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Edited by Pernille Hermann,
Stephen A. Mitchell, and Jens Peter Schjødt
with Amber J. Rose

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Part Three. GLOBAL TRADITIONS

Snorri and the Jews

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Abstract: This essay considers the mythological writing of Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241) in its most temporally proximal comparative context: the intellectual culture of thirteenth century Christian Europe, specifically one particular area of the High Medieval imagination: Christian narratives about Jews. Particular attention is paid to Snorri's use of anti-Jewish typology in his depiction of Loki and the *Muspellssynir* "The Sons of Muspell" (the agents of the apocalypse who break loose at the end of the world). The essay argues that Snorri's configuration of Loki's status amongst the Æsir might well have been drawn from contemporary thinking about the status of the Jew amongst Christians: both were considered outsiders, whose presence was tolerated because they were thought to have special abilities, even while they were widely held to be untrustworthy and deleterious to society. Loki's apocalyptic comrades, the *Muspellssynir*, obviously originate in the eddic poem *Vǫluspá*, but I argue that Snorri's account of them is strongly colored by the medieval motif of the "Red Jews", menacing Jewish warriors who would break out of their subterranean tomb during the Last Days and ride forth into Christendom with warlike intent.

For medieval Scandinavians, it was a religion that belonged to the past. Perhaps it had once offered spiritual truths, but that was before the coming of Christianity, a belief system which had swept it aside and utterly superseded the old ways. People had believed in it only because Christ had not yet come to them. That, in itself, was blameless, but once the Good News had been spread, only the most stubborn and malevolent mind would refuse to convert to the one true faith. Nonetheless, it had left behind a precious trove of worthy narratives, tales of heroic deeds, and beautiful poetry. A good medieval Christian could certainly appreciate that, but he ought to feel nothing but disdain for any remaining

adherents of this backwards creed. In the literature of the thirteenth century, its followers were frequently depicted as witches, troublemakers, and ne'er-do-wells; relics of a bygone age, waiting either for conversion or the righteous violence of the pious. These are perceptions reasonably attached to paganism, as it would have been understood by thirteenth-century intellectuals such as Snorri Sturluson. In this study, however, we will consider the valence of such attitudes to Judaism, the "superseded" religion upon whose abjection the foundations of medieval Christian identity were built.[1]

Hostility towards Jews was an unpleasant and recurrent feature of thirteenth-century European life.[2] The continent's Jewish population, numbering perhaps some 450,000 (Baron 2007: 389), were subjected to rhetorical attacks by Christian preachers, repressive laws, and occasional outbreaks of violence. To frame this chronology of persecution within the life and times of Snorri Sturluson, we might begin by noting that *Snorra Edda* was written just a few years after the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This edict included the infamous proclamation that Jews and Muslims "utriusque sexus in omni christianorum provincia et omni tempore qualitate habitus publice ab aliis populis distinguantur" (*Decreta* p. 266) (of both sexes in all Christian provinces and at all times shall be differentiated from other peoples in the public's eyes by the manner of their dress). The ruling ultimately led to the enforced wearing of yellow badges or hats in many countries. As I have pointed out previously (Cole 2014: 239), Snorri's lifetime saw blood libel accusations and massacres against the Jews in Bristol, Bury St. Edmonds, Fulda, London, Oxford, Winchester and York. By the time Snorri died in 1241, England had been driven into disorder by anti-Jewish pogroms following the coronation of Richard the Lionheart in 1189; crusading mobs had slain over 2,500 Jews in northern France; and Pope Gregory IX had put the Talmud on trial in Paris (Mentgen 2005: 155; Yuval 1998: 113–16).

My aim in this paper, then, is to situate Snorri in what is arguably his most proximal comparative context: that of intellectual culture in the thirteenth

[1] Indeed, in a sense there is more Old Norse writing concerning these "worthy narratives" from the Bible than there are reproductions of pagan narratives. *Stjórn*, *Gyðinga saga*, and the Old Testament *exempla* from *Konungs Skuggsjá*, for example, dwarf *Snorra Edda* and the Eddic poems. For an argument connecting all three of the former to one author, Brandr Jónsson, see Ian Kirby (1986: 169–81), although cf. Wolf (1990). Studies of Snorri's attitudes towards paganism are numerous, but the reader may profitably be directed to Wanner (2008: esp. 140–61) and Faulkes (1983).

[2] The initial description of medieval Europe as a "persecuting society" was provided by R. I. Moore. He pays particular attention to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the second edition of his book, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (2006: 144–71).

century.[3] Specifically, I will focus on the meditations on Judaism, and often anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, which pervaded that culture. During this period serious thinkers could hardly avoid engagement with the questions prompted by the ongoing interaction between Christianity and Judaism. Even if they only treated the topic tangentially, the place of the Jews as characters in the Gospels, popular accusations of Jewish perfidy, the pervasive typological associations of "the Jew" in Christian exegesis, and awareness of Christianity's historical beginnings as a Jewish sect meant that most of the important writers of the thirteenth century made use of the Jewish *topos*. We might cite any number of examples here: Albertus Magnus (fl. 1245), William of Auvergne, (fl. 1228) and Robert Grosseteste (fl. 1220s) are all demonstrative of this trend (Liebeschutz 2007a: 591, 2007b: 64; on Grosseteste, his anti-Judaism and his problematic Hebraism, see McEvoy 2000: 120–32; Friedman 1934; cf. Roth 1951: 121, 126–27).

