Forgotten Preaching
A Latin Sermon on Saint Þorlákr in Uppsala UB C 301

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ÞORLÁKR ÞORHALSSON, born at Hlíðarendi í Fljótshlið, entered the clergy at a young age and was subsequently educated at Oddi, Skálholt, Paris and Lincoln before being elected Bishop of Skálholt in 1178. He was decisively engaged in the staðamál fyrri, a conflict between clergy and laity ca. 1179, and immediately after his death in 1193, local veneration was quickly kindled, leading to the translation of his remains to Skálholt cathedral in 1198.1

Þorlákr was commemorated with two feasts, the dies natale on 23rd December (Þorláksmessa að vetri) and the translatio on 20th July (Þorláksmessa að sumri). Both came into effect by episcopal proclamation at the Althing in 1199 and 1237 respectively. No canonisation efforts had ever been made, apparently because the procedure had not yet been fully established, and the local, episcopal approval of Þorlákr’s sanctity sufficed.2


2 Although the first juridical canonisation is documented as early as the tenth century, it was not before the early thirteenth century that it was perfected. According to the sources, only 49 canonisation processes were conducted prior to the turn of the fourteenth century, 24 of which were successful. See Arnold Angenendt, Heilige und Reliquien: Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart (München: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1994), 180–82. The vernacular saga, however, quotes a letter by Eirik, Archbishop of Nidaros, from the turn of the thirteenth century, in which the Archbishop admits Þorlákr’s sanctity. See Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ed., Biskupa sögur 2: Hungsvaka, Þorláks býskups in elztu, Jarteinabók Þorláks býskups í forna, Þorláks saga býskups yngri, Jarteinabók Þorláks býskups önnur, Þorláks saga býskups C, Þorláks saga býskups E, Páls saga býskups, Ísleif’s þáttur býskupa, Latinubrot um Þorlák býskup, Íslenzk fornrit 16 (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenzka fornritafélag, 2002), 85 and 193. For an interpretation of the two slightly diverging versions, see Gottskálk Jensson, “*Revelaciones Thorlaci episcopi,” 143–44.

Gripla XXVII (2016): 235–261
The Icelandic calendars ascribe the *dies natale* the rank of a Holy Day of Obligation of the highest level with preceding vigils, while the *translatio* was kept as a Holy Day of Obligation. In both cases, mass was prescribed, labour was interdicted, and a fast preceded the winter feast. In addition, two calendars mention the *ordinatio Thorlaci* on 2nd July, though the rank of this feast is not evident.3

The commemoration in mass and prayer of the hours triggered the composition of proper liturgical texts and song. Fragments of a mass rite for 23rd December and for 2nd July are preserved,4 as well as adapted prayers5 and *lectiones* for the prayer of the hours for both feasts.6 Also surviving is an *officium* for the *dies natale* from the thirteenth century which displays Dominican influence.7 In addition to these liturgical compositions, we also find literary efforts in both Old Norse and Latin. In Old Norse, miracles are transmitted in three partly dependant collections, and sagas about Þorlákr reflect three stages of revision from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.8 There are also fragments of two Latin lives of St Þorlákr, the first in the style of a *gesta episcoporum* from around 1200, and the second in the form of a more elaborate *vita* from the first half of the thirteenth century.9 The second fragment group shows signs of liturgical re-use. The Icelandic narratives appear to have been adapted from the Latin, albeit with numerous misunderstandings.10

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3 MSS AM 249 f fol. and GKS Add 1 fol., see Margaret Cormack, *The Saints in Iceland: Their Veneration from the Conversion to 1400*, Subsidia hagiographica 78 (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1994), 159.
5 Eighteenth-century copy MS AM 241 b IX fol. (fol. 10r), see ibid., vol. 1, 69–70.
In the past few decades, scholars have focused on the interrelation between the Old Norse and the Latin biographies in order to establish their chronological and intertextual coherence. The literature on St Þorlákr – not only the lives, but also a poem – served to prove the vividness of Icelandic Latinity and to encourage the revision of earlier research and prejudiced convictions. A Latin sermon on St Þorlákr, the *Sermo de beato Thorlaco episcopo*, transmitted in MS Uppsala UB C 301, however, has gone more or less unnoticed. Up until the present, only the Norwegian liturgist Lilli Gjerløw has discussed the sermon in a study of fragments pertaining to the liturgical history of medieval Iceland. She considers the Þorlákr sermon in the context of the collection in which it survives, i.e. the *Themata sermonum* by Nicolas de Gorran, and describes it as a mere adaptation of an unknown continental sermon. Subsequently, the sermon has attracted less scholarly interest than it indeed deserves: it is not even mentioned in recent studies. Apart from Gjerløw’s judgement, the lack of any connection with other Þorlákr literature may have rendered the sermon of little interest to Old Norse scholars, while Latinists and sermonists continue to struggle with the overwhelming number of transmitted Latin sermons and have no need of additional material.

