr, the saga reports: "Vøldo nu byskupi ^org afaryrðe með auðrum storum iarteinum."<sup>76</sup> However, the ambiguity surrounding *jartein* should not be pushed too far. In most hagiographies, saints' miracles are clearly distinguished as a separate section of the narrative (usually at the end).

Although Guðmundr performed most of his miracles in the course of his life, the redactors of GB and GD both make some effort to group and categorize them.<sup>77</sup> Arngrímr uses specific terminology to distinguish miraculous phenomena. When introducing two miracles involving Guðmundr's water, Arngrímr notes: "... hefir vatnið í hvárumtveggja stað um vendat sinni náttúru í annat efni, en líkanligt mátti verða eðr náttúrulegt."<sup>78</sup> In these cases, Guðmundr's water behaved in a way clearly contrary to natural processes – acting as a fuel for fire.<sup>79</sup> Arngrímr's use of the *contra naturam* motif

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<sup>67</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ed., *Árna saga biskups in Biskupa sögur*, vol. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998), 134.

<sup>68</sup> GD, 176.

<sup>69</sup> GD, 181.

<sup>70</sup> GD, 174; GB, 608, 616.

<sup>71</sup> GB, 595.

<sup>72</sup> GB, 596.

<sup>73</sup> GB, 606.

<sup>74</sup> GB, 596.

<sup>75</sup> See Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 209-216.

<sup>76</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 211.

<sup>77</sup> For example, miracles involving water are grouped together in GB, 611-612, followed by miracles involving vows in GB, 612-616. In GD, Guðmundr's priestly miracles are divided between miracles that occurred at a distance (GD, 24-25) and miracles and occurred in Guðmundr's presence (GD, 25-31). Most of his miracles as bishop are found in GD, 132-139.

<sup>78</sup> GD, 176. See also GD, 134-135.

<sup>79</sup> As Vauchez notes, the categories quickly broke down: "In fact, [papal curialists] always came up against the same obstacle: to establish concretely what was *supra*, *contra*, or *praeter naturam*, the clergy of the early fourteenth century would have to have been able to refer to a rigorous definition of Nature which was

is significant since late thirteenth and early fourteenth century canonization processes were increasingly emphasizing that definitive miracles operated contrary to nature.<sup>80</sup>

In her doctoral thesis on the construction of Guðmundr's *cultus*, Joanna Skórzewska states that unlike the European narratives, the debate over what was a miracle and what was natural is not reflected in the Icelandic hagiographic material. She further argues that, "The authors do not seem to be preoccupied with the problem of 'authentic' or 'false' miracles either, the holiness of the native bishops seems to be undisputable and their acts fully justified."<sup>81</sup>

I think that these positions need to be refined. To some extent, a scholastic and theological discussion of the theory of miracles (as represented by Augustine, Gregory the Great, or Bernard of Clairvaux) is lacking in the Icelandic hagiographic material. But as the passage from *Íslendinga saga* makes clear, there must have been the fundamentals of a discussion over what was natural and what was miraculous in medieval Iceland. Arngrím's revision of "atburður" to "merkligan mótburður" and his explicit use of the *contra naturam* category of miracles plainly show that he was very aware of medieval European modes of thought regarding miracles and that he was keen to make a distinction between the natural and the miraculous.

In my opinion, it is no coincidence that many of these issues were raised by the discussion of Guðmundr's sanctity in particular. To the extent that the native Icelandic hagiographic material does not deal with sorcery and magicians, it is true that an overt distinction between "authentic" and "false" miracles is lacking. However, as I argue below, the charges against Guðmundr's water leveled by a doubting priest may not be too far removed from this type of accusation. As I will show, the redactor of GB was intensely focused on the truth of Guðmundr's miracles and the lies of his doubters. Significantly, these issues were raised as a reaction to Guðmundr's incredibly-vast consecrations of water. This thesis will also show that there was some anxiety over the depiction of Guðmundr's holiness (especially in GB). This anxiety seems to stem from

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beyond their reach... they appreciated the reality and the value of miracles from an apologetic perspective." André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 497-498.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 481-498. For the historical background on miracles as *contra naturam*, see Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* 5-9.

<sup>81</sup> Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cultus* 126.

the expansive limits within which Guðmundr claimed holiness, particularly in regards to his consecrations of water. I will show that we can use Guðmundr's miraculous water as a way of better understanding what constituted "holy matter," capable of producing a *jartein* in medieval Iceland.

### **The Scope of Guðmundr's Water Miracles**

In all of his sagas, Guðmundr's relationship with water is an extremely extensive and varied theme. The concept of "Guðmundr's water" is developed in the *Prestssaga*: "ok uigir hann þar brunna. uiða. ok fengu menn huør uetna bot af meina sinna. af uatne hans ok yfir sǫngum."<sup>82</sup> As discussed above, Guðmundr's practice of consecrating wells throughout the land seems to be a largely original act of sanctification. The act of blessing wells so widely suggests that Guðmundr took an active role in the sanctification of water, although all of his hagiographers downplay this aspect. None of the sagas divulges the specific details of what Guðmundr's consecrations entailed; the narratives are silent as to whether he blessed the water with the sign of the cross, invoked particular saints, or sang particular prayers.

In its annalistic nature, the *Prestssaga* frequently describes Guðmundr's travels as a priest in detail. During these journeys, the *Prestssaga* reports that Guðmundr consecrated wells and springs extensively: "Þaðan ferr hann austr undir Eyia fiøll. ok sua austr a Siðu. ok yfir Austf(iørðo). ok uigir hann þar brunna a huerium bæ er hann giste."<sup>83</sup> While they are less specific about the exact locations Guðmundr visited (this is especially true for Arngrímr), the redactors of GB and GD both elaborate on the theme of Guðmundr's wide travels and wide consecrations of water. As Arngrímr describes:

Nú var meira magn í framferð þessari um öll xvj ár, er hann stóð í prestdóminum, en vér megim eða kunnim í frásögn færa með stöddum greinum, því at meirr en um sinn umkríngdi hann landit nálíga með vatnvígslum ok heilsugjöfum, svá at fjögurra vegna fluttist í allar ættir landsins sú blezan guðs, er fylgdi hans bænar orðum. Þar sem eigi voru fagrir brunnar, vígði hann rennandi vötn eða vöð, mönnum til farsældar... Hjá þjóðveginum landsins á fjöllum uppi vígði hann brunna, fyrir bæn vina sinna, drekka menn þar af árlíga, sem um ríða. Optlíga gera ok þessháttar vötn meiri réttarbót, þá er úfærast hestar manna, en fá þar af

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<sup>82</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 103.

<sup>83</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 118.

fljótan bata, ok þat trúum vér öngan mann letrum lykta, hversu hans vötn ok vígslur hafa veitt mönnum ok smala mikinn fagnað, ok enn gera.<sup>84</sup>

Arngrímr also hints that Guðmundr consecrated many wells during his trips to Norway. The redactor of GB makes similar suggestions.<sup>85</sup>

In spite of these lofty claims, there are few specifically-documented instances in which people are healed by visiting Guðmundr's springs while he was a priest.<sup>86</sup> Both GB and GD include some *post mortem* miracles in which people receive relief after seeking water from Guðmundr's wells.<sup>87</sup> In these instances, the fourteenth century redactors seem to portray Guðmundr's springs as a replacement for the cult of relics – which never seem to be significant for Guðmundr. The healings of a number of animals by Guðmundr's springs are well-attested in the fourteenth century hagiographies. These include a number of horses with eye problems<sup>88</sup> and a dog.<sup>89</sup>

Compared with the healing abilities of Guðmundr's water, the hagiographers place at least as much emphasis on its practical uses and inherently miraculous properties. Guðmundr's water successfully extinguishes a series of fires after all other measures have failed.<sup>90</sup> It also serves as fuel for fire in a number of instances; as we have seen, Arngrímr is eager to emphasize that these belong to the *contra naturam* category of miracles.<sup>91</sup> An especially charming story that captured the medieval Icelandic imagination involves a woman in Lambadalr who is seeking water from one of Guðmundr's springs:

Hon mæltist illa um, er hon hafði ekki til at hafa heim vatnit með sér. Hon tók línúfu af höfði sér, ok mælti svá: 'eigi mun ek minn[a] af fá vatninu, en þat, at vinda húfuna vota.' Tekr hon nú húfuna, ok fyllir af vatninu, en hon lak ekki heldr enn it þéttasta kerald, ok eigi var hon heldr vot. Nú þótti þetta merkiligr [atburðr].<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> GD, 18. Similar sentiments are expressed in GB, 595.

<sup>85</sup> See GD, 130 and GB, 589.

<sup>86</sup> For example, see GD, 24.

<sup>87</sup> See GB, 616-618 and GD, 167, 169-170.

<sup>88</sup> GB, 608-609, 616 and GD, 177.

<sup>89</sup> GD, 139.

<sup>90</sup> GD, 20-21 and GB, 609.

<sup>91</sup> GD 176-177; GB, 596, 616.

<sup>92</sup> GB, 596.

It must be stressed that the concept of Guðmundr's water was not limited to the consecration of wells and springs. In the sagas, Guðmundr seems to always have consecrated water nearby. Arngrímur specifically notes that if Guðmundr's blessing was enough to induce miracles at a distance, his bodily presence carried even greater power:

Nú ef vatni sira Guðmundar fylgði þvílíkr kraptr hvar er þat fór eða fluttist í fjarska við hann, má þat vitr maðr vel hugleiða, hveðrar dygðar þat mundi þá vera, er hann sjálfr fylgði fram með bænum sínum ok list heilags anda, sem enn sýnist í því er eptir ferr.<sup>93</sup>

By sprinkling consecrated water – in conjunction with various other measures – Guðmundr heals a cripple,<sup>94</sup> a tumor,<sup>95</sup> a throat disease,<sup>96</sup> and ends two plagues.<sup>97</sup> Consecrated water also plays a role in Guðmundr's defeat of two separate trolls.<sup>98</sup> According to the hagiographers, Guðmundr blessed bodies of water besides wells and springs. At the behest of Bishop Páll, Guðmundr consecrated a tub of water for healing the sick during Þorlákr's *translatio*.<sup>99</sup> GB also includes a miracle in which the bishop blesses the sea, miraculously producing a huge number of fish for the bishop's host.<sup>100</sup> Finally, Arngrímur includes one miracle in which Guðmundr plays a completely passive role: a farmer receives relief from his eye pain after dabbing his eyes with water that Guðmundr washed in.<sup>101</sup> This type of miracle, in which an item becomes holy after incidental contact with the saint's body, has many medieval parallels. For example, a blind man received his sight after touching his eyes with water that had been used to wash the martyred body of Saint Óláfr.<sup>102</sup>

### **Depicting *in vita* Miracles and Justifying Guðmundr's Power**

One of the most controversial aspects of Guðmundr's water miracles was that many took place while Guðmundr was alive. Guðmundr is noteworthy among Icelandic

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<sup>93</sup> GD, 25.