Snorra Edda obviously does not feature any Jewish characters proper, but, to employ a distinction coined by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his study of Margery Kempe (Cohen 2006, 2003: 185), there are several figures who are "Jew-ish". That is to say, they are not intended to be direct comments upon the Jews or their religion, but they do freely make use of the potent typological armory of anti-Judaism.[4] I use the word "typology" here in a sense that encompasses both its literary and exegetical meanings. The most obvious typological project in Christian narrative is the foreshadowing of Christ projected back into the Old Testament, an endeavour that began with the authors of the New Testament and which was enthusiastically continued by the church. Romans 5: 14 is an early example, and the one that gives us the word "type": "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Koiné: τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος; Vulgate: *forma futuri*). Importantly, the business of figurative interpretation was also applied to non-Biblical texts and concepts. As Eric Auerbach put it concerning the case of Dante Alighieri's (d. 1321) *Divina Commedia*:

> Not only the world of the Christian religion, but also the ancient world is included in Dante's figural system; the Roman empire of Augustus is for Dante a figure of God's eternal empire, and the prominent part Virgil plays in Dante's work is based on this assumption. Dante is not the first

[3] Of course, this is not a novel proposal. See, for example, Fidjestøl (1997: 343–50) or Faulkes (1993: 59–76).

[4] I have deployed Cohen's category of "Jew-ishness" before, although I would now reconsider the previous suggestions of Hebraist influence in the case of Mǫkkurkálfi offered there: Cole 2014: 257–58.

> to subject all the material of human history to the figural conception [i.e. typological reading]; biblical history, Jewish and Christian, came to be seen as universal human history, and all pagan historical material had to be inserted and adapted to this framework. (Auerbach 1952: 6)

Typology in this sense becomes the pursuit of what St. Augustine called "obscura quaedam figura rerum" (the obscured figure of the thing) (*Enarrationes* col. 1788). For the typologically-minded reader, all narrative elements can be aligned with a predictive type, drawn from the rich *dramatis personae* of Christian tradition. The identity of this type will then serve as a predictor for the qualities and behaviors of the character to whom it has been appended. For instance, the Roman Empire is aligned with the Kingdom of Heaven, and therefore becomes a state charged with safeguarding spiritual perfection. Rahab becomes aligned with Ecclesia (Auerbach 1952: 3–4), and thus the scarlet rope she hangs from her window becomes a symbol of Christ's blood: the sacrifice that saves Ecclesia just as the rope saves the harlot of Jericho. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the manipulation of one type, namely the Jew(s) as perceived by thirteenth-century Christendom, and its potential influence upon Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, a literary product of that age. Snorri borrows from a given tradition where its imagery inspires or the typological allusion is particularly striking, but it should be stressed that I do not believe he was dealing in allegory *per se*. This is especially true in the case of Snorri's use of the anti-Jewish tradition. Snorri did not intend to enter into anti-Jewish polemic, much as the more astute in his audience might have drawn that inference. Rather, amongst a myriad of other, more innocent influences, he was inspired by contemporary ideas about Jews and Judaism, and he then deployed those ideas, liberated from their original frame of reference, in the fantasy world of his *Edda*.

Praise for the Jews in the Codex Wormianus

While there are no Jewish personalities in the *Edda*, the Jews as a collective do make an explicit appearance in one particular recension, namely the Codex Wormianus from the middle of the fourteenth century. There, in the prologue, we find the following elaboration on the device of euhemerism:

> Enn sem nofnín fiǫlguðuz. þa tyndiz með þui sanleikrinn. Ok af fyrstu uillu þa blotaði huerr maðr epterkomandí sinn formeistara dyr eða fugla loptin ok himintunglín ok ymisliga dauðlega lutí þar til er þessi uilla gekk um allan heím ok sua uandlegha tyndu þeir sannleiknum at æingi uissi skapara sinn. utan þeir æínir menn sem toluðu ebreska tungu þa sem gekk firi stǫpul smíðina (Wormianus p. 3)

> (And as the names [for God] multiplied, the true one was lost. And from the initial heresy every man and his descendants worshipped as their master animals or birds, the sky and the heavenly bodies and various inanimate objects until this heresy went all around the world, and so they habitually lost the truth, so that no-one knew his Creator, except for those men who had spoken the Hebrew language preceding the construction of the tower [of Babel])

Coming from an interpolation found solely in the Codex Wormianus, this episode is surely "Eddic" even if it probably is not "Snorric". Nonetheless, it is enlightening for our understanding of (one particular) *Edda*'s connections to the Christian conception of the Jews. There is a reminder here of the antiquity of Judaism, and implicit therein is a nod to St. Augustine's paradigm of "Jew as Witness" (Cohen 1999: 23–65). That is to say, this apparently casual remark stresses to the reader that the Jews had been the guardians of God's law even while Scandinavians and the other gentile nations had been distracted into worshipping "inanimate objects" (*dauðligar hlutir*). There is almost a tone of esteem for Jews in the narrative voice, versus a mocking admonishment towards pagans. It is significant that the Jews are not referred to by any of their usual names in Old Norse, e.g. *gyðingr* or *júði*. The somewhat oblique appellation of "men who had spoken the Hebrew language" seems to anticipate any negative connotations which might have accompanied the word "Jew". The separation of the Jews from their language was a common psychological mechanism in medieval Christianity which accommodated anti-Judaism with reverence for one of the languages of scripture. Christian Hebraists who revered the Hebrew language were still capable of anti-Jewish moments, e.g., St. Jerome, who attacked Jewish ritual clothing (Signer 2004: esp. 26; Itzkowitz 2007: 563–72). We can observe this "doublethink" elsewhere in Old Norse literature. For example, in the *Messuskýringar* (commentaries on the symbolism of liturgy) we find the statement: "Því er á inu vinstra horni alltaris miðhlutr messu sunginn, at nú standa aðrar þjóðir undir trú. Enn þeir eru nú mjǫk útan brautar gyðingarnir" (pp. 47–48, my standardization) (This is why the Mass is sung on the left side of the altar, so that other nations might submit to faith. But those Jews are now strayed far from the path). This is in no way at odds with the commentator's previous joyous assertion that: "ina æðztu tungu er ebreska" (pp. 45–46) (the highest language is Hebrew). That being said, there is no reason to suppose that the author was attempting such anti-Jewish intellectual gymnastics in the prologue of the Codex Wormianus. It might be an aside, but his intent is clear. To summarize it colloquially: "you may not like the Jews, but they were a great deal closer to God than we were, back when we were worshipping Óðinn, rocks,

puddles or who-knows-what-other-*dauðligar-hlutir*". The Codex Wormianus thus attests an *Edda* tempered with a degree of warmth towards Jews.

