Across the Oceans

Studies from East to West
in Honor of
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Edited by
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Julian the Apostle and Manuscript Relatedness in
María saga

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I. The Icelandic Life of Mary and Her Miracles

María saga is a term now used to designate two different medieval Icelandic
versions of the life of the Virgin Mary, one about an eighth longer than the
other, as well as a generous supply of miracles appended to each version. The
life of Mary itself is a well-crafted compilation of a large number of Latin texts
that include the Evangelium de nativitate Mariae, the Trinubium Annæ, and a
variety of apocryphal texts, such as the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, but the
study of the sources and of their interrelationships is quite problematic and far
from complete. 1 It is not known when this compilation and translation from the
Latin took place, but fourteenth-century Icelandic tradition ascribes a María saga
to Kygri-Björn Hjaltason, an influential priest in northern Iceland who died in
1238. It is not known, however, whether Kygri-Björn's work is identical to,
just related to, or totally independent of the versions preserved. 2 Because of the
early ties between Norway and the St. Victor monastery in Paris, it has also
been thought that María saga proper could antedate 1200. 3 To complicate
matters, the miracles appended to each version of María saga seem to have
accreted at various times over a span of several centuries. In fact, some of the
Icelandic manuscripts rival the largest European collections in the number of
such stories that they contain.

Because of the difficulty involved in sorting out the textual relationships
among the 58 relevant manuscripts, 4 no definitive, critical edition exists, but in
1871 C. R. Unger published in 1200+ pages a normalized text of each version,
along with 92 miracles after the first version of María saga and 219 after the
second. 5 In the latter group some miracles are printed and numbered separately,
despite the fact that they are the same basic tale, and other miracles share a single
number, but are nevertheless printed in two versions. In addition, some of the
tales in the second group are variants of those found in the first group. Several
miracles in Unger's edition are printed as many as four times (e.g. "Kvinden som
drachte sit i Blodskam avlede Barn" and "Gaude dei genetrix eller den daglige
Hymne").

In order to begin to unravel the complex manuscript relationships of María
saga, possession of the Latin source manuscript(s) would prove invaluable, but
for the life of Mary itself, the clever mix of sources by the compiler has made it
difficult to find a suitable candidate. For the miracles, however, there is a
glimmer of hope. While Marian miracles were exceedingly popular in medieval
Iceland, they are generally identifiable in European collections as well, and they
form a part of the general European infatuation with the Virgin Mary that swept
through Europe after the twelfth century. Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum Historiale* holds an especially large number in common with the Icelandic inventory, but the texts are so different that Vincent’s work must be ruled out as a potential source.

The Icelandic miracles in *Marīu saga* have been classified by both Unger and Widding into three groups. Unger placed nos. 1-51 (i.e. just over the first half of the tales appended to the first version of *Marīu saga* in the edition) into the oldest group, which could be coeval with the fashioning of the saga. These are found in the following manuscripts:

"A" = AM 234 fol., 14th century
"B" = AM 232 fol., 14th century
"C" = AM 633, 4to, beg. 18th century.6

Unger’s next younger, and by far the largest group comprises those miracles found in manuscripts

"D" = AM 634-635, 4to (paper, 18th century, but copied from a vellum manuscript, perhaps late 14th century)
"E" = Holm 1, 4to, beg. 15th century7

According to Unger, the youngest tales are found in

"St" = Holm 11, 4to, 1st quarter of the 14th century,

which is an arbitrary selection (i.e. nos. 57-92 in Unger’s edition) from those miracles in the second group.8

Ole Widding also divides the miracles into three classes, but he uses criteria of style and subject matter.9 His oldest group coincides with the first 55 tales in Unger’s first group and usually comprises translations from smaller, anonymous collections of legends known from the Anglo-Norman area in the period between 1050 and 1200. The translations are rather free and they tend to dramatize the action with quotes from the characters. Widding’s next group is characterized by an embellished style of translation and corresponds with most of Unger’s third class (nos. 57-90) plus those on pp. 401-637. A third, late-classical group is set up by Widding to include those with a Latinized Icelandic style, which are independent translations, often from the larger, well known medieval Latin collections, rather than reworkings of Icelandic translations. This group corresponds to Unger’s manuscripts D and part of E and includes his nos. LXIII-CCXIX as well as variants to sundry miracles from among nos. I-92 and I-LVII.