<sup>94</sup> GB, 606.

<sup>95</sup> GB, 611.

<sup>96</sup> GD, 19-20.

<sup>97</sup> GD, 35.

<sup>98</sup> GB, 607; GD, 26.

<sup>99</sup> GD, 23.

<sup>100</sup> GB, 593-594.

<sup>101</sup> GD, 22.

<sup>102</sup> F. Metcalfe, ed., *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi: From a Twelfth-Century Manuscript in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 74-75.

and European saints because the majority of his miracles occurred *in vita*. At some level, the *vitae* writers had to deal with the fact that Guðmundr must have assumed an active role in blessing and sanctifying his miraculous waters. Throughout the Middle Ages, the cult of a living saint and *in vita* miracles were rarely perceived as positive phenomena. This sentiment is clearly expressed in Icelandic hagiographic writings. In varying degrees, the first versions of both *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga* include the following passage from a sermon attributed to Maximus of Turin:

Ne laudaueris hominem in uita sua tamquam si diceret: lauda post vitam, magnifica post consummacionem. Dupplici enim ex causa, ut sacra scriptura testatur, utilius est hominum magis memorie laudem dare quam uite, ut illo potissimum tempore merita sanctitatis extollantur, quando nec laudantem adulacio nocet nec laudatum temptat elacio.<sup>103</sup>

In the Latin fragments of *Þorláks saga*, only the line “tamquam si diceret: lauda post vitam, magnifica post consummacionem” is omitted.<sup>104</sup> The Old Icelandic version of *Þorláks saga* is likely a translation of the original Latin.<sup>105</sup> A variation of the same text is preserved in chapter nine of the S recension of *Jóns saga*.<sup>106</sup>

Maximus of Turin was a fifth century bishop and theologian. Very little is known about his life and it is extremely difficult to assign particular writings to him with any certainty.<sup>107</sup> This passage comes from a sermon on Saint Eusebius, but it does not seem to be part of the original collection of Maximus’ writings. While the Pseudo-Maximus interpolation has been treated by Peter Foote and Gottskálk Jensson for its textual significance, I think it also deserves to be examined for the message it communicates about miracles and their role in establishing sanctity.<sup>108</sup> This message would have been especially relevant for the contemporary audiences of *Þorláks saga* and *Jóns saga*.

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<sup>103</sup> *PL*, vol. 57 c. 419.

<sup>104</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ed., *Latínubrot um Þorlák byskup* in *Biskupa Sögur*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2002), 353.

<sup>105</sup> See Gottskálk Jensson, “The Lost Latin Literature of Medieval Iceland: The Fragments of the *Vita Sancti Thorlaci* and Other Evidence,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 79 (2004), 150-170. Compare the Latin with ÞA, 60-61.

<sup>106</sup> Peter Foote, ed., *Jóns saga ins helga* in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1 *síðari hluti* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2003), 221-222.

<sup>107</sup> Almut Mutzenbecher, “Maximus und Sein Werk” in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina XXIII Maximi Episcopi Taurinensis* (Turnhout: Brepolus, 1962), 15-36.

<sup>108</sup> Jensson, “The Lost Latin Literature” 165-166. Peter Foote, *Formáli* in Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson, and Peter Foote, eds., *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2003), cclii – cclv.

From the early medieval world of Maximus to the early thirteenth century world of *Þorláks saga* and beyond, the Church frowned on praising a would-be saint during his lifetime. The biblical support for this attitude was based on a verse in Ecclesiastes (11:30): “Ante mortem ne laudes hominem...” The idea of *in vita* miracles was also frowned upon. A living man’s pride in his ability to perform miracles could lead to vanity – which would undermine the reason that a saint was granted miracles in the first place – because of his virtues.

The standard for what constituted a true miracle of a true saint in the eyes of the Church was being raised throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Increasingly strict papal canonization policy can be seen as a response to the explosion of local saints.<sup>109</sup> Many of Pope Innocent III’s (d. 1216) extant writings underscore that both good deeds *in vita* and miracles after death were necessary for canonization. All four of Innocent’s extant canonization bulls cite 2 Corinthians 11:14: “et non mirum ipse enim Satanas transfiguratur se in angelum lucis.” Innocent was clearly concerned that false prophets, like the magicians of the pharaoh, might perform signs and miracles.<sup>110</sup> After a saint’s death, the situation was much simpler: the miracles worked as a result of invocations and relics served as confirmation that an individual had lived a virtuous and saintly life.

Of course, all versions of Guðmundr’s *vita* were written long after his death and the hagiographers’ praise for Guðmundr would not tempt his vanity. However, the portrayal of Guðmundr’s numerous *in vita* miracles – especially in the earliest writings about him – departs significantly from hagiographic conventions. For example, one passage from the *Prestssaga* implies that Guðmundr may have embraced and promoted his miracle-working abilities during his ministry (i.e. just after 1200). In this episode, a farmer named Snorri is being pursued by a troll-woman. Snorri prays to the still-living Guðmundr, (who was only a priest at the time), and directly challenges his saintly power: “Þa heitr hann a G(uðmund) prest Ara s(on). at hann skylldi duga honum ef hann uere

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<sup>109</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* 22-32.

<sup>110</sup> See Michael Goodich, “Innocent III and the Miracle as a Weapon against Disbelief,” in *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography*. Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 456-470.

sua auarðr “uðe. sem hann étlaðe. ok leysa fra trølle þesso.”<sup>111</sup> Guðmundr appears, sprinkles the troll-woman with holy water, and she disappears.

It seems likely that Guðmundr’s *in vita* saintly fame was growing in the early thirteenth century and that this phenomenon would have been a source of concern for the prudent hagiographers of Þorlákr and Jón. The context in which the Pseudo-Maximus interpolation quoted above is introduced into the *Vita Sancti Thorlacii* (written c. 1200) suggests that the author may have been implicitly referencing Guðmundr. The preceding section describes how the water blessed by Þorlákr caused many healings (just as Guðmundr’s *in vita* saintly fame was tied to blessed water). However, the Latin fragments remind the audience that wise men did not proclaim Þorlákr’s healings to be miracles while he was alive because they were mindful of what is said in the Pseudo-Maximus sermon.<sup>112</sup> This could be understood as a condemnation of the foolish men who proclaimed the events at Guðmundr’s springs to be miracles.

All of Guðmundr’s hagiographers needed to confront the concerns surrounding *in vita* miracles. They adopted a number of different strategies to deal with these issues. As Margaret Hunt has noted, Arngrímr does not draw a sharp distinction between Guðmundr’s merits and his miracles. Instead, he frequently demonstrates Guðmundr’s merits *through* his miracles. For example, Guðmundr’s charity *in vita* is demonstrated by a miracle in which a poor woman is searching for something for her children to eat. When she sets a pot of Guðmundr’s well water over a fire and adds grass, the mixture is miraculously turned into food.<sup>113</sup>

Of all the native Icelandic hagiographies, Arngrímr’s model of sanctity is the most prominently different from those portrayed in *Þorláks saga* or *Jóns saga*. Þorlákr and Jón’s *in vita* merits are almost entirely separate from, (but also the cause of), their *post mortem* miracles. In GD, Guðmundr’s main claims to sanctity are his care for the poor and the signs that God granted to him during his life.<sup>114</sup> For Arngrímr, Guðmundr’s *in vita* miracles, including an abundance of those involving water, wells, and springs,

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<sup>111</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 113 .

<sup>112</sup> *Latínubrot um Þorlák byskup*, 353.

<sup>113</sup> GD, 134-135.

<sup>114</sup> See esp. GD, 165-166.

form an essential part of the essence of his sanctity. Ecclesiastical attitudes stressing that *in vita* merits were distinct from, and more important than, miracles were prevalent in fourteenth century Iceland, as is clearly outlined in the B redaction of *Jóns saga*: “En þó at grandalaust líf ok góðir siðir, elska náungs ok ástsemð við Guð ok miskunnarverk, auðsýni mannsins verðleik ok heilagt meðferði framarr en Áll tákn ok jarteinagerðir...”<sup>115</sup>

With his extensive learning, there can be little doubt that Arngrímr was well-aware of these attitudes. However, the first signs of Guðmundr’s sanctity are manifested when Guðmundr is a priest – without any separate discussion of his merits. Arngrímr briefly acknowledges the *ne laudaveris* motif directly during Guðmundr’s dialogue with the Norwegian Archbishop Þórir. After Guðmundr outsmarts his superior, the archbishop proclaims, “vant er mann at lofa meðan lifir, en þat er mín hugsan, at Guðmundr þessi hafi fá menn sér líka yfir mold, bæði til höfðingsskapar ok mannkosta.”<sup>116</sup> Arngrímr thereby stresses the need to admire Guðmundr because of his exceptionality.