As the only known surviving Latin-Icelandic sermon, however, the *Sermo de beato Thorlaco episcopo* is a most important witness to the religious reality of medieval Iceland. In this article, I will analyse the sermon and demonstrate how established continental patterns of sermon composition and performance were executed in Iceland. Ultimately, the sermon will emerge as the sole survivor of the active and vivid preaching culture of fourteenth-century Iceland, and as a composition that situated the island within the intellectual heritage it shares with the rest of medieval Europe.

12 AM 382 4to, see Gottskálk Jensson and Fahn, “The Forgotten Poem.”
Manuscript context

MS Uppsala UB C 301 was produced in Iceland in the fourteenth century but came into the possession of the Dominican convent of Sigtuna (in Sweden) in medieval times. The manuscript is a small quarto measuring 210 x 140 mm and the pages are written in 27 long lines. It is modestly decorated with pen-flourished initials, pen-stroke highlighting, and paragraph signs within the text.

C 301 contains a sermon collection of 49 folia bound together with a later tabula. The stock of sermons derives from the sanctorale of Nicolas de Gorran’s Themata sermonum with appended temporale sermons from other sources to cover the major feasts of the church year. Within the Themata section, omissions and substitutions of sermons indicate that the collection had been tailored to suit specific local needs, probably at the episcopal see of Skálholt. Originally, it might have served a priest or even the Bishop.

The Þorlákr sermon (fols. 4v–5v) has the incipit “Hoc honore dignus est, quemcumque rex honorare voluerit, Ester. Verba proposita licet secundum historiam dicantur de Mardocheo”. There is no known parallel in any other manuscript. The sermon opens with the theme from Esther 6:11 on someone deserving to be honoured. It explains how the scriptural reference is literally meant in its original context, and then applies it allegorically to the veneration of St Þorlákr by subdividing it into four kinds of veneration: of a father by his children, of a doctor by the sick, of a master by his patients, and of a bishop by the clergy.

The collection systematically reduces the number of choices for each feast, and some feasts are omitted entirely. In addition, the texts themselves tend to be more concise by leaving out subdivisions or arguments and by highly abbreviating scriptural quotation. Within the ad status part, any sermons addressing religious communities are left out, while the sermons on the duties of the clergy are expanded by marginal annotation.

See also Gjerløw, Liturgica Islandica, vol. 1, 72; Andersson-Schmitt, Hallberg, and Hedlund, Mittelalterliche Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Uppsala: Katalog über die C-Sammlung (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1988–1995), vol. 4, 7. It must be noted, however, that sermon manuscripts are to be found in large quantities in manuscript libraries, and that it might still be possible for a corresponding item to be found, as the incipit list provided in Schneyer’s repertory is not exhaustive. See Johannes Baptist Schneyer, Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150–1350, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Texte und Untersuchungen 43/1–11 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1969–1990).
by his pupils, and of a prelate by his subjects. In the following sections, the first three subthemes are developed before the sermon is summed up with a prayer.

In a study of the fragmentary Icelandic liturgical material, Lilli Gjerløw presented the Þorlákr sermon as an Icelander’s adaptation of an unknown continental sermon. According to Gjerløw, the sermon resembles those written by Nicolas de Gorran in style and execution, which would bring them in line with the rest of the Themata collection or a similar school.\(^{19}\) Closer analysis of the text, however, reveals that this is not quite the case. The other Themata sermons have been described as “dry and telegraphic”, giving only a series of scriptural or exegetical quotations to support each subtheme.\(^{20}\) This schematic, list-like nature makes them rather unsuitable for reading. The Þorlákr sermon, on the other hand, is much more verbose. It contains connecting sentences to link the quotations together — at least for the first and third subthemes. In general, most sermons by the same preacher would resemble each other in style. The opening and concluding phrases employed by Nicolas de Gorran in the Themata sermonum are quite different to what we find in the Þorlákr sermon.\(^{21}\) Since the Þorlákr sermon diverges significantly from the rest of the collection in its treatment of quotations, rhetoric and phrasing, it is highly unlikely that Nicolas de Gorran is the author of the model. If there is any similarity to be found between Nicolas de Gorran’s work and the Þorlákr sermon, it must be sought in the general principles of sermon composition, such as the division into subthemes and the employment of arguments from the Bible.\(^{22}\)

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Composition

Lilli Gjerløw notes that “the sermon [...] could apply to any confessor saint” and adds that the sermon’s theme was often used for St Andrew, who was a martyr. From the perspective of the genre as a whole, Esther 6:11 is a frequent theme for sermons for St Nicholas or the Chair of St Peter. The related verse Esther 6:9 (“sic honorabitur quemcumque rex voluerit honorare”) occurs for different occasions and saints. This demonstrates that the theme (or a variation on it) was rather popular for preaching on saints but that it was not limited to a certain kind of saint.