II. Texts Containing the "Death of Julian"

Since the Marian miracles are found in many of the same manuscripts that contain *Marīu saga*, information about the manuscript interrelationships gleaned from a study of the miracles should be indicative of the saga transmission as well. The "Death of Julian" ("Den hellige Merkurius ombringer Kaiser Julian," has been selected from among the many possibilities for several reasons. First of all, this miracle is found in two different Icelandic versions (nos. 5 and LXVIII) and four manuscripts (A, B, D, E) with the first three of these being among the oldest extant (14th century). Second, these manuscripts contain either the first version of *Marīu saga* in Unger’s edition (which used mss. B, C, D, and St) or the second version (for which Unger used mss. A and E). Third, two manuscripts of the "Death of Julian" (A and B) contain at the end of the tale the sentence: "ok er ìetta vida sagt í ritningum ok þó einkanliga í fóru Basilius byskups." This raises the possibility that the miracle in *Marīu saga* is indebted not to a Latin source, which has been the traditional assumption for most, if not all of the miracles, but to an Icelandic one, since a life of Basil in the vernacular is known to exist in two Icelandic manuscripts. Fourth, it is extremely important in determining manuscript interrelationships that the potential "source" examined be as close as possible to the actual source that was used by the Icelandic version.10 For the "Death of Julian" we have a text that is indeed very close to that known in Iceland, and perhaps even in Norway, at that time. Not only is a vernacular version extant, but there also exists a single leaf of the *Vita Basili* that can be used to define quite precisely which Latin *vita* was known in Iceland.

The first potential source for the two versions of the Marian miracle no. 5/LXVIII is the very fragmentary *Basilius saga*, a vernacular text of the life of Basil the Great, preserved as AM 655, 4to on two leaves from the beginning of the 13th century, and on AM 238 fol. II, comprising three leaves from the 14th century.11 In the former manuscript only half of the preserved text is legible, while in the latter, leaf 3v is almost totally illegible. Compared to the *vita*, both the beginning and the end are missing, as are several large sections of the middle portion, but the "Death of Julian" is among the texts preserved, albeit not always in a legible state.

A second possibility is a Latin *Vita Basili* although the printed editions don’t contain a passage suitably close to the Marian miracle to be considered a possible source. However, in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, there is a 10th-century Eufemian version of the life of Basil, Codex S.n. 4635, that does contain a passage extremely close to that in *Marīu saga*. Furthermore, the text in chapters 12 and 13 of this *vita* is almost identical to that on a 13th-century Latin fragment in the Icelandic National Library, Lbs. fragm. 74, 4to,12 which quite convincingly demonstrates that the Eufemian version of the *Vita Basili* was known in 13th- or 14th-century Iceland.

A third possibility for the source of the Marian miracle could be an independent, Latin tale about the "Death of Julian," most likely preserved in a collection of miracles. Although the miracle in this form is not known in Iceland, such medieval collections, including those containing "The Death of Julian," are extant in European libraries. In the British Museum, for example, a number of manuscripts with an independent version of "The Death of Julian" can
be found, such as Cleopatra C. x. and Additional 33956. and among those in the Bibliothèque Nationale the 13th-century manuscript no. 12593 can be mentioned. Although an independent "Death of Julian" is better known from the Legenda Aurea, the text there is not nearly as close to that in Maríus saga as is the text in Cleopatra C. x. or in the saga and vita versions noted above.

