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Dominican Resonances in Medieval Iceland: The Legacy of Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt, ed. by Gunnar Harðarson and Karl G. Johansson, The Northern World 91. Leiden: Brill, 2021. ix + 337 pp. ISBN 9789004448797.

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Reviews

Dominican Resonances in Medieval Iceland: The Legacy of Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt, ed. by Gunnar Harðarson and Karl G. Johansson, *The Northern World* 91. Leiden: Brill, 2021. ix + 337 pp. ISBN 9789004448797.

Dominican Resonances in Medieval Iceland: The Legacy of Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt is an interdisciplinary volume which explores the ecclesiastical and literary history, textual culture, and liturgy of Iceland during the early and mid-fourteenth century. As noted in the introduction, the volume stems ultimately from discussions at the 2014 New Chaucer Society Conference in Reykjavík, which led to a conference at Skálholt in 2016. While not without flaws, this book represents a significant contribution to a period of history with great potential for new research. Considering the title, it offers a surprisingly broad and comprehensive exploration of issues and themes, with some chapters only peripherally relating to Bishop Jón.

Dominican Resonances is divided into five thematic sections, beginning with 'Educational and Cultural Context.' The first chapter, 'Canon, Dominican and Brother: The Life and Times of Jón Halldórsson in Bergen,' by Christian Etheridge, sets the stage for the rest of the book by constructing an outline of Jón's life before his election as bishop of Skálholt in 1322. Etheridge successfully draws together a wide variety of sources and scholarship, situating the reader in Jón's life and time in the context of the sources. An appropriate level of source criticism is sometimes lacking, however, above all in the treatment of *Jón þátr biskups Halldórssonar* [The Story of Bishop Jón Halldórsson] as an actual narrative of Jón's life, rather than a series of *exempla* in a biographical frame. The use of details in the first *exemplum* to support the argument that Jón studied theology rather than liberal arts (pp. 17–18) is problematic in light of the entirely formulaic nature of the story. Despite these flaws, the key arguments of the chapter, particularly that Jón probably did not become a Dominican until late in his career, are not unpersuasive.

The second chapter, 'Bishop Jón Halldórsson and Clerical Culture in 14th-Century Iceland,' by Viðar Pálsson, continues the focus on Jón's intellectual background, providing the reader with valuable additional historical background for Jón's activities. The main focus is on his education and his relationship to discourses in canon law. The chapter examines the implications of and reasons for his attendance at the University of Bologna. The arguments here have interesting intersections with the first chapter and both scholars show clearly how Jón's status as friar and/or canon determines what we can assume about his education.



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Part two of *Dominican Resonances* is entitled 'Dominican Exempla and Saga Literature.' The section commences with Gottskálk Jensson's 'Bishop Jón Halldórsson and 14th-Century Innovations in Saga Narrative: The Case of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*.' This chapter paints a persuasive image of Jón as a mediator between continental and Icelandic literature, while also emphasising that Icelandic literature had always been in dialogue with Latin writing from abroad; Jón's influence had an impact but was not revolutionary. Gottskálk explores the range of Jón Halldórsson's possible literary impacts, focusing on the influence of the Seven Sages legend in Iceland. The specific argument about Jón's authorship of *Egils saga einhenda* is partly undercut by a mix-up between *Clári saga* and the *ævintýri* 'Of Master Parus and his Delusions' (pp. 72–73), but the idea that Jón at least had an impact on the saga remains quite convincing. In addition to a nuanced analysis of Jón Halldórsson's place in Icelandic literature history, this chapter is an excellent example of why *Egils saga einhenda* has drawn so much interest in recent scholarship.

From there the focus narrows to *exempla* with Hjalti Snær Ægisson's 'Holy Ministry in Old Norse *ævintýri*.' This chapter categorises *exempla* attributed to Jón Halldórsson and proceeds to illuminate their intersections with other Old Norse texts; these comparisons allow brief explorations of Icelandic attitudes towards clergy, monks, and ecclesiastical activity in the fourteenth century. Hjalti Snær is appropriately careful and critical in offering historical conclusions using literary sources, while insightfully showing how much the *exempla* can reveal about religious and ecclesiastical discourses in medieval Iceland.

The final chapter of part two is 'Clári saga and Its Continental Siblings: A Comparative Literary Approach to an Old Problem' by Védís Ragnheiðardóttir. *Clári saga* and Jón's possible authorship of it are discussed in earlier chapters, particularly Jensson's, and there is a significant amount of response to Shaun Hughes' important 2008 article, '*Klári saga* as Indigenous Romance.' Védís offers the most thorough analysis of the saga in the volume, making use of tale types and motifs. *Clári saga* is identified as ATU 900 'King Thrushbeard' and is compared to other early versions of this tale. While Védís does not argue that Jón actually wrote *Clári saga*, she successfully offers new reasons why he was probably connected to it and proposes new avenues of comparative literary research using the saga.

Part three of *Dominican Resonances* focuses on 'Manuscripts and Illuminations' beginning with Stefan Drechsler's 'Jón Halldórsson and Law Manuscripts of Western Iceland c. 1320–1340.' The chapter's goal is to link Jón to the fourteenth-century manuscripts AM 671 4to and AM 343 fol., as well as the production of Icelandic *máldagar* [church charters]. While Drechsler's conclusions are presented as preliminary, intended as a 'theoretical framework only,' (p. 125) more thorough analysis of the material at hand would have helped to make the chapter more complete. The argument that Jón was present at Helgafell in 1324 and involved with the production AM 671 4to is interesting but not sufficiently developed and remains unconvincing for now. The proposed connection between Jón and AM 343 fol., already tenuous, is undercut by a misreading of the third chapter of *Jóns þáttur*, where Drechsler presents the *exemplum* as condemning a certain killing, when it is in fact defending its righteousness (pp. 137–38). Overall, while the chapter boasts an interesting premise, drawing connections between Jón's tenure as bishop and specific manuscripts through an analysis of ecclesiastical administration and ideology, more thorough source criticism and rigorous argumentation are needed to support its conclusions.