In spite of this admiration for Guðmundr, all of the hagiographers (including Arngrímr) aimed to downplay Guðmundr’s active role in his *in vita* miracles in order to avoid the charge of vanity. Especially during his priesthood, the hagiographies place particular emphasis on how Guðmundr’s miracles demonstrated heavenly power and grace. In all of the sagas, one of the first events underlining the holiness of Guðmundr’s water involves an insane woman on Flatey. Many saints were invoked for her and her priest consecrated water, but her condition did not improve. The episode continues in GD:

... ok stóð it sama hennar vanmegg þar til at tígulig júngfrú birtist um nótt konu þeirri, er mesta dygð ok manndóm sýndi þeim aumíngja...  
Hún svarar: ‘hversu munu vér syndugir menn slíkt með ráðum vinna, heldr bið ek fyrir várs herra nafn, at þú kynnir mér ráð þat, sem til liggr, þvíat ek trúir at þú vitir guðs vilja.’  
Satt segir þú þat, vel veit ek ráðit, þvíat ek er Mária, móðir guðs, skal ek ok til leggja, því at þér hétuð á mik. Gerið eptir vatni því, er blezat hefir vin minn Guðmundr prestr Arason, þvíat hann þykki mér beztan hátt á kunna at vígja vötnin.’<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Jóns saga*, 220.

<sup>116</sup> GD, 94.

<sup>117</sup> GD, 18-19.

The hagiographers thereby establish that Guðmundr had powerful intercessors in heaven. The Virgin Mary confirms that Guðmundr is the best consecrator of water and that his water has the strongest blessing, which explains why it produced miracles where other water failed.

Guðmundr's relationship with God's intermediaries – the saints in heaven and their relics – is a focal point of the texts. According to the *vitae*, Guðmundr actively participated in the translations of both Jón and Þorlákr.<sup>118</sup> Their declaration as miracle-working saints at the *alþingi* takes place in the midst of the descriptions of Guðmundr's first *in vita* miracles. The *vitae* describe how Guðmundr kissed an old woman on her death bed and told her to send his greetings to selected members of the heavenly host: Mary, the Archangel Michael, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, Saint Óláfr, and especially Saint Ambrose.<sup>119</sup> In one *in vita* episode in GD, Guðmundr tells a poor woman that he will ask the Virgin Mary to perform a miracle for her.<sup>120</sup>

Guðmundr also collected the saints' earthly remains. Arngrímr makes the explicit connection that Guðmundr collected relics in order to avoid accusations of vanity and *in vita* sanctity as his power and notoriety grew:

... því at vatnviðslur hans ok bæn yfir sjúka menn frjófaðist til ávaxtar dag frá degi meirr ok meirr, bæði fyrir guði ok mönnum. En til þess at engi maðr eignaði hans krapti eðr dygðum þat er gjörðist, las hann at sér reliquias heilagra hvar hann kunni fá...<sup>121</sup>

In a number of his *in vita* healings, the hagiographers emphasize that Guðmundr used a variety of different techniques simultaneously. For example, he heals a throat disease by dipping his relics in consecrated water and letting the water drip onto the man's throat.<sup>122</sup> He heals a cripple by pouring consecrated water on the cripple's body, holding his holy relics over the man, and praying to God.<sup>123</sup> In these instances, the locus of power is distributed across many different sources and away from Guðmundr's person.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 100-101, 106-107. To some degree, his participation is confirmed by Jón and Þorlákr's *vitae*. See Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cultus* 68-71.

<sup>119</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 122. GD, 37.

<sup>120</sup> GD, 135.

<sup>121</sup> GD, 17.

<sup>122</sup> GD, 20.

<sup>123</sup> GD, 25.

<sup>124</sup> However, as I discuss below, Guðmundr's relics, like his water, were not beyond the shadow of doubt.

Joanna Skórzewska has called attention to the decreased use of relics in Guðmundr's healings during his time as bishop. The redactor of GB suggests that this was because his sanctity entered a new stage; as he grew more powerful and acquired more celestial recognition, the relics became less necessary.<sup>125</sup> Still, both GB and GD include an episode in which Bishop Guðmundr reaffirms his passive role in the miracles resulting from his consecrations of water. In GB the episode reads:

Bóndi bað biskup vígja brunn sinn, 'ok þætti mér allmikitt við liggja, at heilagr yrði,' segir bóndi.  
'Hví munda ek eigi sýngja yfir brunni þínum, bróðir,' segir biskup, 'en guð ráði helgi hans, sem öllu öðru.'<sup>126</sup>

In this light, Guðmundr is simply singing over the water – perhaps affirming its holiness – but it is God who ultimately determines what is holy and what is not. This line of argument is central to Guðmundr's justifications of his consecrations before Archbishop Þórir in GB and GD.

### **Guðmundr's Dialogue with the Archbishop**

One of the most striking additions to the fourteenth-century hagiographies is the description of a discussion between Bishop Guðmundr and the Norwegian Archbishop Þórir. In both GB and GD, the dialogue takes place after the archbishop calls Guðmundr back to Nidaros in the midst of increasing violence between Guðmundr and the chieftains. The conversation-episode is structured according to many medieval religious paradigms. On the model of Christ's teachings, the archbishop and his clerics ask Guðmundr questions. Guðmundr then presents lengthy responses that justify and clarify his peculiar practices. The question-and-answer format was well known in Iceland, as evidenced by texts such as the Old Norse *Elucidarius*. The model is also prevalent in translated continental saints' lives, in which saints are frequently called upon to debate and defend their beliefs.<sup>127</sup>

While the dialogue between Guðmundr and Þórir is clearly dubious in terms of its historicity, it offers a wealth of information about the perspectives and concerns of

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<sup>125</sup> GB, 595. See Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cultus* 125.

<sup>126</sup> GB, 606. Cf. GD, 79.

<sup>127</sup> Hunt, *Authorial Perspective* 99.

Guðmundr's fourteenth-century hagiographers. The two main concerns of both redactors were 1) justifying Guðmundr's vast consecrations of water and 2) explaining the amount of violence that took place during Guðmundr's episcopacy. In the format of a dialogue with the archbishop, these issues could be addressed head-on.

The archbishop's first direct question relates to Guðmundr's practice of consecrating many clerics at once. According to Joanna Skórzewska, this passage had a "purely political motive." Since some clerics were killed and others went over to the enemy, the bishop needed extra assistance.<sup>128</sup> However, the themes of overly-vast and careless consecrations are clearly reflected in the immediately-following discussion of Guðmundr's holy water.

In the B redaction, Archbishop Þórir does not directly challenge the water-consecrations; he merely offers Guðmundr the opportunity to explain them: "Erkibiskup svarar: 'hvat segir þú um vatnvígslur þínar? Því at þar er enn mikit orð á um þær.'" <sup>129</sup> In the D redaction, the archbishop is much more direct: "En nú er at tala um aðra grein, er segist, at þér sétt mjök vígslugjarnir at krisma vötn eðr fleiri skepnur, ok kalla þat síðan helga dóma."<sup>130</sup> The *Guðmundar sögur* offer a few hints as to what other *skepnur* Guðmundr was said to have consecrated. These include a measure of butter,<sup>131</sup> a *skyrker*,<sup>132</sup> a stone,<sup>133</sup> and a rope.<sup>134</sup> The quotidian and primitive features of these miracles are similar to many incidents in Þorlákr's *jarteinabók*.<sup>135</sup> In both GB and GD, however, Guðmundr's response to the archbishop focuses entirely on his consecration of water.

Compared with the B redaction, Guðmundr's response to the archbishop in GD is significantly condensed. In some ways, this is uncharacteristic for Arngrímr, who seems eager at every turn to rearrange, expand, and comment on his material. Arngrímr's primary concern is to demonstrate Guðmundr's saintliness through the signs that God

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<sup>128</sup> Skórzewska, *Constructing a Cultus* 130.

<sup>129</sup> GB, 575.

<sup>130</sup> GD, 96.

<sup>131</sup> GB, 600.

<sup>132</sup> GB, 600-601.

<sup>133</sup> GD, 145-146.

<sup>134</sup> GD, 111.

<sup>135</sup> For example, when a staff owned by Þorlákr is placed into a batch of foul-smelling ale, it turns into the finest beer. Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ed., *Jarteinabók Þorláks biskups in forna in Biskupa sögur*, vol. 2, 115.

granted to him. Despite his obviously-extensive learning, Arngrímr breaks little new ground in clarifying the doctrinal soundness of Guðmundr's holy water.

The essential argument put forth by both hagiographers (outlined in more lengthy terms in GB) is that all water is holy as a result of Christ's baptism in the River Jordan.

GD offers a concise summary of this idea:

Herra Guðmundr svarar: svá mun yðr sýnast, at þat sé eigi greinarlaust at ek vígi vatn, en þó meira greinarmál, at ek leggi þeim helganar nafn, þvíat yðvarri vizku er vel kunnigt, at sá helgaði þau í sinni hérvist, sem brunnr er allrar helganar, þá er hann steig niðr í Jórdan, ok heilagr andi í dúfu ásján krismaði vatnið sinni nákvæmd; spretta upp af þessu vatni æ síðan margar æðar ok ýmisligar rásir í gegnum jörðina, heilagri kirkju til nytsemdar andar ok líkama. Ok hvað er þá annat sannara, en allar keldur eru Jórdanar vatn? þvíat þær fyllast allar af einni upprás með guðs forsjá. – Ok í aðra grein, þótt vórr herra hafi svá skipat sem hæfði, at ei skal skírn veitast sama manni meirr en um sinn í heilagri kirkju, veitir mildr drottinn andliga skírn fólki sínu með synda afþvált í sama vatni Jórdanar, þá er þat rennr um æðar líkamans at hjartanu, ok þaðan út af augunum, með svá mikilli fljótvirkt ok heilagleik, at sá er í morgin var grimmr guðs úvin, hann er í kveld hinn kærasti guðs ástvin.<sup>136</sup>

Guðmundr argues that the water becomes holy because of God, not because of himself.

If anything, his consecrations simply affirm the holiness that already exists in all water because of its contact with the body of Christ. Water thus becomes a kind of secondary relic, deriving religious value from its proximity to the dominant holy object – i.e.