Loki the Jew?

Snorri himself, as opposed to the Wormianus scribe, tends to borrow from the more dramatic, hostile perception of Jews. The example of Snorri's putative anti-Judiasm that has probably received the most attention concerns the role of Christian typology in Snorri's account of Baldr's death and abortive resurrection. It is worth noting as an aside that elsewhere scholars have also investigated parallels and perhaps even borrowings from medieval Jewish literature in *Snorra Edda* (see Bugge 1881–1898: 45; Turville–Petre 1964: 119; O'Donoghue 2005: 90–91; Cole 2014), although space does not allow for further discussion of this trend here. Baldr's Christ-like credentials are well known, which begs the question: which character in Snorri's narrative then represents the people whom medieval Christians widely saw as Christ's killers, the Jews? Noting the long-standing characterization of "Synagoga" as blind, Arthur Mosher proposed that Hǫðr must have been intended to refer to the Jews, with Loki, as the orchestrating power, acting as a cipher for Satan (Mosher 1983: 313–14). Mosher's overtly Christological interpretation of this episode has not been universally accepted (e.g., Liberman 2004: 24–25). His hypothesis can perhaps be modified and enhanced with some concomitant examples of the tropes he discusses. To my knowledge, Jews are described as blind five times in the surviving Old Norse corpus, including one reference in the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* (*Maríu saga* pp. 890–93, 963–65; *HMS* 1 pp. 302–08, 308–11; *Homiliubók* pp. 57–58). In addition to these textual attestations, one pictorial depiction of the blind Synagoga survives from the Old Norse-speaking period on an altar panel from Kinsarvik, Norway (see Figure 1). Moreover, the Gospel motif of the Jews as unwitting instruments for Satan's plan to kill Christ also features in *Niðrstigningar saga*, the Old Norse translation of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nichodemus*, which Christopher Abram (2006: 13, 2011: 220) has argued may have inspired Snorri elsewhere in the *Edda*, specifically his account of Hermóðr's *Helreið* (ride to Hel). In *Niðrstigningar saga* it is written that the Devil "ęggiat gyþing[a] lyþ fiandscapar viþ hann" (*HMS* 2 p. 16; cf. pp. 3–4, 19) (incited the Jewish nation to enmity against Him).

I therefore agree that it is not unreasonable to adduce that Snorri would have been familiar with the trope. But Mosher's argument is open to criticism on two fronts. Firstly, it implies that *Snorra Edda* is a sort of *roman à clef*, where each character is a façade for one discrete referent. As I have elsewhere argued concerning the similarity between Surtr, the *Døkkálfar*, and *blámenn* (Cole 2015b), such narrow literalism is not how Snorri's mind worked. Behind

a single character may lie a genealogy including any number of influences—"authentically" pagan or otherwise—and a single influence may manifest itself in many different characters simultaneously. Secondly, Mosher does not draw on the most tangible and credible source of typology for Snorri's writing, namely the kind of preaching material now best exemplified by the *Old Icelandic Homily Book*. Abram, who also argues for the presence of incognito Jews in Snorri's work, says this on the matter:

Figure 1. Blind Synagoga with St. Paul, Antependium from Kinsarvik Church, Norway, c. 1200. Image courtesy of Norsk Folkemuseum.
Interestingly, many of the published images of this altar frontal are cropped in such a way as to remove her.

> In [Gregory the Great's (590–604)] eighth homily on the Gospels, [...] [he] specifies that not quite *everything* acknowledged Christ's divinity by their sorrow at his death. Gregory enumerates the ways in which the different elements of creation—including the rocks, sea and sun—perceived Christ as Lord [...] But, continues Gregory, the Jews who turned away from Christ were harder hearted even than rocks, refusing "to acknowledge him whom [...] the elements proclaimed to be God either by their signs or by being broken" [...] When combined with the relatively well-known idea that all creation wept at Christ's death, Gregory's homily may lead us to suspect that at some point in the transmission of the Baldr myth it has been susceptible to Christian influence. Gregory's homilies were known in Iceland and translated into Old Norse, and they provided an important source for the types of sermon that Snorri might have heard preached each Sunday in church. (Abram 2011: 219–20)

Abram's argument is fortified when we confirm that the relevant excerpt from the Gregorian homily he describes is indeed attested in an Old Icelandic sermon on the Apparition of Christ:

> En oss er þeckianda i ællom tócnom þeim er sýnd ero bæþe at bornom drótne oc deyianda. hve mikil illzca hever veret i hiortom neqverra gyþinga er hvártke kendosc þeir viþ gvþ fyr spár ne fyr iarteiner. þuiat *allar hofoþskepnor vǫ́ttoþo komet hafa scapera sin. J þui kendo himnarner guþ. er þeir sendio stiornona. Hafet kende hann. þuiat þat spratt eige vndan fótom hans þa er hann geck yver þat. Jorþen kende hann. þuiat hon skalf at honom deyianda. Sólen kende hann. þuiat hon gerþe eigi skína. Steínar kendo hann. þuiat þeir sprungo a tíþ daúþa hans.* Helvíte kende hann. þuiat þat varþ aftr at selia þa dauþa men es þat helt áþr. En þóat allar hofoþskepnor váttaþe hann guþ vera. þa villdo ǫllvngis eige hiorto ǫ́trúra gyþinga trúa hann guþ vera. oc harþare steinom villdo þau eige kliúfasc til iþronar. oc vilia eige iáta þeim er allar skepnor skilia guþ vera. (*Homilíubók* p. 58, my emphasis)
>
> (It is known to us in all wonders, those which were seen both at the Lord's birth and death, how much evil has been in the hearts of some Jews, who neither acknowledge God for prophecies nor for miracles. Because *all the elements affirmed that their creator had come. The heavens acknowledged God, for they sent the stars. The sea acknowledged Him, because it did not part under his feet when he walked over it. The earth acknowledged Him, because it shook upon his death. The sun acknowledged Him, because it*

> *did not shine. The stones acknowledged Him, because they cracked at the time of His death*. Hell acknowledged Him, because it came again to deliver back those dead men, whom previously it held. But even though all of the elements attested that He was God, then the hearts of the faithless Jews would by no means believe Him to be God, and harder than stones they would not be cracked for [their] repentance, and would not yield to Him, whom all of creation understands to be God.)

Considered alongside Snorri's own words, the influence from this scene on the *Edda* becomes quite transparent:

> Því næst sendu Æsir um allan heim ørindreka at biðja at Baldr væri grátinn ór Helju. *En allir gerðu þat, menninir ok kykvendin ok jǫrðin ok steinarnir ok tré ok allr málmr, svá sem þú munt sét hafa at þessir hlutir gráta þá er þeir koma ór frosti ok í hita*. Þá er sendimenn fóru heim ok hǫfðu vel rekit sín eyrindi, finna þeir í helli nokkvorum hvar gýgr sat. Hon nefndisk Þǫkk. Þeir biðja hana gráta Baldr ór Helju. Hon segir:
>
> "Þǫkk mun gráta / þurrum tárum / Baldrs bálfarar. / Kyks né dauðs / nautka ek karls sonar: / haldi Hel því er hefir".
>
> En þess geta menn at þar hafi verit Loki Laufeyjarson er flest hefir illt gert með Ásum. (*Gylfaginning* pp. 47–48, my emphasis)
>
> (The next thing that happened, the Æsir sent word around the whole world, asking for Baldr to be wept out of Hel. *And everyone did so, humans and animals and the earth and the stones and trees and every kind of metalwork, as you will have seen that these things weep when they are brought out of the cold and into the warm.* Then when the messengers came home and had almost completed their task, they find a giantess sitting in a certain cave. She was called Þǫkk. They ask her to weep for Baldr, to get him out of Hel. She says:
>
> "Þǫkk will cry / dry tears / at Baldr's funeral. / Living nor dead, /I did not delight in the old man's son [Baldr] / May Hel keep what she has."
>
> But most people think this was really Loki, son of Laufey, who committed the most evil against the Æsir.)

Besides the allusion to Gregory's homily, there are other factors in Snorri's account contributing to Loki's Jew-ishness. There appears to be a subtle irony in the choice of Loki's alter ego. Þǫkk means "thanks" or "gratefulness". Richard

Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfusson assert that this is a coincidence, and that Þǫkk's name must originally have a different root (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874: 756). But for typological purposes, this double meaning is quite appropriate. After all, from a medieval Christian perspective, it was gratefulness that was sorely lacking when Christ revealed himself to the Jews. As Christians told the history of the early Church, the Jews had been given a great gift, yet they had rejected it. In the end, it was the gentiles who would show appreciation, and so form the Church. As the *Old Icelandic Homily Book* says: "iorsala lýþr oc gyþingar georþesc vinstre handar menn. þat ero recningar fyr ótrú sína. en hann valþc epter písl sóma heógre handar menn sér af heiþnom monnom ór norþre" (*Homilíubók* p. 37) (the people of Jerusalem and the Jews were made left-hand-men [i.e. enemies], that is a sign of their faithlessness, and after his crucifixion he chose for the honor of his right-hand-men heathen peoples from the North).

Furthermore, there is something very Jew-ish in Loki's function amongst the Æsir. Loki in Ásgarðr and the Jew in Western Christendom are both positions predicated on the notion of "being in service". From Augustine describing the Jews as book-carrying servants for Christian students, to Emperor Frederick II's designation of Jews as *servi camere nostre* "servants of our chamber", to the possessive servitude exhibited in the Anglo-Norman *Judei Nostri*, the doctrine of the "Jew in Christian Service" permeated medieval thinking about Jews (Rowe 2004: 16; Krummel 2011: 28–36; Abulafia 2011). But in both cases, the servant is held in contempt, perceived as antisocial and disloyal. Like the Jew amongst Christians, Loki is an ethnic Other, because his father Fárbauti belongs to the race of the *jǫtnar* (giants).[5] And in both cases, the cunning, magic-wielding outsider is tolerated only because of his unique qualities. If Loki only insulted and tricked the gods, and did not at all assist them when they fell into unfortunate predicaments, his presence in Ásgarðr would surely not be sustained. The parallel also extends perfectly to the way "the Jew" and Loki are treated. Both are righteously abused for the profit of their masters. Robert Grosseteste, a contemporary of Snorri, succinctly articulated the consensus regarding the status of the Jew within Christendom:

[5] The relationship could even be conceived of in postcolonial terms. Miriamne Krummel reads the "Red Jews" motif in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* as an anxiety that the Christian oppression of the Jews will be inverted during the apocalypse (Krummel 2011: 80–87). Ragnarøkr will also see the Æsir fall prey to the giants they have oppressed for so long, led by Loki, a half-giant in their midst.