III. Textual Comparison

Both Icelandic versions of the Marian miracle, the "Death of Julian," contain the text that forms both chapters 8 and 9 in the Euphemian redaction of the Vita Basilii. There is a substantial difference between the two Icelandic versions of the miracle, with the first occupying only 25 lines in Unger's edition (pp. 72-73), while the second spans 100 lines on pp. 699-702 of Unger's work. According to the longer version, the pagan Emperor Julian, while passing through Caesarea in Cappadocia on his way to fight against the Persians, encountered Archbishop Basil, with whom he had gone to school (I), and proclaimed himself to be the wisest of the two. When Basil gave him three loaves of barley bread, the emperor was incensed and had Basil presented with hay. Basil defended his gift by noting that he had given the emperor that of which they themselves partook, while the emperor had given them fodder in return. Julian promised to return after his victory over the Persians to destroy the city and plow up the earth so that it would produce grain rather than people.

After Julian's departure, Basil asked his flock to collect gold and silver in the hope of placating the emperor and to repair to the shrine of Mary on Mount Didyne for three straight days. While they held their vigil, the Virgin Mary, sitting amidst a heavenly host, appeared to Basil in a dream. She called for the martyr Mercurius and commanded him to kill Julian. In an aside, it is then noted that the magistrate Libanius, when in Persia, also saw in a vision the death of the emperor. Basil subsequently went and looked in the tomb where Mercurius' weapons (E, bones D) were kept, but the weapons had disappeared. Returning to the mountain, Basil woke the people and urged them to pray to God. Then Basil went to the city and visited the grave of Mercurius, where he found the weapons returned and the spear covered with blood.

Subsequently, Libanius himself traveled to Caesarea and reported how Julian had died—while the emperor was surrounded by his soldiers on the banks of the Euphrates River, an unknown, heavily armed soldier rode up with a great noise. After impaling the emperor he rode off and was never seen again. Blaspheming God, Julian died. Libanius reported that he had seen a vision similar to that of Basil and then asked to be baptized. In the morning Basil offered to return to the people the gold and silver that they had donated, but they refused, allowing Basil to do with it as he sought fit. Basil returned one third to the people and used the remainder to restore the church for the honor of Christ and his Mother. When the people of Antioch learned of Julian's death, they held a great celebration and mocked the fallen emperor.

Version II is obviously not an expansion of version I. The latter, for example, skips from the announcement of Emperor Julian's impending arrival to Basil's advice to his flock to repair to the church of St. Mary. In other words, Julian's entire visit, found in all the potential sources listed above—saga, vita, and independent miracle—has been expunged from version I, but not from version II.

Version II is likewise not indebted to the corresponding passage in Basiliius saga because the former often contains readings closer to the Latin texts. These are listed below in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Variant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>version II</td>
<td>preceded by page and line from Unger's edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saga</td>
<td>with ms. page and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vita</td>
<td>Vienna ms. S.n. 4635 (W) plus ms. page and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miracle</td>
<td>Cleopatra C. x., Neuhaus' edition (N) plus page and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>699,17</td>
<td>for til bardaga mot Persidis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2r16</td>
<td>æt ladi til serklands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W15v10</td>
<td>aduersus perss uenit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N25,42-43</td>
<td>aduersus Perss Caesarem Cappadociae deuenisset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700,26</td>
<td>aa fialinnv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2v8)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W17r16</td>
<td>in monte W17r16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N24,28</td>
<td>totem montem N24,28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>701,2-3</td>
<td>Þulíka viðar vm dauda Juliani sa Libanius questor ath tign, sem hann var i Perside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2v15</td>
<td>las hann davā lviði lviði níð ingis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W17v17-18r3</td>
<td>Similem uero uisionem mortis iuliani uidit ipsa nocte et libanius sophista cum esset cum eo in perside. et quaeestoris dignitatem perageret.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N24,34-36</td>
<td>Non imparem uero uisionem uidet et Libanius sophista dum esset cum tirannio in Persida. quaeestoris officium equeuens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>701,21</td>
<td>Libanius questor Juliani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3v6</td>
<td>libanius...rau vnavr lviði</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W19v4-5</td>
<td>libanius iuliani questor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N25,3</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In numerous instances it is chapters 8 and 9 in the Vita Basilii that contain a reading closer to version II than does the Latin miracle (N). At the meeting between Julian and Basil, the latter answers the former's boast of being a better philosopher than Basil with a disrespectful "Utinam philosopharès" (W15v15) in the vita and "Gud vildi, at þu kendit vid sanna speki" in version II, 699,24,
but there is nothing corresponding to this in the independent, Latin miracle. Julian accuses Basil of urging the people to break the statue of the goddess worshipped by the emperor (W16r17-16v3), and version II has the emperor accuse Basil of breaking his command and of ridiculing the goddess Diana (II,700,3-5). There is nothing comparable in N. In W19v4 and II,701,21 Julian's questor Libanius arrives in person to relate the story of Mercurius' deadly attack, but the miracle only notes: Refertur autem in trieritura historia (N25,3). Other instances are (references to *Basilius saga* henceforth omitted):