Christ's body. Water correspondingly derives value from the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Guðmundr's hagiographers adopt an extremely wide conception of "holy matter," in some ways akin to an Augustinian understanding of the miraculous, in which the entire world and all natural processes were miraculous because they were created and set in motion by God.<sup>137</sup> The redactor of GB specifically refers to the Jordan River (and correspondingly all bodies of water) as a *heilagr dómr* and re-connects all water to God via the Creation:

... því at [Jórdan á] er enn háleitasti heilagr dómr, síþan drottinn var skírðr í henne... drottinn helgar á hverju ári heiðnar þjóðir til sín með Jórdanar skírn ok hennar vatni, því at hon ein er vatn í öllum heiminum þat et sama, er drottinn skapaði í upphafi heimsins í paradiso...<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> GD, 96.

<sup>137</sup> See Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* 3-4.

<sup>138</sup> GB, 577.

The significance of Christ's baptism in the River Jordan was discussed throughout the Middle Ages. While a direct source for this passage has not been found, the basic ideas expressed by Guðmundr's hagiographers are well-attested in medieval European thought and in translated Icelandic literature. For example, in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Ambrose of Milan writes, "Baptizatus est ergo Dominus non mundari volens, sed mundare aquas; ut ablutae per carnem Christi, quae peccatum non cognovit, baptismatis jus haberent."<sup>139</sup> The same idea is repeated in the widely-popular *Elucidarius*, which was translated into Old Icelandic around 1200. The Latin text reads: "*Discipulus*: Cum in eo fuerit plenitudo divinitatis corporaliter et nihil posset ei gratiae accedere, cur baptizatus est? *Magister*: ut nobis aquas ad baptismum sanctificaret."<sup>140</sup>

The most striking parallel with Guðmundr's justifications for widely consecrating water comes from a sermon on the Epiphany in the *Íslensk Hómiliubók*. Like Guðmundr's hagiographers, the homilist hints that Christ's baptism in the River Jordan not only prepared the waters for the baptism of future Christians in a spiritual and metaphorical sense, but also literally sanctified *all* the water in the world:

Í dag skírði Jóan baptista Krist í Jórdan. Hvílk er sjá skírn, er sá er skírnarbrunninum hreinni, er skírður er, og vatnið helgaðist af þeim, er það tók við? Hvílk er sjá skírn græðera vors, er í þeirri hreinsast vötn heldur en þau hreinsi? Því að með nýju tákni heilagleiks vors var heldur vatnið skírt af Kristi en hann skírðist af vatninu, því að þá er heimsgræðeri sté niður í vatnið, þá helgaði hann öll vötn og brunna í tákni skírnar sinnar, svo að hver maður hreinsast í Krists brunni, hvargi sem hann vill skírast í nafni *Domini*.  
Til þess vildi *Dominus* skírast, að hann helgaði oss vötn til hreinsunar. En eigi þurfti hann sjálfur að hreinsast fyr skírnina. Yfir hann flaut vatnið, en það bar órar syndir braut með sér. Af honum drupu skírnardropar, en af oss flutu syndir í þeim dropum.<sup>141</sup>

The likely source for this section of the homily derives from a sermon by the pseudo-Augustine now ascribed to the fifth-century bishop Maximus of Turin.<sup>142</sup> The ascription is not particularly important since it is clear that the thought expressed in the passage had

<sup>139</sup> *Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam, Libris X*, in *PL*, vol. 15, c. 1583A.

<sup>140</sup> Evelyn Scherabon Firchow and Kaaren Grimstad, eds., *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1989), 68. The manuscript from c. 1200 is a fragment. This section is first attested in Old Icelandic translation in a manuscript from c. 1300.

<sup>141</sup> Sigurbjörn Einarsson, Guðrún Kvaran, Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson, eds., *Íslensk hómiliubók: Fornar stólræður* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1993), 116.

<sup>142</sup> Andrea de Leeuw van Weenen, ed., *The Icelandic Homily Book: perg 15 4to in The Royal Library, Stockholm* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1993), 10-11.

a life of its own, being copied into medieval homilaries throughout Europe. The Maximus passage reads:

Hodie ergo baptizatur in Iordane. Quale hoc est baptismum, ubi purior ipso est fonte ille qui mergitur? ubi dum susceptum aqua diluit, non sordibus inficitur sed benedictionibus honoratur? Quale, inquam, saluatoris baptismum est, in quo purgantur magis fluenta quam purgant? Nouo enim sanctificationis genere Christum non tam lauit unda quam lota est. Nam ex quo saluator in aqua mersit ex eo omnium gurgitum tractus cunctorum fontium uenas mysterio baptismatis consecrauit, ut quisque, ubi in nomine domini baptizari uoluerit, non illum mundi aqua diluat sed Christi unda purificet. Saluator autem ideo baptizari uoluit, non ut sibi munditiam adquireret, sed ut nobis fluenta mundaret.<sup>143</sup>

The parallels with the *Íslensk Hómiliubók* are clear. A particularly interesting feature of the *Hómiliubók* passage is the addition of *brunna* to the sentence “þá helgaði hann öll vötn og brunna í tákni skírnar sinnar...” Given the dating of the *Íslensk Hómiliubók* to c. 1200, it is possible that Guðmundr himself was responsible for popularizing the motif of the holiness of *all* water in early thirteenth century Iceland.

Most medieval writers preferred to emphasize the spiritual and metaphorical significance of Christ’s baptism. Elsewhere, Ambrose warns that not all water is capable of healing:

sed non aqua omnis sanat; sed aqua sanat, quae habet gratiam Christi. Aliud est elementum, aliud consecratio: aliud opus, aliud operatio. Aqua opus est, operatio Spiritus sancti est. Non sanat aqua, nisi Spiritus descenderit, et aquam illam consecrauerit.<sup>144</sup>

The essential argument set forth by Guðmundr’s hagiographers is that there is an ambiguity surrounding which water exactly possesses the grace of Christ and is consecrated by the Holy Spirit. GB and GD both argue for an expansive Holy Spirit that frequently reveals its power through miracles to demonstrate God’s favor. Arngrímr summarizes this idea concisely by quoting John the Baptist: “non ad mensuram dat deus spiritum.”<sup>145</sup> Thus all water, no matter how far-removed from a church, could be an instrument for God’s grace – especially if the water’s sanctity had been affirmed and reinforced by Guðmundr’s blessing. As GB explains, “... Jórdan helgar vötn öll ok

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<sup>143</sup> *Corpus Christianorum*, vol. 23, 45-46.

<sup>144</sup> *De Sacramentis, Liber Sex*, in *PL*, vol. 16, c. 422A.

<sup>145</sup> GD, 97. John 3:34. Arngrímr’s interest in the mysticism of Elizabeth of Schönau can be seen in the same light. See GD, 151-155.

hreinsar allar uppsprettur ok stöðuvötn, ok jafnvel leirkeldur sem önnur vötn...<sup>146</sup> As we have seen above, Guðmundr's hagiographers emphasized the presence of the Holy Spirit with Guðmundr by noting the appearance of a dove above Guðmundr early in his priesthood – the same sign that accompanied Christ's baptism in the Jordan.

Another main argument in Guðmundr's justification is the elevation of water above the other primary elements. Arngrímr points to Christ's miracle at the wedding in Cana (where he turned water into wine) in order to show how much love Christ felt for water. The Old Icelandic translation of *Blasius saga* includes an analogous passage in which the saint argues that water is often a vehicle for God's power. In a formulaic scene, Blasius is defending the true faith before an obstinate earl. When the earl threatens to drown Blasius, he responds:

En þot goþ þin sycki niþr [í vatn oc metti egi up komazc, þa mun þo Cristr minn syna crafst sinn á vatni, þviat craftr hans er [opt syndr í vatnom; þott [vÄtnn þvai ¶lgi syndir af oss fyrir helgan anda, þa ero margar oc miklar aprar iarteinir, þer er gorzk hafa á vÄtnom...<sup>147</sup>

Blasius then describes the miracle in which Christ walked on the sea and proceeds to duplicate the feat himself.

The redactor of GB offers a significantly more-detailed discussion of the virtues of water. In GB, Guðmundr explains, “trúi ek meir á vatnið en hinar iij höfutskepnur.”<sup>148</sup> Guðmundr continues by describing the role of spiritual water in the medieval body. Firstly, he argues that water is the most helpful of all elements in the body because it quickly overcomes sin in the form of tears of repentance. He continues by pointing out that water is the most immutable of the four elements:

... er þetta vatn guð[s] gefit hverjum manni, sá er hann er skírðr, ok vill ávallt lífga manninn en alldri deyða, ok er þetta því an[d]ligt vatn; er nokkur von ávallt lífsins, er þat þornar eigi... Nú er líka[m]s vatnið því öruggura til hjálpar mannum, en allt annat í skepnunni: þat skilst síþarst við manninn af fjórum höfuðskepnum, vindrinn fyst með andanum, en þá eldrinn, er maðrinn er kaldr, ok verðr þá líkaminn mold ein eptir, nema dauða vatnið, þat er þá setr or dauða holdinu, ok skilst þá nauðigt við þat, svá sem margir lifandi menn vita, at maðrinn

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<sup>146</sup> GB, 577.

<sup>147</sup> HMS, vol. 1, 266-267.

<sup>148</sup> GB, 577.

deyr af eðli sínu, at vatnið rennr or dauðum líkamanum leingi síþan öndin er við skilin.<sup>149</sup>

As Caroline Walker Bynum has observed in many medieval contexts, “... the holy is that which resists change and decay.”<sup>150</sup> Holy matter was an important medium in late-medieval piety because it allowed for personal contact with God. The holy bodies of saints were frequently noted for their resistance to change in death. The GB redactor is similarly focused on stasis and makes the case that holy water stays unchanged: baptismal water remains a part of the body throughout life and it is the final element to leave the body in death.