> [...] et justæ pœnæ inflictio est ut terram laboriose operetur, quæ etsi ex operatione illius populi fructificet, non tamen fert illi fructus suos, sed principibus sub quibus captivatur. (*Epistolae* p. 35)[6]
>
> ([...] it is the infliction of a just punishment that this people labour hard at tilling ground that, although it produces abundantly from their efforts, nevertheless bears its fruits not for them, but for the princes under whom they are held captive (*Letters* pp. 67–68))

This is a metaphor which could just as well be applied to Loki under the Æsir.

The Sons of Muspell and the Red Jews: Two Harbingers of the Apocalypse

Loki's Jew-ish credentials are further enhanced when we consider his fate at the end of the world. When the Æsir suspect his role in Baldr's death, their vengeance is grisly in the extreme. There is a brief allusion to the fact that Loki has been bound in stanza 14 of *Baldrs draumr*: "er lauss Loki líðr ór bǫndom" (Poetic Edda p. 279) (when Loki gets free from his bonds). Some details are also given in the prose epilogue to *Lokasenna* in the Codex Regius, which corresponds quite closely to the description provided by Snorri. *Snorra Edda*, however, is our chief source for the details of the scene. As Hár explains to Gangleri:

> "Nú var Loki tekinn griðalauss ok farit með hann í helli nokkvorn. Þá tóku þeir þrjár hellur ok settu á egg ok lustu rauf á hellunni hverri. Þá váru teknir synir Loka Váli ok Nari eða Narfi. Brugðu Æsir Vála í vargs líki ok reif hann í sundr Narfa bróður sinn. Þá tóku Æsir þarma hans ok bundu Loka með yfir þá þrjá steina - einn undir herðum annarr undir lendum, þriði undir knésfótum - ok urðu þau bǫnd at járni. Þá tók Skaði eitrorm ok festi upp yfir hann svá at eitrit skyldi drjúpa ór orminum í andlit honum. En Sigyn kona hans stendr hjá honum ok heldr mundlaugu undir eitrdropa. En þá er full er mundlaugin þá gengr hon ok slær

[6] The anti-Semitic image of the Jew as a duplicitous servant, making cloying pledges and boasting indispensable special skills even while he undermines his master's society, is also brilliantly exemplified by the words Thomas of Monmouth (fl. c. 1149) puts into the mouth of an imaginary Jewish lawyer: "Nos iudei tui sumus, tui quotennes tributarii, tuisque crebro necessarii necessitatibus, tibi siquidem semper fideles regnoque tuo non inutiles" *(The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich* p. 100) (We are your Jews, your yearly payers of tribute, and to you we are necessary whenever you are in need, for we are always true to you and not at all useless to your realm (my translation)). That the William of Norwich legend was apparently known in Iceland and Norway, and that Archbishop Eysteinn (d. 1188) would have been in Bury during the alleged martyrdom of Robert of Bury, are the matter for a separate study.

> út eitrinu, en meðan drýpr eitrit í andlit honum. Þá kippisk hann svá hart við at jǫrð ǫll skelfr. Þat kallið þér landskjálpta. Þar liggr hann í bǫndum til ragnarøkrs". *(Gylfaginning* p. 49)
>
> ("Now, without mercy, Loki was taken and brought to a certain cave. Then they took three slabs and turned them on their edges and drilled a hole in each. Then the sons of Loki were taken, Váli and Nari or Narfi. The Æsir transformed Váli into the shape of a wolf and he tore his brother Narfi to shreds. Then the Æsir took his entrails and bound Loki with them over the three stones—one under his shoulders, the second under his hips, the third under his knees, and they turned those bonds into iron. Then Skaði took a poisonous serpent and secured it above him so that the poison would drip out of its mouth onto his face. And Sigyn, his wife, stands by him and holds a cup under the dripping poison. But when the cup is full then she goes and throws the poison away, and in the meantime the poison drips onto his face. Then he thrashes so hard that the whole earth shakes. That's what you call an earthquake. He lies there in his bonds until Ragnarøkr".)

And when Ragnarøkr[7] comes, this is what happens:

> Í þessum gný klofnar himinninn ok ríða þaðan Muspells synir. Surtr ríðr fyrst ok fyrir honum ok eptir bæði eldr brennanndi. Sverð hans er gott mjǫk. Af því skínn bjartara en af sólu. En er þeir ríða Bifrǫst þá brotnar hon sem fyrr er sagt. Muspells megir sœkja fram á þann vǫll er Vígríðr heitir. Þar kemr ok þá Fenrisúlfr ok Miðgarðsormr. Þar er ok þá Loki kominn ok Hrymr ok með honum allir hrímþursar, en Loka fylgja allir Heljar sinnar. En Muspells synir hafa einir sér fylking; er sú bjǫrt mjǫk. (*Gylfaginning* p. 50)
>
> (In this clamor, the sky splits in two and the sons of Muspell ride forth. Surtr rides out first, before and after him there is burning fire. His sword is very great. The shine from it is brighter than the sun. And as they ride on Bifrǫst, then it breaks as previously said. The troops of Muspell head forth to the field which is called Vígríðr. Fenrisúlfr and Miðgarðsormr also arrive. Loki has also arrived, and Hrymr, and with

[7] I use the spelling Ragnarøkr throughout as it is specifically Snorri's version of events, as depicted in chapters 50–51 of *Gylfaginning*, to which I am referring. On this problem, see Haraldur Bernharðsson (2007). I am particularly grateful to one of my anonymous peer reviewers for recommending this source.