II,700,8 sagið þeim ord keisaran
W16v7 narruit ei imperatoris uerba
N24,15 –

II,700,23 bidad ... gud
W17r11 postulauerunt deum
N24,25 psallere dei et eius benignissimae matris

II,700,28 taladi til hofdingia þeira, sem næst henne satu
W17v1-2 dicentem ad proxime sibi stantes magnificos uiros
N24,30 sibi circumstantibus talia inferentem

II,701,14 at aa þeiri somu noto mundi hinn grimmi konungr Julianus
dreipim
W18v5 quia ista nocte interfuctus est tyrannus
N24,45 –

It is also of considerable importance that the independent, Latin miracle omits a paragraph found in chapter 9 of the *vita*, in which Basil attempts to restore to the people their donations, and the fallen emperor is mocked by the populace of Antioch.\(^\text{17}\) Version II, on the other hand, does contain a passage at 702,6-17 corresponding closely to this text in chapter 9 of the *vita* (W2014-20).

On the other hand, there exist just a few examples where the independent, Latin miracle is closer to version II than is the *Vita Basilii*. The seemingly odd remark in the Icelandic text that Basil had gone to school with the emperor ("er fyrvm hafdi verit hans skolabrodri" II,699,20-21) is found only in N24,2-4 "erant enim prius in iuuenili aetate consolastici cum Libanio sophista sub praepotore Graeciae Eubalo," albeit somewhat more embellished in the Latin text. Other examples where the independent, Latin miracle, rather than the *vita*, is closer to version II are:

W17r14 in visu
II,700,25 i suefnri
N,24,27 in somnis

Although the closest text to version II is usually that found in chapters 8 and 9 of the Euphemian *Vita Basilii*, the few examples above indicate either that an earlier version of the *vita* contained the few deviant readings noted above or that there might exist some version of the independent, Latin miracle whose text is much closer to the text of the *vita* than is the text as we now have it preserved in Cleopatra C. x. in the British Museum.\(^\text{18}\) In the latter case that version would once have to have contained the material from chapter 9, missing in N but present in the Icelandic Marian miracle. Probably missing, though, from this older, hypothesized miracle would have been the short passage (W17v8-15) in which the apparition of Mary presents Basil with a book containing the entire story of the Creation, since these lines are present neither in N nor in the Icelandic Marian miracle. In any case, however, these texts that we do have preserved, especially that in W, still offer readings exceedingly close to the Icelandic "Death of Julian."

Being in possession of such a very close source for the Marian miracle allows some conclusions to be drawn about the interrelationships between the Icelandic manuscripts. In version II it is apparent that mss. D and E are not indebted to each other but rather to a common source. Examples where D is closer to the Latin text are listed below:

| p. 700,3 | D: | helldr miol enn meen |
| 16r16 | E: | helldr miol enn vin |
| 16v3 | W: | farrifera magis quam hominifera |

| p. 700,4 | D: | ath hann brioti |
| 16v3 | E: | ath hann dirifiz at briota |

| p. 700,26 | D: | sem mikill fioldi himnesks hers |
| 17r14-15 | E: | sem mikill fioldi himneska hirdsueita ok herskapar |
| 17r14-15 | W: | multitudem militae caelestis |