In fact, there is nothing specifically relating to Þorlákr in the sermon. This fits with the majority of sermons on saints which in their written form are devoid of any individual traits or details from the saint’s vita. The sermon is actually only connected to St Þorlákr by two occurrences of his name in the outline and in the second subdivision. In both cases, the name is inserted into an otherwise grammatically functional sentence: “isti sancto, scilicet beato Thorlaco,” and “medicum nostrum, scilicet sanctum Thorlacum”. The “scilicet”-addition could point to a later insertion. It must be noted, however, that these kinds of insertions are common in the sermon genre, and therefore this might not be a wholly compelling argument.

There are rhetorical inconsistencies between the surviving subdivisions, which suggest that the sermon did not follow one model but probably

23 Gjerløw, Liturgica Islandica, vol. 1, 72. Gjerløw bases her observation on Est 6:7 (“respondit homo quem rex honorare cupit”), not Est 6:11 (“hoc honore condignus est quemcumque rex voluerit honorare”) which is quoted in the sermon. This error does not generally affect her argumentation.

24 On St Nicholas, e.g. Robertus de Sorbonio no. 1315, Schneyer, Repertorium, vol. 5, 277. In cathedra S. Petri e.g. Lucas de Padua no. 46, ibid., vol. 4, 75.


27 Gjerløw transcribes it as “siue”, Gjerløw, Liturgica Islandica, vol. 1, 73. This is wrong both paleographically and grammatically.
at least three. The first subdivision opens with the subtheme “Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam ut sis longevus super terram” (Ex 20:12). As a theme on its own, this is most common for the third Wednesday in Lent. Furthermore, the first subtheme ends with a body of scriptural and patristic quotations and has a rather unfinished, almost abandoned air to it. There is no summarising sentence of the kind found in both of the other subdivisions. It is also vague with regard to how far the theme of the spiritual father applies to the saint, as this is not explicitly mentioned. The subdivision could, therefore, have been taken from another sermon that was not even intended for a saint’s feast.

The second subdivision develops the subtheme “honora medicum prop ter instantem necessitatem” (Sir 38:1). A number of saints’ sermons (most of which are for St Luke the evangelist) use this quotation as a theme in its own right. The content of the subdivision fully applies to a saint, and there is both a reference to the saint’s legend (although it is rather unspecific) and Þorlákr’s name as an insertion. By and large, there are fewer quotations than in the preceding part, and they are connected by longer explanatory sentences.

The subtheme “Sede, doce nos, quia dedit tibi Dominus honorem senectutis” (Dn 13:50) is developed in the third subdivision. As a sermon theme, this is a rather rare choice, only found elsewhere in one sermon for St Nicholas. There are no references to a saint in this subdivision. In fact, only Jesus Christ is mentioned as a teacher here. There are a number of quotations, and they are well merged into the argumentation. What is different, however, is the rhetorical “heu”, which structures the paragraph. It sets the third subdivision apart from the rest, especially from the first subdivision, which is a mere agglomeration of references.

28 “Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”
29 E.g. Johannes de Castello no. 623, Schneyer, Repertorium, vol. 3, 420. Also Nicolas de Gorran no. 317, ibid., vol. 4, 275. This sermon is not contained in Uppsala UB C 301.
30 “Honour the physician for the need.”
31 Schneyer, Repertorium, vol. 5, 327; vol. 8, 178; vol. 3, 715; vol. 2, 239; vol. 3, 429. There are also sermons for St Silvester and one sermon for SS Cosmas and Damian.
32 “Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder.”
33 Schneyer, Repertorium, vol. 4, 281.
The fourth subtheme, i.e. the veneration of a prelate by his subjects, is left out, although outlined at the beginning of the sermon. The closest scriptural passages that might determine the text are “quicumque sunt sub iugo servi, dominos suos honore dignos arbitrentur” (1 Tm 6:1), and “in medio fratrum rector illorum in honore” (Sir 10:24). Neither of these verses have been documented as the theme for a full sermon. Since the sermon does not follow its outline to the end, it seems to have been altered from its previous state. This is in accordance with what has happened to other sermons in Uppsala UB C 301. In these, we find the careful reduction in length of almost every sermon, achieved through the omission of quotations and a shorter, more concise rendering of those quotations that are included. In some cases (comparable to the Þorlákr sermon), parts of the argumentation are left out without a corresponding adjustment of the outline. This suggests that a later redactor modified parts of the collection, including the Þorlákr sermon.