> him all the Ice Giants, and all the champions of Hel follow Loki. And the sons of Muspell have a *fylking* all to themselves. It shines a great deal.)[8]

Snorri quotes stanza 51 of *Vǫluspá* as his source here:

> Kjóll ferr austan
> koma munu Muspells
> og lǫg lýðir,
> en Loki stýrir.
> Þar ró fíflmegir
> með freka allir
> Þeim er bróðir
> Býleists í fǫr (*Gylfaginning* p. 51; cf. Poetic Edda p. 12)
>
> (A ship journeys from the East
> [the sons] of Muspell are coming
> across the waves
> There are the monstrous brood
> with all the wolves
> Those are the brothers
> of Býleist, on their way)

But Snorri's description of the imprisonment and counter-attack of the Muspellssynir also has much in common with another popular medieval narrative. "The Red Jews" is a motif, seeming to emanate most forcefully from German-speaking Europe in the twelfth century (e.g. Gow 1995: esp. 91-95), in which a nation of Jews are imprisoned in a remote area, often in a mountain tomb somewhere around the Caucasus. Upon their release in the build-up to the apocalypse, the Red Jews will attack Christendom, resulting in an apocalyptic bloodshed that will bring on the End of Days. There are many variants to the legend—sometimes the Red Jews are identified with Gog and Magog, sometimes the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Sometimes, as in *The Travels of John Mandeville* (c. 1350s), they will seek out the Jewish Diaspora, and act as a globally coordinated threat. Sometimes they are directly answerable to the Anti-Christ or they ride

[8] It may be noted that Snorri's conclusion of his account of the Muspellssynir on the march with the words *er sú bjǫrt mjǫk* (It shines a great deal) or more closely (It is very bright) is remarkably similar to the description of the Red Jews on the march in *Der Göttweiger Trojanerkrieg* (1280): *Ir helm waren hartte glantz* (Their helmets had a frightful gleam) (*Der Göttweiger Trojanerkrieg* p. 273). However, as the Middle High German account is much later than *Snorra Edda* there can be no possibility of direct influence. The most we can say about this resemblance is that it is indicative of the similar mental images both the Muspellssynir and the Red Jews were conjuring during the thirteenth century.

with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Elsewhere, they are in league with the forces of Islam (Gow 1995). The first textual witness to a group of people actually referred to as "Red Jews" is *Der Jüngere Titurel* (c. 1272) but the motif is undoubtedly dependent on much earlier material from Alexander romances, going back as far as the tenth century *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni* (Gow 1995: 70–76). Precursor groups to the Red Jews appear in St. Jerome's *Commentariorum in Hiezechielem* (c. 380), Lamprecht's *Alexander* (c. 1130), and the *Historia Scholastica* (1160s) amongst other Latin and German sources (see Gow 1995: 300–1, 305–6, 308). The Red Jews proper are not attested in the West Norse corpus, although an antecedent tradition does appear in the Old Norse *Elucidarius* (c. 1200)[9]:

> Anti christus man berast i babílon hínní miclu or kỳni dan fra port kono [...] Oll tacn hans ero lỳgín. Hann man endr nya hína fornu iorsala borg. þat er íherusalem. oc lata sic þar gofga sem guð. Við honum monu gỳðingar taka fegensamlega. oc koma til hans or ollum heími. En þeír monu snuast til tru af kenníngum enocs oc elias. Oc taka mioc sua aller harðar píníngar fyrir guðs nafne. (*Elucidarius* p. 84)
>
> (The Anti-Christ will be born in Greater Babylon to a woman of easy virtue from the tribe of Dan [...] All his miracles are false. He will rebuild the ancient *Jórsalaborg*, that is to say, Jerusalem, and have himself worshipped there as God. The Jews will receive him eagerly, and they will come to him from all over the world. But they will be converted to the faith by the teachings of Enoch and Elijah. And they will receive very harsh punishments in the name of God.)

There is no suggestion here that the Jews have been contained, or that they will embark on a premeditated annihilation of Christendom. Crucially, though, there is the notion that the Jews will unite all over the world, and that they will act in a coordinated fashion in the service of the Anti-Christ until Enoch and Elijah show them the errors of their ways. These "proto-Red Jews" are a noteworthy example of the kind of thinking about Jews that was circulating in the Old Norse world. As shall be seen, it appears that Snorri had access to a more mature version of the Red Jews legend, which he then allowed to color his perception (or depiction) of the Muspellssynir: e.g., both Snorri's "sons of Muspell" and the Red Jews are held underground until the end of times, both ride on horseback, etc. If we are in search of a strain of the Red Jews tradition

[9] I am grateful to Arngrímur Vidalín for pointing out to me that this tradition was still current in the early fourteenth century, as it is repeated in *Hauksbók* (pp. 170–71).

which is more analogous to the apocalyptic agents of *Snorra Edda*, we must look beyond Icelandic sources.