The purity of water and its role in the body help clarify a strange series of miracles involving water-parasites. In GD, Arngrímr describes three stories of medieval Icelanders who grow violently ill after drinking water. In each case, Arngrímr emphasizes that it was an impurity in the water – never the water itself – that caused the illness.<sup>151</sup> In the first two instances, the victims are described as “trúlitill” and “hégómafulla.” Both forget to cross themselves before drinking and both are stricken with water parasites. In the third instance, a woman fetches water with an “impure pail” and also swallows a parasite. The worm grows inside of her for several months until her parish priest makes vows to Bishop Guðmundr and rubs her body with water from one of Guðmundr’s wells. Afterwards, the priest is able to extract the worm, which is now fully-grown with a tail and legs, from the woman’s mouth. In each case, Arngrímr highlights the impurities in the water alongside the victims’ impure faiths as the root causes of their sufferings.

The increasing emphasis on the faithfulness and beliefs of the recipients of Guðmundr’s water-miracles is characteristic of the fourteenth century hagiographies, especially GB. The redactor of GB frequently discusses the dichotomy between pure and impure, truth and lie, faith and disbelief. Beginning with the prologue, the stress in GB is laid on the truth and righteousness of Guðmundr’s water miracles on many different levels.

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<sup>149</sup> GB, 578.

<sup>150</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 137.

<sup>151</sup> GD, 87-88 and 171-174.

## **Faith, Miracle, and the Archbishop in GB**

The B redaction of *Guðmundar saga* is unique in medieval Icelandic literature for its division into three parts with accompanying prologues. These prologues precede discussions of 1) Guðmundr's family and his childhood, 2) his priesthood, 3) his time as bishop and his posthumous miracles.<sup>152</sup> In the first prologue, the redactor follows a common medieval convention by emphasizing the truth of the saga because of the trustworthiness of the authors: "Er ok þessi sögu því fullkominliga vel trúanda í alla staðe, at hana hafa saman sett góðir ok skilríkir menn..."<sup>153</sup> In all of his additions, the GB redactor reminds his audience of the inherent truth and righteousness of Guðmundr's life and miracles. This is especially apparent in the case of those aspects of Guðmundr's sanctity that might have caused unease. As an epilogue to the abundant *in vita* miracles that characterized Guðmundr's priesthood, the GB redactor admonishes his audience, "... ok mun svá at hyggjast þeim er þessa sögu lesa eða heyra, at fár munu prestasögur þvílíkar á bókum ritnar, ef með réttum hug er virt..."<sup>154</sup> Thus, the intentions and faith of the listener take center stage; only those "með réttum hug" will understand the significance and wonder of Guðmundr's priestly miracles.

This line of reasoning is repeated frequently in GB, and it is central to Guðmundr's justifications of his vast water-consecrations before the archbishop. As Guðmundr says:

... eigi má hugr hyggja né túnga tína þá miskunn, er guð hefir í vatninu setta til hjálpar mönnum hér í heimi, ef trúa vilja guðs miskunn; en ótrúum manni, ok þeim er svívirða vill guðs stórmerki, verðr allt at syndum ok áfallsdómi, svá sem segir heilög ritning, at allt er h[r]einum ok trúföstum hreint, en óhreinum ok trúlausum er[u] allir hlutir óhreinir...<sup>155</sup>

The citation is taken from the Paul's Letter to Titus.<sup>156</sup> To illustrate his point, Guðmundr cites an episode from *Ambrosius saga* in which the food on Queen Justina's table turns

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<sup>152</sup> Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum. Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1988), 61-62.

<sup>153</sup> GB, 559-560.

<sup>154</sup> GB, 565.

<sup>155</sup> GB, 575-576.

<sup>156</sup> Paul's Epistle to Titus 1:15: ...omnia munda mundis; coinquinatis autem et infidelibus nihil mundum, sed inquinatae sunt eorum et mens et conscientia... See Ian J. Kirby, *Biblical Quotation in Old Icelandic-Norwegian Religious Literature*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1976), 387.

into dragons, snakes, and toads. Ambrose explains that all men who lack faith will only be able to see impurities - like dragons, snakes, and toads.<sup>157</sup> GB then continues,

‘Nú er slíkt sýnt í undrum’ segir Guðmundr biskup. ‘Nú trúi ek slíkum dæmisögum ok mörgum öðrum þvílíkum, at allt verði sem guð vill, þat er í hans nafni er gjört ok þeim gengr gott til er gerer.’<sup>158</sup>

The redactor of GB thus seems to shift the burden of determining the rightness of Guðmundr’s well-consecrations to precedent. However, neither the New Testament citation nor the episode from *Ambrosius saga* relate in any way to water or consecrations. This suggests that even Guðmundr’s hagiographers considered his miracles at wells and springs to be somewhat anomalous. Instead, the redactor of GB focuses on Guðmundr’s intentions – everything done in God’s name with earnest faith (including water-consecrations) is true, righteous, and pleasing to God. This focus on intention is also well-attested in medieval religious thought. For example, the Old Norse translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues* reports: “Margir hlutir synaz þeir godir, at eigi ero godir, þviat eigi ero af godum hug gervir; þviat eigi ero god verk, þo at god syniz, ef eigi ero af godum hug giorr.”<sup>159</sup> The redactor makes the clear connection that since God has granted manifold miracles from the consecrations, Guðmundr must have pure faith and his blessings must please God.

When the dialogue between Guðmundr and Þórir ends, the archbishop succinctly announces his verdict on Guðmundr’s consecrations. In GB, the archbishop emphasizes that the water-blessings are to the benefit of all and reiterates the righteousness of all things that are done with God in mind: “... vil ek leyfa þínar vígslur ok yfirsöngva, bæði mönnum ok fénaði ok öllum vötnum, ok öllu því, er þú veitir miskunn í guðs hlýðni ok fulltíngi, til hjálpar mönnum ok fénaði...”<sup>160</sup> In Arngrímr’s version, the archbishop bids Guðmundr to continue the water-consecrations as before, “... þviat trúin þróast með þvílíkri miskunn...”<sup>161</sup> As I have argued, Arngrímr intended to prove the indisputable sanctity of Guðmundr. From his perspective, there is less need to justify Guðmundr’s water consecrations than first and foremost to marvel at the miracles they incite which

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<sup>157</sup> *HMS*, vol. 1, 34.

<sup>158</sup> GB, 576.

<sup>159</sup> *HMS*, vol. 1, 196.

<sup>160</sup> GB, 583.

<sup>161</sup> GD, 99.

strengthen and grow the faith. Arngrímr repeats this attitude in a later miracle in which a dog is healed by Guðmundr's well-water: "Ok þó at þessi lutr fremdist á óskynsamligri skepnu, má þat hvern maðr skilja því framarr, hversu dýrligar vóru þess manns vígslur..."<sup>162</sup>

I think that the redactor of GB was more anxious about what might be regarded as "óskynsamligar skepnur" in the corpus of Guðmundr's miracles. Before GB relates the *in vita* miracles that Guðmundr performed when he was a bishop, the redactor includes another preface emphasizing the inherent truth of Guðmundr's miracles. He again cites the passage from Paul's letter to Titus to show that doubts about miracles are born out of lies and evil. After referencing the "margir merkiligir hlutir í ferðum hans," as a result of Guðmundr's prophecies and consecrations, GB continues,

En þótt sumum mönnum þikki þat nú sem lygi sé, þá er þat þó ótalligr fjöldi manna, er trúa enn þessa sögu sanna, ok svá mun jafnan, meðan kristnin stendr, at þeir munu fleiri, er trúa þessi frásögn. Nú má því eigi at hvers manns orði fara, at sitt þikkir hverjum satt, ok skal af því nú enn rita fleira frá Guðmundi biskupi, at þeim verði at gagn ok gaman, er trúa með góðum hug þessi sögu, því at þat vita allir menn, at þat er allt satt, er gott er sagt frá guði ok hans helgum mönnum, ok er því gott góðu at trúa, en illt er at trúa illu, þótt satt sé, ok allra ve<r>st því, er illt er logit, ok verðr þat þó mörgum góðum mönnum, at trúa því er logit er, ok verðr þá eigi rétt um skipt, er menn tortryggja þat, er gott [er] ok satt, en trúa því er illt er ok logit. Nú munu vér hér setja sem flestar jartegnir Guðmundar biskups, þær er guðligr krap[t]r vann firir hans árnaðarorð í þessu[m] heimi, bæði við menn ok fénat, ok mart eptirlæti við menn, er trú höfðu til at njóta hans bæna í guðs nafni...<sup>163</sup>

Again building his argument around the Titus citation, the redactor emphasizes that the lives of holy men like Guðmundr possess an inherent moral and historical truth.<sup>164</sup> To doubt the reality or truth of Guðmundr's miracles was to believe a lie. In a medieval religious context, lies, fears, and doubts about God's holy men were portrayed as the deceits of the devil.<sup>165</sup> The repeated emphasis on these themes belies the fears and anxieties of the GB redactor – that many people might doubt Guðmundr's miracles.

The passage also communicates a plea for the audience to be like those people "... er höfðu trú til at njóta hans bæna í guðs nafni..." The miracles described in GB

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<sup>162</sup> GD, 139.

<sup>163</sup> GB, 592.