Part three then concludes with Karl G. Johansson's 'AM 657 a–b 4° and the Mouvance of Medieval Texts: Roles and Functions in the Transmission of Texts in a Manuscript Culture.'

This chapter offers a careful and nuanced critique of how ideas like ‘author’, ‘compiler’, and ‘translator’ are constructed and used, focusing on the case of AM 657 a-b 4to and its relationship to Arngrímur Brandsson and Jón Halldórsson. The key points of the chapter do lack some clarity in their presentation, and the arguments can be difficult to follow, but they intersect in thought-provoking ways with the other discussions of *exempla*, *Clári saga*, and manuscript culture in *Dominican Resonances*.

Part four, ‘Music and Liturgy,’ is a high point of the volume, albeit one particularly distant from most discussions of Jón Halldórsson. Here Astrid Marner provides a much-needed reframing of our conception of Icelandic liturgy in ‘Liturgical Change and Liturgical Plurality in the Province of Nidaros: New Light on the *Ordo Nidrosiensis Ecclesiae*.’ Marner reevaluates Gjerløw’s classic edition of the *Ordo Nidrosiensis* and the manuscripts behind it, calling for a much overdue acknowledgement of liturgical plurality in the archdiocese of Niðarós. Jón Halldórsson’s introduction of the feast of Corpus Christi to Iceland in 1326 is presented as evidence for significant liturgical plurality on the island; otherwise the bishop has no real role in Marner’s argument. The chapter is nonetheless a reminder of the centrality of the liturgy in any consideration of the life and career of a bishop.

Gisela Attinger continues in a closely related vein with ‘Some Reflections on the Liturgy for St Þorlákr.’ While dealing with the Office(s) of St. Þorlákr rather than the *Ordo*, the core argument overlaps significantly with the previous chapter: even the few surviving manuscript fragments are enough to show that there were significant local variations in liturgical practice in Iceland and the archdiocese of Niðarós as a whole. The specificity of Attinger’s work highlights the significance of these conclusions, showing how variation existed even within liturgical celebrations of a minor local saint like Þorlákr. Here the connection to Jón Halldórsson is slightly more significant, as the chapter shows Dominican models for melodies in an Office for St. Þorlákr, which may have come to Iceland through Jón.

At the end of the volume, part five, ‘Manuscript Practice and Multiple Careers,’ examines two other important figures from Jón Halldórsson’s time. Embla Aae begins the section with ‘Elucidating Charter Practice and Administrative Literacy in Four Works by Einarr Hafliðason.’ The scope of this chapter is ambitious, but Aae takes the time and space to properly explore the intertextuality of Einarr’s works and insightfully highlights the presentation of administrative writing and literacy in these four texts. The miracle story in AM 194 8vo, ‘Atburðr á Finnmörk,’ provides a particularly fascinating case study of the complex agencies involved in textual transmission and intersects well with Johannsson’s earlier chapter.

Finally, Gunnar Harðarson outlines the life and career of Arngrímur Brandsson in ‘Music and Manuscripts in Skálholt and Þingeyrar.’ This is an ideal conclusion to the book, mirroring the first chapter in its reconstruction of a particular life and career, as well as presenting a nuanced image of Arngrímur Brandsson, who is shown throughout *Dominican Resonances* to be a key link between Jón Halldórsson and Icelandic literary production. There is a strong emphasis on the complexity of Arngrímur Brandsson as a person and care is taken not to overemphasise or misrepresent the more speculative conclusions of the chapter. Harðarson adds significantly to the overall impact of the volume by offering such a complete and up-to-date biography of this vital figure of fourteenth-century Icelandic textual culture.

Dominican Resonances includes four appendices: an English translation of *Jóns þáttur* entitled ‘The Account of Bishop Jón Halldórsson;’ a 1338 letter of bishop Hákon of Bergen to Jón Halldórsson; a commentary on a booklist generally attributed to Bishop Árni Sigurðsson (d. 1314); and finally, a list of the contents of manuscript AM 671 4to, the *Helgafell*

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manuscript discussed in Drechsler's chapter. All of these are interesting reference points, but the translation of *Jóns þáttur* is most relevant to the volume and likely to be useful to most readers. While the translation is a revision of Marteinn H. Sigurðsson's translation from his 1997 MPhil, and thus appears to have the accuracy expected of a text revised by several talented Old Norse experts, the English used is sometimes clunky or unidiomatic and in places the translation can be difficult to read.

There is very little missing from *Dominican Resonances*, though the completeness of the volume might have been enhanced by a biography of Jón's tenure as bishop of Skálholt, mirroring Etheridge's outline of his earlier life. But the range of texts and topics examined — all of which touch in some way upon Jón's life and career — is truly impressive. Furthermore, the relationship between the topics discussed and Jón is not inconsequential: his presence provides a compelling historical link that emphasises the intersections between very different areas of research. It is all the more impressive, from a literary and textual perspective, that his significance stands independently of whether he actually authored or compiled any works himself, and in spite of how limited the evidence for his life is. This book is an important step forward in our understanding of late medieval Iceland and, despite some flaws, remains highly recommended to anyone interested in the subject.

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