As the continental material concerning the Red Jews is so diverse, any decision over which particular source to quote as exemplary will be more or less arbitrary. Therefore, I have opted to compare Snorri's Muspellssynir with the tradition as it appears in Old Swedish.[10] Doubtless, there can be no suggestion of direct transmission between the two, as the Swedish *Konung Alexander* (c. 1380) is over a century younger than *Snorra Edda.* However, the particular Latin text of which it is substantially a translation, the *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni*, dates from the tenth century. The Old Swedish account thus has the advantage of having a strong connection to one of the oldest known ancestors of the Red Jews. Furthermore, owing to the linguistic affinity between Old Swedish and Old Norse it can also give us a hint at what a rendering of the Red Jews tale might have looked like in Snorri's own language—not that there necessarily was a written vernacular version. The tale could well have been told by foreign guests or cosmopolitan scholars at the Norwegian court of King Hákon Hákonarson, for example. We know that people in that very circle were discussing—and evaluating the plausibility of—another Orientalist fantasy, namely the *Letter of Prester John.* Written at the court of King Hákon for the king-in-waiting, Magnús Hákonarson, *Konungs skuggsjá* (c. 1250s) refers to "þá bok er gior var a indija landi [...] þar sie margt vndarliga j sagt" (*Konungs skuggsiá* p. 13; see also Larrington 2004: 96–97) (that book which was made in India [...] in which many wondrous things are said). Indeed, it ought to be noted that some versions of the *Letter* actually contained references to the Red Jews (Gow 1995: 307, 309–10). Obviously we are in the realm of the deeply speculative here, but it does not seem unthinkable that a discussion similar to the one hinted at in *Konungs skuggsjá* might also have taken place concerning the Red Jews.

> [Old Swedish]
> han foor thådhan ower sitiam
> ôster borter ij wårlina fram
> enkte land laa thiit wt mere
> ther man wiste aff sighia flere
> han fan ther folk wårre ån trull
> thȝ hafdhe tho råt månniskio hull
> rådhelikith ok mykith oreent
> them gat ångin opa seet

[10] An overview of this tradition in East Norse more broadly is provided by Jonathan Adams (2013: 75–77). On *Konung Alexander* and the sources of the *Historia* see Mitchell (1996: 37–38), Zingerlie (1977) and Gow (1995: 77).

the hafdho syyn å swa grym
at ånghin thordhe se a them
thȝ lifdhe alt widh trulla sidh
ångin månniskia fik ther fridh
thȝ aat folk mȝ huld ok krop
inbyrdhis hwart annath op
ok alla handa creatwr
håst ok wargh foghil ok diwr
hwath som fødhis a iordh åller wådher
thȝ åta the alt saman mådher
.....
the plågha enkte thera iordha
the åtar them op a thera bordhe
hwath man kan hålȝt lifwande nåmpna
.....
orena gerninga margha handa
sa alexander aff them ganga
ther lofflika åra skriffwa
thȝ år alt ont thȝ the drifwa
Rødhe iudha mon thȝ heta
swa finder han ån hwa them wil leta
tha alexander hafdhe thetta seet
badhe hørt ok widha leet
at thetta folk dreff tholik last
han thånkte ij sinom hoghe rast
vtan thetta folk forgaar
al wårlin åpter døme faar
ok smittas ij tholik gerning snødh
all wårlin hafwer thås stora nødh
om thȝ skal ganga sin fram gang
åpter thera sidh tha smittas mang
ok lifwa ij thera åpter døme
thȝ ware båtra at man them gøme
Alexander fan et ful got raadh
thȝ folkith han saman drifwa badh
ij en flok badhe mån ok qwinna
swa then mera som then minnda
swa at enkte ater bleff

nor ij wårlina alla them dreff
swa langan wågh rât ij nor
at thiit ångin fara thôr
Thȝ war alexanders idhelik bôn
til gudh som allom gifwer lôn
at wårlin skulle ekke smittas
aff tholikt lifwerne ekke hittas
.....
han badh swa långe gudh hôrdhe han
gudh giordhe vnder the åra san
ey stort fore alexanders saka
vtan månniskio helso til maka
han bôdh tvem berghom the standa ån
ganga til saman badhin ij sån
the waro hôgh ok mykith lang
gingo saman vtan alt bang
.....
ther år stort rwm innan til
som et ganȝt land iak thȝ sighia wil
.....
bårghin åra alt kringom brant
som annar mwr thȝ år sånt
the åra som andre mwrwåggia hôghia
ther kan ångin op fore ôghia
the rôdha iudha åra ther inne
badhe flere ok swa minne (*Konung Alexander* 130–33)

[English]
(He goes from there over Scythia.
Away, far to the East of the world.
There was no land out there any more
that anyone knew of. Many say
there he found a people worse than
trolls
Although they had human skin
angry and most unclean
No one could bear to look upon them
They had such an ugly appearance

that no one dared to look upon them
they all lived in the manner of trolls.
No human there could find any peace.
They ate people with skin and body
including each other
and all kinds of creatures,
horses and wolves, birds and beasts,
whatever lives on earth or sea,
they ate it all in the same way
.....
they do not tend to their land.
On their tables, they eat up
whatever living thing you can name.
The committing of many impure deeds [spells?]
Alexander saw them do.
There, it is written in law
that everything they do is evil.
They are called "Red Jews"
so he seeks them, and wants to see them.
When Alexander had seen that,
both heard it and clearly observed,
that this people behaved in such a way
he thinks in his booming voice
all the world will be judged
unless this people are destroyed
and will be smote by such sordid actions.
The whole world is in great need.
If things were to go their own way
according to their custom many would be smitten
and live ever after in their power.
It would be better if one could hide them away
Alexander had a great idea.
He had that people rounded up
in one group, both men and women,
the short and the tall,
so that not one was left behind at all.
He had them driven north in the world,
such a long way north,

that no one would dare to go there.
It was Alexander's pious prayer
to God who rewards all
that the world would not be smitten
and never encounter such a way of life
.....
he prayed so long that God heard him.
God did it, it's true,
not for Alexander's sake alone
but for the good of all humankind.
He commanded two mountains—they still stand—
to come together as one.
They were tall and very long.
They went together without any noise
.....
Inside there is a lot of space
like a huge country, I should say
.....
the mountains are steep all around
like another wall, it's true.
They are like other tall walls.
No one can climb it.
The Red Jews are in there,
both short and tall.)