<sup>164</sup> Tómasson, *Formálar* 246-247.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

place a constant focus on the faith of the supplicants. The redactor emphasizes that those who trusted and believed in God and Guðmundr the most were the ones who were rewarded with miracles. This is especially apparent in the miracles surrounding Guðmundr's water-consecrations. In one story, a woman named Ingibjörg from Aðalvík is worried that her calf will not provide enough food for the feast on Ascension Day. The saga tells us that she “treystist mjög vígslum [Guðmundar].” Before the calf is slaughtered, Ingibjörg lets it drink some of Guðmundr's water and it produces far more meat than expected.<sup>166</sup> Another woman named Oddkatla is stricken with some kind of facial tumor: *andlitsmein*. The saga continues:

... hon bar á vatn Guðmundar biskups, ok var á fám dögum heilt. Þessi kona trúði mjög á vígslur Guðmundar biskups, ok sjá en sama kona sáði fimm mælum korns at áliðnu sumri í ótadda jörð, ok um haustið tók hon af þeim akri xij fjórðunga mjöls, ok þótti mönnum þessi ávöxtr fágætr, ok þökkuðu guði.<sup>167</sup>

Arngrímr also values the faith and belief of the supplicants. In some instances, however, he points out that Guðmundr's power and dearness to God is best demonstrated by his miracles that benefited people who did not even ask for help. According to Arngrímr, this type of miracle frequently occurred as a result Guðmundr's well water:

Þar er kyn jartegna, at maðr mýktr í hjarta leitar miskunn ok finnr hana, en þat er frábært, at hjálpin grípi mann þann, er einskis biðr um sína nauðsyn, sem optsinnis varð fyrir vötn ok vígslur þessa manns, þó at eitt af mörgu sé hér til dæmis dregið, þat er tvær konur fóthrumar vóðu þann læk, er féll úr þeim brunni, er sira Guðmundr hafði vígt, ok vurðu í stað alheilar, en vissu á öngan veg hvaðan leiddi þeirra bata, áðr kunnir menn greindu þeim upprás lækjarins.<sup>168</sup>

Certainly, Arngrímr would agree that those who had the faith and belief to use Guðmundr's water would be rewarded. Both hagiographies also agree that those who flatly doubted Guðmundr's water would be punished. GB is especially keen to emphasize that those who were worldly, envious, and prideful were not ready to receive God's grace and had abandoned and desecrated Guðmundr's wells:

Hann vígði marga brunna, er hann fór um sýslu sína, ok urðu þar mikil tákn af því síþan, meðan menn höfðu trú til at njóta, með guðs miskunn; en nú er því eydt,

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<sup>166</sup> GB, 611.

<sup>167</sup> GB, 611.

<sup>168</sup> GD, 24. It is clear from this passage that the *brunnr* is some kind of spring. Another miracle in the same spirit occurs when Guðmundr saves an unbaptized child. See GD, 175-176.

sem mörgum öðrum góðum hlutum, af ótrú manna ok ofmetnaði, ok öfund þeirri, er þeir höfðu, er eigi vóru slíkt verðir at þiggja af guði, firir syndum sínum, ok af elsku heimsins ok eigingirni veralligra hluta.<sup>169</sup>

The skeptics and their doubts about Guðmundr's water will be my next focus.

### **The Well-Desecrators**

All versions of Guðmundr's saga report the following incident near Reykjaholt during Guðmundr's priesthood: “Þar uigðe hann brunn þann er þeir migu i síðan til haðs við hann. enn þo batnaðe eigi siðr en aðr við þat uatn.”<sup>170</sup> This episode seems to have been part of the *Prestssaga*. Guðmundr certainly had his share of political enemies, but we are not told who did the deed. Clearly, urinating into this well was a direct mockery of Guðmundr and the efficacy of his consecrated water.

Disbelief and even outright mockery of a saint are common in hagiographic writings. In *vitae et miraculae*, blasphemes directed towards a saint served as a forum to expose and counter the enemies of the Church (secular lords, heretics, non-believers, and those whose “mild expressions of doubt might sow the seeds of discord.”)<sup>171</sup> All of Guðmundr's hagiographers used this motif. One episode that is extant in all four versions of Guðmundr's saga involves a priest named Steinn. In the presence of Guðmundr and others, Steinn expresses doubts about the sanctity of Bishop Jón and his relics. Guðmundr then prays that God will show everyone some sign of Jón's holiness. Gradually, everyone except Steinn becomes aware of a powerful fragrance of the sweetest incense emanating from the relics. As we have seen repeatedly (especially in GB), a skeptic like Steinn cannot “see” (or in this case, smell) the truth of a miracle. Steinn is bitterly ashamed of his disbelief and begs for forgiveness.<sup>172</sup> Steinn's punishment for his “mild expression of doubt” pales in comparison to the punishment

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<sup>169</sup> GB, 595-596.

<sup>170</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 104. GD, 24.

<sup>171</sup> Michael Goodich, “Miracles and Disbelief in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Lives and Miracles of the Saints: Studies in Medieval Latin Hagiography*. Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 23.

<sup>172</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 120-121, GD, 36-37.

meted out by continental saints on persons who doubted their power or disrespected their shrine in any way.<sup>173</sup>

The saga authors made use of this conventional revenge motif in order to prove Jón's sanctity and in order to emphasize that Guðmundr had powerful friends in heaven. In this light, the lack of retribution on those who urinated in Guðmundr's well is somewhat surprising and atypical of hagiography. The author only half-heartedly remarks that the well continued to heal as before. The perpetrators seem to get off without a scratch. Can we imagine the fate of someone who urinated on Thomas á Becket's shrine in Canterbury?

Arngrímur clearly felt that this episode needed to be revised. In his version of the story, the well not only keeps its healing powers, it flourishes and produces even more miracles post-desecration: "En þat sem þeir þóttust [gjöra] guðs vin til háðúngar, sneri vórr drottinn sér ok sín[um] vin til virðíngar, því at framarr en fyrr blómgaðist sjá brunnr mönnum ok fénaði til heilsubótar."<sup>174</sup>

Nevertheless, this story presents a mixed view of the holiness of Guðmundr's water. On one hand, as discussed above, holy matter is that which resists change and desecration. According to the hagiographers, Guðmundr's water remained immutably holy (or became even more holy) in spite of the insult. On the other hand, the episode illustrates that Guðmundr's wells were mocked and doubted by his contemporaries. Guðmundr's wells and springs were scattered throughout the land, where they could not be monitored or sanctioned. It is undeniable that this extreme diffusion of sacred space made this type of incident possible. Moreover, during this period, Guðmundr was a priest to whom God had demonstrated favor. But the hagiographers also tacitly had to acknowledge that Guðmundr was not yet a saint who could summon or expect divine retribution on his doubters. Guðmundr's water was indeed holy, but it did not possess the same locus of holy power as saints' shrines.

A somewhat analogous episode of doubt involving Guðmundr's relics is found in the *Prestssaga* tradition (and omitted in GD). According to the *Prestssaga*, a certain

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<sup>173</sup> For example, Goodich cites the *miracula* of St. Leonard in Bavaria in which a soldier was struck dead after he attempted to pilfer some chickens from the saint's shrine. Goodich, "Disbelief" 30. Whaley has noted the lack of "chastisement" miracles in the Icelandic sources. Whaley, "Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops" 176-178.

<sup>174</sup> GD, 24.

chieftain named Þorsteinn proclaimed that Guðmundr's relics might be the bones of horses: "... lez eigi uita. huart þat voro heilagra manna bein e(ða) hrossa bein."<sup>175</sup> Rather than a heavenly show of support for the unspecified relics, Guðmundr summons Þorsteinn before the *alþingi* on the charge of blasphemy: "... uð laustun er hann kallaðe bein heilagra manna hrossa bein."<sup>176</sup> Guðmundr was awarded the right to self-judgment in the case that summer.

It would certainly be a stretch to view these episodes of doubt as hagiographic propaganda against non-believers. Guðmundr wins his case against Þorsteinn, but he has to go through the channels of secular authority. While Guðmundr spent nearly his entire episcopacy fighting the authority of secular chieftains, the efficacy of holy relics was nevertheless a suitable matter for him to bring before the *alþingi*. In these cases, the authors were somewhat reluctant to describe heavenly retribution on Guðmundr's doubters. However, after Guðmundr's death, the redactors of GB and GD both added a chastisement miracle that unambiguously emphasized Guðmundr's place among the saints and the holiness of his water.

### **Ljótr prestur and the Miracle of Revenge**

Both GB and GD include an elaborate miracle of disbelief and revenge (absent in the *Prestssaga*) surrounding a priest who expresses doubts about Guðmundr's water. The narrative of this miracle is intricately tied to the themes and messages that the fourteenth century hagiographers wanted to communicate about Guðmundr's water. Arngrímr, in particular, esteems the miracle especially highly, concluding that, "Er þetta verk svá víðfrægt, at aldri mun fyrnast meðan Ísland byggvist."<sup>177</sup> The episode takes place shortly after Guðmundr's death at a spring assembly. At the meeting, Guðmundr's friends praise the bishop's deeds. According to them, the *in vita* and *post mortem* events at Guðmundr's wells are suggestive of sanctity: "Á þeim fundi var mart talat um vatnvígslur Guðmundar biskups, ok lofuðu þat allir mjög, ok sögðu hann verit hafa helgan mann í sínu lífi, ok svá eptir lífit."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *Guðmundar sögur*, 89.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>177</sup> GD, 182.

<sup>178</sup> GB, 610.

Also present at the meeting is a priest who is described as one of Guðmundr's constant opponents. In its more-local spirit, GB notes the priest's name (Ljótr), his farm (Árnesi í Trékyllisvík), and his three sons (Þorkell, Þorgils, and Kálfr). Arngrímr skips most of these details. Instead, he includes a preface to the miracle that again urges the audience to marvel at Guðmundr's awesome power with God. Arngrímr pays special attention to the fact that Guðmundr's prayers twisted the sea against its own nature:

... mundi öllum auðsýnt verða, at hans bænir hafa svá kærlega hljóðat fyrir himna konúnginum ok hans signuðum eyrum, er á landi hefir skepnan umvendat sinni náttúru í allt annat mát, en henni var sett í skapan heimsins, ok náttúrat með heilags anda forsögn. En sjórin, til kúgaðr fyrir hans blezaða bæn, hefir æ vorðit laust at láta þat herfang, sem hann hefir til sín dregit meðr gráðugri ágirni, ok þar til skulum vær heyra eina dásendar jartegn merkiliga.<sup>179</sup>

At the spring assembly, Ljótr makes disparaging remarks specifically directed at Guðmundr's water consecrations. GB reads, "Ljótr prestr kvað þat vera allmikla lygi ok loklássu, ok mikla ábyrgð at fara með slíkan hégóma, at trúa á vötn hans eða steina."<sup>180</sup>

The GB redactor thus returns to the themes of truth and lie that were dealt with extensively in Guðmundr's conversation with the archbishop. Ljótr not only doubts the truth, he also believes a lie. His accusation seems to imply that only foolish people would believe in the miraculous powers of water and stones. The worshiping of earthly elements is reminiscent of the criticism leveled by the apostles and early medieval saints against the errors of the pagans. For example, the apostle Bartholomeus implores: "... heyri þer nu, hvern hinn sanni guð er, skapari yðarr, sa er byggir a himnum en eigi i steinum [eða stokkum]."<sup>181</sup> The priest's disparaging remarks are slightly different in GD,

...hnyss hann við prestrinn, segir villu ok vantrú at lofa slíkt, sem eru vatnsvíglur hans eða enn fleiri framferðir, kallar þá menn aftrúast, er þvílíkum hlutum veita sinn trúnað.<sup>182</sup>

*Aftrúa*, *villa*, and *vantrú* are also attested in the *Postola sögur* and elsewhere with reference to heresy and false belief. The stage is set for the priest to be punished and his doubts about Guðmundr's water to be overcome by the truth of Guðmundr's miracles.