There is no true summarising end to the Þorlákr sermon, although the end of the third subtheme might be taken as such. The lack of a conclusion is, however, frequently found in sermon manuscripts, as Monica Hedlund has noticed in the works of Peregrinus de Opole. This might result from improvisation during performance, and it does not necessarily indicate that something was left out in transmission. All in all, the Þorlákr sermon gives the impression of being something of a patchwork. Considering the different foci of the remaining three sub-themes, the irregularities in their rhetoric and style, as well as the changing use of supporting quotations, we might conclude that they could well have been appropriated from different sources.

It is interesting to note that although the theme Est 6:11 could not be traced back to any sources, the anti-theme of 1 Tm 4:5 can be found in one of Nicolas de Gorran’s other works, a commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy. Here, Nicolas gives several aspects of honoration:

34 This has not been noticed by Gjerløw, who claims that “[t]hese four themes are developed with citations from Scripture and from St. Ambrose, Galienus, and St. Bernard.” Liturgica Islandica, vol. 1, 73.
35 1 Tm 6:1: “Whosoever are servants under the yoke, let them count their masters worthy of all honour.” Sir 10:24: “In the midst of brethren their chief is honourable.”

37 Nicolaus Gorranus, In Omnes Divi Pauli Epistolæ Enarratio. Selectis S. Scripturæ, Conciliorum Et SS. Patrum intertexta ubique authoritatibus. Opus omnibus Ecclesiae Pastoribus, Asceticis & Verbi divini Praconibus perutile, nunc primum ab innumeris aliarum editionum mendis expurgatum. locis S. Scripturæ & SS. Patrum citationibus: versibus textus Evangelici ac duplici Indice illustratum. Tomus Primus continens Epistolæ Ad Romanos, Corinthios, Galatas, Ephesios, Philippenses, & Colossenses (Lugdunum: Anisson, Posuel & Rigaud, 1692), 94–95. Italics as in the original (“Note on this [worthy of all honour] that the creature is said to honour God. Sir 7:33: Honour God with all thy soul. Ps 28:2: Ascribe to the Lord glory and honour. A subject for the prelate. Sir 10:14 [=10:24]: In the midst of the brethren their leader is held in honour. A slave for the master: as this one here [1 Tim 6:1]: whoever are under the yoke of slavery etc. Mal 1:6: A son honours his father, and a servant his master. Anyone for a saint. Ps 138:17: But to me thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable: their principality is exceedingly strengthened. But alas! They did not judge the honour in their souls. Children for their parents. Ex 20:12: Honour thy father. Sir 3:7: He that honoureth his father shall enjoy a long life. Husband for their wives. 1 Pt 3:7: giving honour to the female as to the weaker vessel. The young for the elder. Lev 19:32: Rise up before the hoary head, and honour the person of the old man. Between equals. Rom 12:10: with honour preventing one another. The infirm for the doctor. Sir 38:1: Honour the physician for the need. The pupil for the master. Ws 8:10: For her sake I shall have glory among the multitude, and honour among the elders. Heb 12:9: Moreover we have had fathers of our flesh for instructors, and we reverenced them: shall we not much more obey the Father of spirits, and live?”).
All four distinctions of the Þorlákr sermon can be found here, and they are at least partially accompanied by the same biblical quotations (Ex 20:12 and Sir 38:1). In addition, we find the same rhetorical device “sed heu” in the commentary under the honoration of a saint, as is employed in the Þorlákr sermon in the third subdivision on the honoration of a master by his students.

*Distinctiones* as a genre were among the most popular preaching aids of their time. However, it is a genre in which it is almost always impossible to trace intertextuality between individual sermons due to the frequency of the associated quotations. In the case under consideration, equivalent quotations cannot prove that the Þorlákr sermon was based on the Commentary on the Pauline Epistles, since the overlapping text is not extensive enough to build an argumentation on. But the quotations do illustrate that the sermon’s author used a known cluster of quotations to base his sermon on, as the verses were very much intertwined in contemporary theological thinking. This cluster would have served as a point of departure for determining the four subdivisions. For each subdivision, the author would then have collected texts from other sermons, probably adjusting some words, rearranging them or even adding passages of his own. Such compilatory license or working methods also make it difficult to track down sources for individual passages. It must be noted that there are several sermons in Nicolas de Gorran’s *Themata sermonum* that draw on the biblical authorities listed in his commentary on 1 Tim. For instance, *De pluribus apostolis* 5 employs Ps 138:17 as a theme, and the sermon ends with Est 6:11, which is the theme of the Þorlákr sermon.