In even more cases it is E that is closer to the Latin texts:

| 699,17 | D: | Persidis |
| 15v10 | E: | Persis |
| 700,1 | W: | persas |
| 16r14 | E: | Persas |


Indeed, there is some question about whether the compiler of version I had a written source in front of him at all. Julian's trip to Caesarea, the extensive verbal exchange with Basil, and the specific threat by the emperor are all replaced by a single sentence, Julian's announced intention to come to the city to torture Basil and all those who refused to deny God. Basil's vision of Mary having Mercurius summoned to her is simplified so that Mary stands at Mercurius' tomb and issues a direct command for him to rise from his grave. In addition, all names not those of the four most important participants are simply omitted in version I, such as Diana, Didymy, Persis, Libanius, Eufrates, Antiochus. Since the compiler of version I was obviously familiar with several different redactions of the miracle, it would not have been difficult (or even unlikely) for him to produce the very general version I from memory.

For the first version there are very few significant differences between the two relevant manuscripts, A and B. It would appear that B preserves the more original reading at p. 73,4-5 where Basil sees in a vision the Virgin Mary "me̞ miklum fiðla̞ a heilagra manna" ('with a large group of holy men') corresponding to the Latin "multitudem militiae caelestis" W17r14-15, "exercitum coelestis militiae" N24,28 ('a multitude of celestial soldiers') while A writes "me̞ miklum fiðla̞ a heilagra meyi̞a" ('with a large group of holy maidens'). The source for A had doubtless abbreviated "manna" as a followed by a superscript a. It should be noted that both manuscripts of version II are closer to the Latin here, especially D: "mikill fioldi himneskers hans".

Corresponding to the sentence at p. 700,22-24 in version II where the populace travels to the church of the Virgin Mary, holds a vigil and prays, B faithfully preserves all three verbs, albeit not in the same order, as do version II and the Latin versions:

p. 73,2  
A: allir skýldu fasta ok vaka at Mariu kirkju  
B: allir skýldi fasta ok vaka ok fara til Mariu kirkju

17r8-13  
W: ascendere . . . ieiuni sustinentes . . . vigilantibus in oratione

24,23-25  
N: perrexit . . . ieiuni sine cibo . . . orare psallere

None of the variants in A can be shown to be closer to the Latin than are the corresponding readings in B.

IV. Conclusions

From the discussion above there are several conclusions that can be drawn.

1. Neither ms. D nor ms. E borrowed from the other; they are (eventually) indebted to a common source.

2. Ms. B does not stem from ms. A. The latter is indebted either to ms. B or to a common source.

3. Neither of the version II manuscripts D or E nor their common source is an expanded version of A, B, or their immediate source.
4. The compiler of version I was certainly familiar with several different redactions of "The Death of Julian" and may not have relied directly on any of them. Version I is a drastically reduced redaction of "The Death of Julian" and could have been composed from memory.

5. Neither of the version II manuscripts (D, E) is indebted to the vernacular version of Basilii saga that is preserved in Iceland.

6. Due probably to a very old dependency between the widely preserved Eufemian version of the Vita Basilii and the independent, Latin miracle concerning the death of Julian, both Latin redactions are very similar.

7. The immediate Latin source of version II is most closely related to that found in the Eufemian version of the Vita Basilii, but this was probably not the exact source for the Icelandic translation.

8. The immediate Latin source of version II was also very close to that found in the collection of Marian miracles as preserved in British Museum manuscript Cleopatra C. x., but this manuscript version omits too much information to have been the exact source for the Icelandic translation.

9. Given the popularity of "The Death of Julian" in large collections of miracles, many of which also turn up appended to Marius saga, it is probable that the immediate source of the Icelandic Marian miracle was a Latin collection in which "The Death of Julian" existed in a much older form—one that more closely resembled chapters 8 and 9 in the Eufemian Vita Basilii.

NOTES
5. Marius saga, (Christiana, 1871).
6. Unger, pp. xii-xiii. According to Unger, ms. C is a faithful transcription of a much older manuscript.
11. Edited by Christian Morgenstern, Arnamagnæanske Fragmente (Leipzig and Copenhagen, 1883).