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<sup>179</sup> GD, 181.

<sup>180</sup> GB, 610.

<sup>181</sup> C.R. Unger, ed., *Postola sögur* (Christiania, 1874), 749. The theme of false miracles and false healing is very prevalent in *Bartholomeus saga*. See *Postola sögur*, 748-749.

<sup>182</sup> GD, 181.

This comes to fruition in the midst of the assembly when Ljótr's son Kálfr drowns while playing with the other boys in the sea. Ljótr's other son Þorgils runs to tell his father the news:

[Þorgils] kemr í stufu ok grætr, ok mælti til föður síns: 'dauðr er kusli.'  
Prestr mælti: 'eigi hirði ek, þótt kusli sé dauðr.'  
Sveinninn mælti: 'Kálfr er dauðr.'  
Prestr svarar: 'margir kálfar hafa dáit fyrir mér.'  
Sveinninn mælti: 'Kálfr er dauðr, bróðir minn.'<sup>183</sup>

This comedic dialogue also has a clear message: Ljótr is deaf to the truth about his son's drowning just as he is unable to recognize the truth of Guðmundr's water miracles. When the priest finds his dead son washed ashore in a pile of seaweed, Guðmundr's friends explain that Kálfr's death is a punishment for his disparaging remarks. The episode continues:

Prestr iðraðist nú mjög við allt [jafn sa]man, sonartjónið ok orð þeirra. Nú spyrja menn prest, ef hann vill vegsa[ma] Guðmund biskup ok vígslur hans, ef hann þiggr þat af guði, at Kálfr lifni af vatni hans; en prestr lézt þat vilja feginn... Síþan var tekit vatn Guðmundar biskups, ok er haldit upp höf<u>ðinu sveinsins, at vatnið rynni sem leingst í brjóstið; ok er þat kom í brjóst sveininum, þá koma bláir flekkir í hörondit, ok því næst roðnuðu þeir við áriðu vatnsins, ok var þá alvotr líkamrinn, ok þá kom roði í kiðrnar, ok litlu síþar hrærðust fíngnir ok lukust upp augun, ok þá var mjög allt senn, at sveinninn lifnaði ok var alheill, ok þótti öllum mikit um vert þessi tíðindi ok lofuðu guð.<sup>184</sup>

The resurrection not only demonstrates the power of Guðmundr's water, but also reaffirms the roles of water in the body that were described in Guðmundr's dialogue with the archbishop. As Arngrímr explains, water revives life and cleanses sin: "... þá er [vatn Jórdanar] rennr um æðar líkamans at hjartanu, ok þaðan út af augunum, með svá mikilli fljótvirkt ok heilagleik, at sá er í morgin var grimmr guðs úvin, hann er í kveld hinn kærasti guðs ástvin."<sup>185</sup> After his spirit has left, water revives Kálfr's body. It is no coincidence that the priest "...tárust nú meðr iðran..." before Guðmundr's water is sought.<sup>186</sup>

### **The Ban of Bishop Árni**

<sup>183</sup> GB, 610. The first exchange (re: *kusli*) is absent in GD.

<sup>184</sup> GB, 611.

<sup>185</sup> GD, 96.

<sup>186</sup> GD, 182.

More skepticism surrounding Guðmundr's springs is expressed in a miracle found only in GB. The hand of a man named Þorvaldr comes out of joint and none of the best men in the district is able to set it back in place. In a dream that night, a man (presumably Guðmundr) appears to Þorvaldr and says:

‘hvárt þótti þér, fóstri, vaxa verkrinn í hendinni, er þeir toguðu?’

‘Þat er satt,’ sagði Þorvaldr.

Dra[u]mmaðrinn mælti: ‘láttu sækja vatn Guðmundar biskups, ok ber á höndina.’

Þorvaldr svarar: ‘þat bannar Árni biskup, ok er niðr laginn brunnrinn.’

‘Ekki at síðr ok’ segir hann, ‘sendi móðir þín eptir vatninu; hon heitr fast firir þér.’

Um morgininn segir hann móður sinni þenna firirburð. Nú sendir hon þegar til Keldnabrunns, er þá var ónýtt af boði Árna biskups.<sup>187</sup>

With the secret help of Gró, the niece of Sighvatr Hálfðanarson, the pair locate the spring. After Þorvaldr soaks his hand in Guðmundr's water for three days, the hand springs back into joint.

While this episode is suggestive, it seems to leave us with more questions than answers. Firstly, it is not immediately clear whether “Bishop Árni” refers to Árni Þorláksson (Bishop of Skálholt from 1269-1298) or his nephew Árni Helgason (Bishop of Skálholt from 1304-1320). Árni Þorláksson is the more likely candidate. He was a staunch defender of the rights of the Church and his time as bishop was characterized by disputes with powerful laymen over property donated to the Church but administered by lay families.<sup>188</sup>

The miracle is unclear about the extent of Bishop Árni's ban. Did he ban the practice of seeking water from all of Guðmundr's springs or did he merely block up the spring at Keldur? The site of this well was close to Skálholt and Árni may have been uncomfortable with such unorthodox devotion to Guðmundr in his own backyard. The extant sources do not indicate evidence for a large-scale prohibition of Guðmundr's wells in the years after his death. At the same time, the saga authors seem to emphasize that devotion to Guðmundr's wells was borne out of popular devotion; perhaps it flew under

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<sup>187</sup> GB, 612.

<sup>188</sup> Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, *Formáli*, in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998), xi-xii and xxvii-xli.

the radar of ecclesiastical authority. GD also includes an episode in which a well seems to be blocked up, but there are no details surrounding the circumstances.<sup>189</sup>

We might imagine that the dialogue with Archbishop Þórir in GB and GD was written to answer the concerns about Guðmundr's water that might have been expressed by someone like Bishop Árni Þorláksson. *Árna saga biskups*, written in the early fourteenth century, is entirely silent on Guðmundr and his water. However, there is evidence to suggest that Árni was concerned about the sanctity and orthodoxy of consecrations – including the consecration of water – in his bishopric. Árni advocated the idea of a hierarchical church in which priests received the authorization from the bishop to marry, baptize, and consecrate holy water from the mother-church at Skálholt.<sup>190</sup> When he became bishop in 1269, Árni issued a set of *boðskapr*, reaffirming and expanding the orders issued by Bishop Magnús Gizursson in 1224. Two of Árni's *boðskapr* relate to the sanctity and use of consecrated water. The first instructs priests not to baptize a child without water. The second reads, “Eigi skulu olærdir menn uatn uigja.”<sup>191</sup> Combined with the evidence from GB, it seems likely that Árni Þorláksson may have been concerned with the unorthodox use of consecrated water by Guðmundr's devotees and banned the practice of seeking water from Guðmundr's wells. Unfortunately, the evidence is too scanty to draw firm conclusions.

It bears repeating that the historicity of Þorvaldr's dream is very questionable. The entire episode may have been the creation of the GB hagiographer. More significant is the attitude expressed by the passage – a direct, high-level ecclesiastical opposition to Guðmundr's water. Like the well-desecration episode, this miracle gives a mixed impression of Guðmundr's sanctity. The holiness of Guðmundr's spring triumphs over Bishop Árni's ban, but the presence of an ecclesiastical ban in the first place acknowledges that there was anxiety towards Guðmundr's wells. Certainly these doubts could be interpreted in a hagiographic matrix – as evidence of the unjust abuses Guðmundr suffered and his triumph over them. However, like the well-pissing incident, this seems to be a miracle of “lukewarm” revenge. Guðmundr's water is found and

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<sup>189</sup> See GD, 178.

<sup>190</sup> Grímsdóttir, *Formáli*, ix-x. *Árna saga biskups*, in *Biskupa sögur*, vol. 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1998), 16-17.

<sup>191</sup> *Diplomatarium Islandicum. Íslenskt fornbréfasan*, vol. 2 (Kaupmannahöfn: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1857-), 23-25.

carried away in secret. Bishop Árni is not confronted with miraculous truth and does not repent his ban.

## **Conclusion**

Based on evidence from different genres of medieval Icelandic religious literature, Margaret Cormack has noted that "... Icelandic clerics were ready to claim holiness within generous limits."<sup>192</sup> In *Hungrvaka*, supernatural signs are attributed to nearly every bishop of Skálholt. Fritz Paul and Ásdís Egilsdóttir have both suggested that there is not a strict division between "biographical" and "hagiographical" in the corpus of *biskupasögur*.<sup>193</sup> However, as Eva Elm has argued with reference to the *Vita Augustini*, the medieval genre of episcopal biography was designed to encompass the varied roles and facets of the bishop: authority, humility, asceticism, and wonder-working.<sup>194</sup>

Holiness in medieval Iceland does not seem to have been restricted to bishops or even clerics. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarsson was a widely-traveled thirteenth century doctor who accompanied Guðmundr on his voyage to be consecrated by the archbishop in Norway. *Hrafns saga* contains detailed descriptions of some of his cures, including cauterizations and a phlegmbotomy.<sup>195</sup> These procedures are described in a manner that is "firmly based on classical medical learning and its medieval development in southern Europe."<sup>196</sup> This indicates that Hrafn may have been trained as a physician during his travels abroad.