The most likely scenario, then, is that the Þorlákr sermon was compiled from various sources employing the usual copy-paste technique found in medieval sermon composition. Monica Hedlund found that Johannes Borquardi, who worked at Vadstena Abbey from 1428 to 1447, drew on

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“his own collection of ideas”\(^\text{41}\) and re-used snippets from model sermons to create a new text. Although often following his direct source for longer passages, usually a subsection, Johannes would insert occasional words or even quotations, sometimes jumping over thematic units. Some passages are modelled freely, and the degree to which Johannes alters his source sermons might vary from verbatim quotation to the mere loan of ideas, the latter being especially hard to track down. A similar phenomenon has been observed for preaching literature in Middle High German.\(^\text{42}\) In both cases, the interrelation between the compiled sermon and its sources is rather obvious because the source texts are known. For fourteenth-century Iceland, this kind of comparison is impossible to conduct because the manuscript tradition is nearly completely lost, as is the other evidence supporting it. However, internal evidence in the text, i.e. inconsistencies in the use of biblical authorities and rhetorical means, indicate that the Þorlákr sermon was forged with the same techniques as employed in the rest of Europe.

In this context, it is also important to point out that the compilatio technique was not a phenomenon restricted to the periphery of Europe. Neither was it a characteristic of an uninspired or untalented preacher, as originality does not seem to have been a goal in preaching.\(^\text{43}\)

### Preaching on St Þorlákr

As indicated above, the Þorlákr sermon might be the only sermon that can positively be connected with medieval Iceland. There is abundant evidence for the preaching of exegetic homilies in the form of translations and homily collections listed among Church possessions.\(^\text{44}\) All this


\(^{44}\) The Icelandic máldagar use the terms (h)omilia and sermo for earlier collections, e.g. by Augustine or Gregory the Great, which corresponds to continental habits. Finding a reference to a sermon book in these sources therefore does not allow us to identify them with high medieval sermons in the scholastic style.
evidence, however, points to the two centuries immediately following the Christianisation of Iceland. It supports a tradition of written preaching literature but does not reflect the actual performance in Church, which was oral. If and how Icelandic clergy undertook sermon preaching from the middle of the twelfth century onwards, however, is much less easy to ascertain. The mendicant orders never established houses on the island although we can trace Dominican influence at the beginning of the fourteenth century through certain prominent individuals like Bishop Jón Halldórsson. The possibility that the Dominican order, at least, sent more friars to Iceland cannot be excluded, but the order may not have considered establishing houses due to the distinctly rural profile of the country.

There are traces of some model sermon collections in the Icelandic textual record. Apart from C 301 and its fragmentary sister manuscript AM 241 b I α fol., which both contain the Themata sermonum by Nicolas de Gorran, there is a fragmentary copy of the Sermones de tempore by Guilelmus de Malliaco in AM Acc. 7, ms. 134 (Iceland, fourteenth century).\(^{45}\) A fragment of the Sermones aurei de sanctis by Leonardus Matthaei de Utino in AM Acc. 7, ms. 105 (Italy, fifteenth century) might have been imported to Iceland in the late Middle Ages.\(^{46}\) We can see that at the time of the last Catholic Bishop, Jón Arason (d. 1550), a considerable number of sermon collections and virtue treatises, featuring some prominent preachers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were present at Hólar.\(^{47}\) Model collections are a good indicator of an active preaching culture, since they helped preachers in the preparation and delivery of new sermons in Church.

45 Merete Geert Andersen, Katalog over AM Accessoria 7: De latinske fragmenter, Bibliotheca Arnaminæana 46 (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 2008), 128. The sermons are Guilelmus de Malliaco nos. 1, 7 and 13, Schneyer, Repertorium, vol. 2, 473–74. Note that no. 7 on 2ra had not been identified and was thus wrongly assigned to Christmas Day by Andersen.

46 Leonardus Matteo de Utino, Sermones aurei de sanctis (Colonia: Anton Koberger, 1473), sermo xxiv. The fragment is listed in the AM Accessoria 7 catalogue but as containing an unidentified theological treatise and being written in Iceland in the fourteenth century, cf. Andersen, Katalog over AM Accessoria 7, 93. The identification is my own, but I am indebted to Michael Robert Gullick for helping me with the provenance and date.

47 Sermons by Thomas Aquinas and Johannes de Verdena, as well as known preacher manuals, were among the possessions of Hólar cathedral, cf. Íslenzka bókmentafélég, ed., Diplomatarium Islandicum: Íslenskt fornbréfasafn sem hefir inni að halda bréf og gjörnirna, dómna og máldaga, og aðrar skrár, er snerta Ísland eða íslenzka menn, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: Bókmentafélég, 1857–1972), vol. 9, 297 ff.
Contemporary Icelandic accounts are remarkably silent about the composition and performance of sermons. Two incidents, however, link sermon preaching to St Þorlákr. According to the fourteenth-century Icelandic Lárentíuss saga, a Dominican friar from the see of Nidaros was sent on visitation to Iceland in 1304. When asked to preach on St Þorlákr on the feast of his translation, this friar, Björn, was reluctant, doubtsing the sanctity of someone who had not been approved by the archiepiscopal see of Nidaros. Björn wanted Instead to interdict that mass be sung for Þorlákr until the agreement of the see was obtained. The narrative relates how Björn’s Icelandic companion, the future Bishop Lárentíus Kalfsson, warns him that Þorlákr will prove his sanctity, but Björn pays no heed and even has meat prepared for dinner, thus breaking the rule of fasting before the feast. Later in the evening, Björn is struck down by a sudden illness, and Lárentíus, who is called to his bed, quickly ascribes this to Þorlákr’s saintly power. Björn repents, is cured by the saint’s intervention and performs the requested sermon the following day.
According to Jóns þáttr Halldórssonar, the Bishop preached a sermon on St Þorlákr and illustrated it with an exemplum:

Skulu vér greina þessu næst eitt æfintýr er hann setti í sína predikan, þá er hann var byskup Skalholtsins Þorláksmessu á sumarit í Vestfirðingafjórðungi á þeim bæ er Staðarhóll heitir, ok hversu réttlátr var hinn sæli Þorlákr ok vandlátr at geyma Guðs lög setti hann honum tiltekit dæmi svá fallit sem hér stendr.

The following ævintýr (i.e. an exemplum in the vernacular) is about a rich man who kills his nephew to punish him for adultery. On his deathbed, he refuses to confess and is thus denied Extreme Unction and communion by a certain bishop. Through a miracle, however, he turns out to be still favoured by God, making the bishop out to be an unfair player. There is no fully apparent connection between this episode and the saint, as exempla would not be understood verbatim. Rather, a preacher would extract more general themes from the exemplum and connect them with elements from the saint’s life such as the struggle for morally correct conduct.

Both accounts show that preaching in the modern style did occur in fourteenth-century Iceland. The accounts serve a specific purpose in the context they appear in: to illustrate the sanctity of Þorlákr, to distinguish Iceland from Norway, to illustrate the proud attitude of the Norwegian friar or to provide a backdrop for the Bishop’s story-telling skills, and all of these functions might have affected the historical accuracy of these accounts. However, the accounts also prove that the preaching of a sermon on the occasion of Þorlákr’s translation was not considered a strange event. Sermon preaching is described in Lárentiuss saga without further explana-

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50 Jóns þáttr Halldórssonar is assumed to have been composed shortly after the Bishop’s death in 1339. It is preserved in two manuscripts, AM 624 4to (1490–1510, religious and canonistic texts) and AM 764 4to (‘Reynistaðarbók’, 1300–1399, annals, legends, miracles, exempla). In both cases, it figures as part of a collection of religious texts with varying theological or edifying nature. In the þáttr, the exact nature of Jón’s preaching and use of exempla is depicted. The terminology suggests a clerical authorship and audience, and the text might have been composed by members of Jón’s entourage shortly after his death.

51 Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ed., Biskupa sögur 3, 449–50. (“Next, we shall lay out a tale that he put into his preaching, when he was bishop of Skálholt, on St Þorlákr’s feast in the summer in the West Fjords in that place that is called Staðarhóll. And [to illustrate] how righteous blessed Þorlákr was and [how] eager to keep God’s law, he put for him a specific example such as here follows.”)
tion or introduction of its terminology, and in no way is it highlighted as something exceptional.

The sermon under discussion thus can be connected to a well-established cult and can be seen to have supported it by giving the audience an example of virtue and faith. In this regard, the sermon should be seen as being in line with the majority of sanctorale sermons. Specific sermons to promote a cult or even to support the canonisation of a saint are rather rare and restricted to prominent saints such as Thomas Becket. In Þorlákr’s case, the cult had been established quickly, and it would not have needed further promotion nationally. Nor is there any evidence that a particular effort was made to have Þorlákr canonised, as discussed above. Thematically, the sermon would not fit a canonisation scenario due to its theme of veneration and its very restricted transmission. Moreover, it is unlikely that it was ever intended to be used outside of Iceland. The fact that MS Uppsala UB C 301 was used in Sweden does not contradict such an intention. The Þorlákr sermon could simply have been skipped, or it could have served as a model for other saints or as a source of quotations for a new sermon, making it a new starting point in the never-ending series of copy-paste compilations.

We can suppose from its skeleton outline that it is highly unlikely that the Þorlákr sermon was actually preached in its present state. Rather, the written sermon would have served as a point of departure, providing the preacher with a host of quotations and a rough structure. In any case, he would have needed to have added prayers at the beginning and at the end. He would also have had to link many of the quotations by adding explanatory sentences, as well as adding life to the sermon by incorporating details from Þorlákr’s life. The preacher might even have added further quotations as he went along, without them being noted in the manuscript, or have omitted those that he found of little use in the given context. There would also have been opportunity to work in illustrative stories, exempla,
as illustrated in Jóns þátr Halldórssonar. Even the language of the written sermon could be changed upon delivery. Latin sermon collections were popular during the Middle Ages precisely because they were not fixed in time and space. And even though Latin was used in writing down a sermon, its actual performance was usually in the vernacular, depending on the audience. Thus although the Þorlákr sermon was written down in Latin, it still could have been preached in Old Norse-Icelandic, as a well-trained preacher could easily switch between the two languages, especially when transforming the sermon into his native language.