There are several striking affinities between the coming of the Muspellssynir according to Snorri and the Red Jews according to the Alexander romances. Both are imprisoned underground: Loki in a cave, the Red Jews in the mountains. Both engage in cannibalism. The Red Jews "aat folk mȝ huld ok krop / inbyrdhis hwart annath op" (eat people and their flesh and blood / they'll even munch each other up). Similarly, according to Snorri, Loki's son Váli eats his brother, Narfi. The release of either the Red Jews or the Muspellssynir is a precursor to the apocalypse. Alexander, as a Christianized king in the medieval tradition, can pray to the one true God and prevent it from happening. Snorri's tragically flawed pagan deities, on the other hand, must vainly await their doom. Indeed, concerning one important detail, *Snorra Edda* is closer to the Red Jews motif than it is to *Vǫluspá*. In the eddic poem, the Muspellssynir approach over water with a ship, a *kjóll*. But in *Snorra Edda*, despite the citation of the original

Figure 2. Der Antichrist, fol. 14v (1480).
Image courtesy of Die Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

poem, the accompanying prose clearly states that they ride on horseback towards Ásgarðr. This suggests that the image of the Muspellssynir conjured by Snorri's mind's eye probably resembled something like the example provided in Figure 2, rather than the nautical setting that would have been drawn from *Vǫluspá* alone.

If one did not know the actual context for this image (and did not know how relatively few artistic depictions there are of Old Norse myth from the Middle Ages versus, say, Christian devotional art), one might very well describe these horse-mounted warriors and their malevolent leader as the Sons of Muspell and Loki, as depicted by Snorri: "ríða þaðan Muspells synir" (the Sons of Muspell ride forth) (*Gyfaginning*, p. 50). Of course, it is actually a depiction of the Red Jews from *Der Antichrist*, fol. 14v (1480). The queen of the Amazons is also amongst the horde. A similar image can also be found in Ms. Germ 2mo 129, fol. 15v (c. 1320). Otherwise, the earliest surviving pictorial representation pertaining to the Red Jews shows the entombed Gog and Magog eating human flesh, from the *Ebstorf World Map* (1235). See Gow 1995: 383–390.

	Muspellssynir in Vǫluspá	*Muspellsynir in Snorra Edda*	*The Red Jews*
Appear at the apocalypse?	Yes	Yes	Yes
How will they arrive at the apocalypse?	Sea, by boat (*kjóll*)	By land, on horseback (*at ríða*), and on foot	By land, on horseback, and on foot
Where are they prior to the apocalypse?	Muspell, more specific whereabouts unknown	Underground, inside a cave	Underground, inside a mountain
Depicted as a military force?	Uncertain, described as fíflmegir, 'monstrous men', perhaps intended here as 'monstrous brood' rather than 'monstrous troops'. However, the point seems obscure.	Yes. They march in a *fylking*, a medieval defensive formation. They are also referred to as the *Muspells megir*, 'men of Muspell', perhaps intended here in the sense of 'troops of Muspell' (but cf. *fíflmegir*).	Frequently, as in e.g. the Gottweiger *Trojanerkrieg* late 1200s): "Dar ringe gantz / Ir ringe gantz / Ir helm waren hartte glantz" (Gow 1995: 193) [There under [their armor] they wore huge steel rings / their helmets had a fearful gleam]

As is so often the case with Snorri's work, the sons of Muspell are not drawn exclusively from any one tradition. *Vǫluspá* clearly provided the basic structure upon which Snorri could build his own narrative of Ragnarøkr. But Snorri does seem to be permitting his ancient, pagan materials to draw color from the potent images of the high medieval cultural canon in which he was immersed. Snorri was not insulated from the intellectual climate to which he was contributing, and thus could no more avoid being influenced by the powerful typologies of anti-Judaism than he could avoid any other aspect of the medieval Christian *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, the emphasis on the "sons of Muspell" as a descent group based on lineage makes them feel more like a contemporary ethnic group than a venerable cosmological fixture.[11] As if to highlight the originality of the

[11] On the notion of descent and race in the Middle Ages, see Robert Bartlett (2001). On the importance of lineage for understanding Jewishness in Old Norse literature, see Richard Cole (2015a: 239–68).

thirteenth-century eddic hybrid he has created, it is only Snorri (and the singular example of stanza 48 in *Lokasenna*) who employs the name "Muspellssynir" to refer to these agents of the apocalypse. In *Vǫluspá*, they are elliptically named *Muspells,* lit. "Of Muspell". One might rather optimistically attribute the uniqueness of Snorri's appellation by proposing that he is the only surviving witness of a naming tradition which was already at least two centuries old by the time he wrote it down, having apparently survived in oral record from some time around Iceland's official conversion in the year 1000 until the 1220s. More soberly, we might consider Snorri's own era and consider if there were any group in the thought of that period whose presence was associated with the apocalypse and who were known as *synir*, (sons of). Readers will note the similarity between the phrases *Muspells synir* and *Israels synir*, the term frequently used in thirteenth century works—such as *Stjórn*—to refer to the Jews. Both are based on the formula of geographical location + *synir*. They are also phonologically similar. In Snorri's days the /els syni:r/ of *Muspells synir* would have made a half rhyme with the /ɛ:ls syni:r/ of *Israels synir.* Admittedly, the proposition that there are resonances of anti-Jewish imagery in *Snorra Edda* may be unpalatable, but it is a crucial to considering Snorri in his comparative context. Much as scholars may employ *Snorra Edda* to recover details of the pagan past, it is also necessary to acknowledge Snorri's Christian present. Thinking about the Jews was an inalienable aspect of that experience.

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