Still, the author of *Hrafns saga* does not hesitate to attribute his hero's healing abilities to a divine gift. The saga's prologue describes how St. Óláfr appeared to his son King Magnús during a battle in 1043 and told him to pick twelve men from his army to care for the soldiers' wounds. Hrafn's great-great grandfather was among the men

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<sup>192</sup> Margaret Cormack, "Saints and Sinners: Reflections on Death in some Icelandic Sagas," *Gripla* 8 (1993), 201-203.

<sup>193</sup> Ásdís Egilsdóttir, "Eru biskupasögur til?" *Skáldskaparmál* 2 (1992), 210. Fritz Paul, "Historiographische und hagiographische Tendenzen in isländischen Bischofsviten des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts," *Skandinavistik* 9 (1979), 36-46.

<sup>194</sup> Eva Elm, *Die Macht der Weisheit: Das Bild des Bischofs in der Vita Augustini des Possidus und andere spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Bischofsviten* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 239-254.

<sup>195</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, ed., *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 5-6.

<sup>196</sup> Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, "Introduction," in *Hrafns saga*, xciv.

chosen. The author concludes, “Svá kom lækning af guðs miskunn fyrsta sinni í kyn Bárðar svarta [Hrafn’s grandfather].”<sup>197</sup> The author of *Hrafns saga* clearly knew how to use the rhetoric of hagiography. The descriptions of Hrafn’s cures conclude with language that is very similar to miracles: “Litlu síðar varð hann heill.”<sup>198</sup> The portrayal of Hrafn’s healing abilities as a divine gift was naturally favored over whatever medical knowledge Hrafn might have learned during his travels.

More striking are the hagiographic and miraculous motifs surrounding the execution of a layman named Þórðr Jónsson.<sup>199</sup> Under the years 1389 and 1390, the *Flateyjarannáll* reads:

[1389] flutt bein Þordar Jonssonar til Stafhollz i kirkiu gard eftir skipan officialis ok samþycki allra lærðra manna ok hygga menn hann helgann mann.

[1390] hlupu skridurr nær vm allt land sua at vnyttuz bædi skogar eingiar tódur ok wthagar. tok bæ allann <sup>a</sup> Hiallalandi i Vatzdal ok sex menn. komz þar eingi lifs vndan sa er i bænum var. tok ok bæ i Budarnesi ok onduduzst .xij. menn enn einn lifdi i husbrotunum ok hafdi heitid a Þord Jonsson.<sup>200</sup>

While these annal entries are extremely brief, they hint that the concepts of holy men with saint-like powers were probably more expansive in medieval Iceland than we know.

The conclusions of this thesis on the miraculous water of Guðmundr Arason support the argument that Icelandic clerics were ready to make a case for an expansive conception of holiness. However, as I have shown, the holiness of Guðmundr’s water needed to be justified; the limits of holiness were not universally agreed upon.

A tentative biography of Guðmundr emerges from the written sources. It seems very likely that he did consecrate wells and springs throughout Iceland during the early thirteenth century. This practice likely provoked doubt and scorn among some of his contemporaries. The years from c. 1240-1310 form the most difficult period in which to judge attitudes towards Guðmundr’s holy water. The impetus for the compositions of Guðmundr’s *vitae* was probably sparked by his *translatio* in 1315. The redactors of the B, C, and D versions clearly set out to write saints’ lives. I have examined the ways in

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<sup>197</sup> *Hrafns saga*, 1.

<sup>198</sup> *Hrafns saga*, 5-6.

<sup>199</sup> The extant sources give only an extremely fragmentary representation of Þórðr’s life and death. See Einar G. Pétursson, “Góði maðurinn Þórður,” in *Véfréttir: sagðar Vésteini Ólasyni fimmtugum 14. febrúar 1989* (Reykjavík: 1989), 27-29.

<sup>200</sup> Gustav Storm, ed. *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania: Grøndahl, 1888), 415-416.

which the B and D redactors incorporated the theme of Guðmundr's water consecrations into their hagiographies and how they made a case for the holiness and miraculous properties of this water.

In all writings about Guðmundr, the authors try to divert the locus of holy power away from Guðmundr's person. As a priest, all of the authors note that the Holy Spirit was with Guðmundr, presumably sanctifying his wells and springs just as the Holy Spirit had sanctified the River Jordan in Christ's baptism. The strength of Guðmundr's water blessing was affirmed by the Virgin Mary herself. Compared with the *Prestssaga* tradition, GB and GD go much further in expanding the justifications for Guðmundr's holy water – in analogous and different ways. Both frequently remind their audiences that God, not Guðmundr, governs what is holy. The addition of a conversation between Guðmundr and the Norwegian Archbishop Þórir gave the GB and GD redactors a platform to argue for an expansive conception of “holy,” in which all water in the world becomes a kind of secondary relic because of its contact with Christ's body. This argument has some parallels in medieval religious thought, but proclaiming the holiness of *all* water as a justification for blessing wells and springs seems to be unique to the fourteenth century *Guðmundar sögur*.

The holy virtues of water are discussed more extensively in GB. The GB redactor also places an intense focus on the inherent truth of Guðmundr's miracles. Continually referencing Paul's letter to Titus, the GB redactor emphasizes the mindset of the audience and Guðmundr's intentions. The redactor argues that since God ultimately decides what is holy and since numerous miracles occurred as a result of Guðmundr's water, God *must have approved* of Guðmundr's blessings. Since God granted Guðmundr these signs *in vita* and *post mortem*, Guðmundr *must* be a saint. Since he is a saint, all that is said about him is righteous and true and his practices are fully justified. Only those in the audience who possess the correct mindset will understand and appreciate the truth of his miracles. Those skeptics who lack the right mindset, like Queen Justina in *Ambrosius saga*, will only be able to “see” lies and doubts in Guðmundr's saga.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Cf. “... sjúkum augum er ljósið að hatri það sem helium augum er elskulegt...” *Augustinus saga* in *Heilagra karla sögur*, 239.

This line of reasoning in the B redaction acknowledges that some people might resist and question Guðmundr's sanctity: "En þótt sumum mönnum þikki þat nú sem lygi sé..." As we have seen, many of the doubts about Guðmundr are tied to his wide blessings of water. While the ban of Bishop Árni and the disparaging remarks of the priest Ljótr could both be the products of the GB redactor's imagination, these incidents give voice to concerns and reservations about the expansive conception of "holy water" claimed by Guðmundr and his hagiographers. The GB redactor can be characterized as slightly anxious about the orthodoxy of Guðmundr's blessings.

Although he repeats many of the same arguments for the holiness of Guðmundr's consecrations, Arngrímr's redaction represents less of an attempt to justify Guðmundr's water than a campaign to incite admiration and wonder for its miraculous powers. Instead of developing the theological explanations for Guðmundr's springs, Arngrímr presents a curtailed summary of the conversation with the archbishop relative to GB. The D redaction is largely a celebration of the transcendental figure of Guðmundr. In the descriptions of his water miracles, Arngrímr skips most of the personal and place names that occupy so much of GA and GB. The signs surrounding Guðmundr's water blessings elevate Guðmundr above the human and geographic spheres.

It has been suggested that Arngrímr wrote his *vita* with a foreign (and possibly papal) audience in mind.<sup>202</sup> Scholarly opinions differ on whether Arngrímr's redaction is a translation of an original Latin *vita*.<sup>203</sup> The issue of canonization is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is sufficient to say that any effort to canonize Guðmundr would have had to clear enormous bureaucratic obstacles and there is little evidence to suggest that a serious attempt at canonization was made in the Middle Ages.<sup>204</sup> The issue of a foreign audience

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<sup>202</sup> "[Arngrímr's] task was to compile an official record of his hero's martyrdom in office and saintliness that would convincingly support Guðmundr's candidacy for canonization." Marlene Ciklamini, "The Hand of Revision: Abbot Arngrímr's Redaction of *Guðmundar saga biskups*," *Gripla* VIII (1993), 233.

<sup>203</sup> E.g. Peter Hallberg asserts that Arngrímr's work was also written in Latin. Peter Hallberg, "Den sena legendsagan om biskop Guðmundr Arason" in *Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1968), 152. Stefán Karlsson presents a more skeptical view. See Stefán Karlsson, "Authorial Viewpoints" 168.

<sup>204</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* 59-84. See also pp. 257-260, where Vauchez notes the diminishing importance of holy bishops in the fourteenth century. For the evidence, see *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, vol. 3, 205-207. There is no record of a papal inquiry for Guðmundr's case in the Middle Ages.

does raise the question of how Guðmundr's miraculous water fits into the milieu of late-medieval sanctity.

While stressing the complexity and individual nature of medieval santliness, André Vauchez has described patterns and mentalities in the fourteenth century with direct relevance for the B and D redactions. In particular, Vauchez has noted a shift in focus away from relics and towards the sacred bodies of living saints. He argues that the shift away from relics corresponded to an increasing percentage of miracles taking place at a distance from saints' gravesites. The shift towards saints' bodies also corresponded to an increasing perception of late-medieval saints as supernaturally holy beings, in many ways detached from the world around them.<sup>205</sup>

In some ways, these patterns are represented in GB and GD. According to his *vitae*, Guðmundr's grave does not appear to be a significant site of veneration. His holy springs throughout the land seem to have replaced the role once occupied by relics. The characterization of Guðmundr as a supernaturally-holy being is especially apparent in Arngrímur's redaction. However, among most later medieval saints, this idea of "supernatural holiness" was based on internal qualities. Saints were noted for their superhuman penitence and piety; their bodies shared material similarities with the body of Christ. Most late-medieval hagiographers and clerics placed emphasis on saints' internal holiness, not on their external miracles or secondary relics. In late medieval canonization processes, the number of miracles performed by saints *in vita* diminished considerably.<sup>206</sup> By contrast, according to the *vitae*, Guðmundr's wells throughout Iceland form a link between his personal holiness *in vita* and his miracles (*in vita* and *post mortem*). As I have described, the B and D redactors clarify, justify, celebrate, and sometimes worry about this link.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 433-453.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 502-505.

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