Conclusion

Despite earlier scholarly beliefs, the Þorlákr sermon demonstrates that thematic sermons were indeed preached in medieval Iceland. It draws on the same thematic features and mechanisms of textual construction as its counterparts all over Europe, especially outside major centres such as Paris. The sermon is void of details relating to the saint, a typical feature of thematic sermon preaching. It seems to have been forged from several pre-existing sermons, rather than being an adaptation of a single model sermon as was previously thought. The parts seem to have been assembled by thematic association of the underlying scriptural quotations, and their conventionality can, for instance, be seen in matching patterns found in distinctiones. Evidence for the copy-paste technique being used elsewhere in Europe places the Þorlákr sermon firmly in the context of this tradition, rather than making it a peripheral phenomenon.

Furthermore, it can be seen that in Iceland, too, the sermon was part of a tradition of occasional preaching on the saints’ feasts, a supposition which is supported by saga literature. While continental and modern in its composition, it can also be characterised as Icelandic and traditional through the focus on the Icelandic saint. The alleged lack of individual detail is due to the sermon’s skeleton-like expression in writing. It would have reached its full splendour during performance: enriched with details from the saint’s vita and framed with appropriate prayers, a contemporary audience would have found it to be a convincing example of a godly life at the periphery that was worth imitating.

56 D’Avray, Preaching of the Friars, 94–95.

58 corr. from “honorare” by the same hand.

De beato Thorlaco episcopo.

“Hoc honore dignus est, quemcumque rex honorare voluerit” [Est 6:11], Ester. Verba proposita licet secundum historiam dicantur de Mardocheo, quem rex Asuerus temporaliter honoravit. Allegorice intellecta isti sancto, scilicet beato Thorlaco, competere possunt, quem rex regum Christus aeternaliter exaltavit et honoravit. Sed quia secundum Apostolum “omnes convenit hono-

rare” [1 Tim 6:1], praecipue tamen eum, quem a Deo scimus honoratum, debet ergo honorari tamquam pater a filiis, medicus ab infirmis, magister a discipulis, praelatus a subditis. Ipse enim fuit pater noster gubernando in gratia, medicus sanando a culpa, magister erudiendo in doctrina, praelatus gubernando in vita.

De primo, Exodus: “Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam ut sis longa-

Secundo, debet honorari ut medicus ab infirmis. Ecclesiasticus: “Hon-
ora medicum propter instantem necessitatem” [Sir 38:1]. Si ergo honoramus medicum propter necessitatem nostrorum corporum, multo plus medicum spiritualiter propter necessitatem animarum. Maior enim est necessitas sanitatis animae quam corporis, quia corpus quodcumque sanetur debet mori. Sanitas autem animae potest in aeternum durare. Item periculosior est infirmitas animae, quae mortem aeternam inducit, quam corporis, quae tamen temporale. Haec medicina habet fieri per contrarium, sicut dicit


Affirmate ergo lectionem, quia liber appensus est ante oculos, in quo scripta sunt oboedientia et humilitas Christi Ihesu et abstinentia, ut sic compatiamur iuxta dictum Bernardi: “Quam dulciter, bone Ihesu, cum hominibus conversatus es, quam abundanter multa et magna hominibus largiri dignatus es, quam aspera pro hominibus passus es, ut liceat sugere mel de petra oleumque de saxo durissimo amplectenda crucis supplicia” [serm. 2,7]. Rogemus ergo etc.
Appendix 3: Translation into English

On the blessed Bishop Þorlákr.

“Worthy of this honour is he whom the King would wish to honour” [Est 6:11], Esther. Although according to the Old Testament reading, the words which I have set out are said of Mordecai, whom king Ahasuerus honoured temporally, they can – understood allegorically – be applied to this saint, i.e. blessed Þorlákr, whom the King of Kings Christ has exalted and honoured eternally. But since according to the Apostle “it is befitting to honour all” [1 Tm 6:1], (it is), however, particularly (befitting to honour) him, whom we know to be honoured by God, in as much as he should be honoured like a father by his children, or a physician by the infirm, a master by his students, a prelate by his subjects. For he was our father by governing (us) in grace, our physician by saving (us) from sin, our master by educating (us) in doctrine, our prelate by governing (us) in life.

On the first (sub-theme) Exodus: “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land” [Ex 20:12]. This is the commandment of God. Therefore (honour) much more your spiritual father, because the bond of grace is stronger than that of nature. It is a smaller benefit to lead into being than to lead into well-being, because through this (conduct), God is feared as a parent, God who commands one to honour one’s parents. He should honour, I say, parents and serve as masters those who generated him in the flesh or in the spirit, as the apostle says: “Through the gospel he generated you” [1 Cor 4:15]. Let us therefore honour our spiritual father by imitating his virtues. “We are the children of our saints” [Tb 2:18], and “the knowing son [is] the father’s glory” [Prv 13:1]. The blessed John says: “I know no greater joy than to see that my children walk in truth” [3 Jn 1:4]. Hence the Lord says: “If you were Abraham’s children, you should do the works of Abraham” [Jn 8:39]. Ambrose: “Anyone is called the son of the one whose labour he does” [serm. XXX,1]. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” [Mt 5:16].

Secondly, he should be honoured as a physician by the infirm. Ecclesiasticus: “Honour the physician for the urgent need” [Sir 38:1]. So if we honour the physician for the need of our bodies, (we should honour) much more the spiritual physician for the need of the souls. For the need of the sanity of the soul is greater than that of the body, because whatever body
is healed, it must die. Likewise: more dangerous is the soul’s weakness, which induces eternal death, than the body’s, which only induces temporal death. This medicine tends to work through opposites, as Gregory says: “As in the art of medicine, hot is cured by cold and cold by hot, so our Lord opposed contrary medication to the sins, such as continence for the inconstant, generosity for the miserly, gentleness for the irascible, humility for the proud” [Hom. ev. II,32,1]. Behold the physician, it is clear how much he truly followed his own medicine. With how much chastity, abundance, clemency, and humbleness he operated, will surely be mentioned in his legend. Let us therefore honour our physician, i.e. saint Þorlákr, by loving his medication, because what he made for himself, he did for our benefit. Ecclesiasticus: “The most High has created medicine out of the earth, and a wise man will not abhor it” [Sir 38:4].

Thirdly, he should be honoured as a master by his students, as is said about Daniel: “Have a seat, and teach us, because God gave you the honour of old age” [Dn 13:50]. Honour truly, because “although he had been perfected by studying briefly, he filled a long time by teaching” [Ws 4:13]. Let us therefore honour such a doctor by perfecting his doctrine, because everyone will be perfect, if he is as his master. For there is praise of the doctor in the perfection of his hearer. But alas, how little does it yet appear that we Christians are in the schools of Christ or his saints! For we have learned little or nothing on perfection. Yet the Lord himself nevertheless says: “Learn of me” etc. [Mt 11:29]. But alas, we have rather learned of him, who teaches cruelty than piety, and that is deplorable, because no animal would do savagery against his own kind except man. Therefore, since we have rather learned bad than good things, we should fear that our master Christ will punish us hard, when he will have asked for the reason of the lesson.

Therefore, affirm the lesson, because the book is dangling before our eyes, in which there are written the obedience and humility of Jesus Christ and the abstinence, so that we have compassion according to the saying of Bernard: “How sweetly do you, good Jesus, associate with mankind, how aboundantly do you deign to bestow many and great things, how bitterly did you suffer, that it may suck honey from rock and oil from the hardest stone when embracing the entreaties of the cross” [serm. 2,7]. Let us therefore pray etc.
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Samandrąg

Gløymd preike: Ein latinsk sermo om den heilage Þorlákr i Uppsala UB C301.

Nøkkelor: Uppsala UB C 301, Heilage Þorlákr, ein latinsk sermo, 1300-talet, transkripsjon

Handskriftet Uppsala UB C 301 blei skreve på Island på 1300-talet. Midt i preikesamlinga Themata sermonum ved den franske dominikanaren Nicolas de Gorran inneholder det ein latinsk sermo om den islandske nasjonalhelgenen Þorlákr.

Inntil no har ein sett på denne preika som adaption av ein tapt modell. Stilistisk variasjon i teksten viser derimot at preika ikkje kann vere ein opphavleg del av samlinga ho er overlevert i. Artikkelen viser at dei tre subtemaa etter alt å døme fylger ulike kjelder. Etter alt vi vet, er inga av desse kjeldene bevart. Bibelcitata, som subtemaa byggjer på, heng saman i teologisk tenking, og vi kan til dømes spore dei i ein kommentar til Paulusbreva ved Nicolas de Gorran. Det er ikkje mogeleg å prove om kommentaren kunne ha påverka preika direkte. I Þorlákr-preika er framande tekstdelar sette saman på ein kreativ måte, som er typisk for sjangeren. Liknande teknikk finn vi blant anna i Sverige og Tyskland. Samstundes er preika tvers igjennom islandsk gjennom den helgenen ho handlar om. Truleg var funksjonen hennar å støtte dyrkinga av helgenen, som hadde vore fast etablert på

Vedlagt til artikkelen fylgjer det ein diplomatisk og normalisert transkripsjon av preika samt ei engelsk omsetjing.

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