

Páls leizla: *The Vision of St Paul*. Edited and translated by Dario Bullitta. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2017. XLIX, 56 pp.

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Daria Bullitta's edition presents the Norse translation of one of the earliest and most widely circulated medieval Latin afterlife visions. It is generically affiliated with other popular visiones such as the *Visio Tundali*, the *Visio Gunthelmi*, the narratives of Dryc-thelm and Furseus, both from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and similar episodes found in Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* – all of which survive in Norse translations. The most widely known medieval form of the *Visio Pauli* is derived from an apocryphal apocalypse composed in Greek, probably in Egypt in the third century, in which the apostle, guided by St. Michael, is taken to the different spheres of heaven and subsequently to hell, where he is shown the tortures assigned to different categories of sinners in the hereafter. The version of the *Visio Pauli* that circulated most widely in the Middle Ages contains only the journey through hell. It probably originated on the British Isles and survives in some 102 medieval codices.

The diverse variants of the *Visio* have been categorised by Lenka Jiroušková (2006) into three main MSS families, of which her C group was most widely copied and shows the strongest affinity with the Norse translation. Bullitta goes a step further than previous scholarship on *Páls leizla* in pinpointing the closest relative of the Norse fragments, found in an MS from the West Midlands from around 1400 (London, St. Paul's Cathedral Library, Ms. 8). The two texts share eleven readings that are unique in the entire corpus. Based on the similarities between the two, Bullitta finds it plausible that one of the immediate ancestors to the English MS also provided the basis of the Norse translation (xvi). The two extant Norse fragments survive in the manuscripts AM 681c 4to and AM 624 4to, dated in ONP to ca. 1400 and ca. 1500 respectively. The latter MS is the fuller version, with only one tenth of the narrative surviving in the former codex.

Páls leizla, exists in two previous editions: Matthias Tveitane's lightly normalised edition, accompanied by a compiled Latin version of the *Visio*, in *En norrønn versjon av Visio Pauli* from 1965, and Jonas Wellendorf's normalised edition, based on Tveitane, in *Kristelig visionslitteratur i norrøn tradition*, from 2009. Bullitta's edition

presents the text of the fuller version found in AM 624 4to. It is normalised according to editorial conventions of the ONP, reflecting an early thirteenth century standard, though the editor has chosen to retain a few later features to give readers 'an impression of the character' of the MS (e.g. 'voru' for 'váru'). This attempt, however, is complicated by the fact that the orthography of the MS text is inconsistent in several places, and contains conservative features as well as variant spellings of common words (e.g. 'giora' and 'gera' for 'gøra'). The Norse text is accompanied by variants from the closest Latin versions of the *Visio Pauli* and English translations of both on the facing page. Presented in this way, the edition facilitates comparison between the Norse translation with the Latin source material, while the English translations help to make the edition accessible to readers outside the field of Old Norse scholarship with interest in the transmission of this *Visio*.

The edition itself is introduced by a thorough assessment of the historic relationships between the Norse MSS and source texts, the idiosyncrasies of the Norse narrative, and the provenance of the Norse translation. Particularly engaging is Bullitta's discussion about the features that distinguish the Norse translation from the Latin variants. Though notably briefer than Latin variants, the Norse scribe consistently glosses categories of sins shown to the visionary to give 'greater clarity' to the eschatological concepts presented. Some of the sins described in the Norse translation are unique additions compared to the extant source material, with particular attention devoted to souls who in various ways had been 'illir í tungu', such as perjurers, perpetrators of witchcraft, and such that spoke ill against their parents or priests. As Bullitta observes, two of the strictures described in the hell vision echo methods of punishment found in contemporary law texts. Heretics, for instance, are burned on the stake, a practice introduced in France in the second half of the thirteenth century, and in England from 1401. The legal trials known in Norse sources as *járnburðr* and *ketiltak*, associated especially with paternity cases, are echoed in Pál's description of souls carrying glowing hot iron ('sindranda grjót') and boiling cauldrons. This angle of analysis is interesting and may help to decode the often vivid but enigmatic conceptions of punishment and reward and their local resonances in the large medieval visionary corpus.

Bullitta's analysis of the theological imagery of the *leizla* ties in with his larger argument about the late medieval provenance of the Norse translation. This dating is reinforced by items of vocabulary only matched in later manuscripts within the extended Norse corpus. Legalistic terms such as 'skrökvitni' ('false witness') and 'forstöðulauss' ('without protection') are not found in sources earlier than the thirteenth century. Notably, there is the expression 'blífa ok vera', occurring towards the

end of the *leizla*, which is only commonly found in MSS from the late fifteenth century and not found before 1413. To this Bullitta adds convincing analyses indicating that material in other Norse texts (e.g. in *Duggals leizla*) formerly held to derive from *Páls leizla* is more likely to have travelled in the opposite direction. On the whole, Bullitta suggests a late fifteenth century as a likely date of translation, identifying Hólar during the regency of the Norwegian bishop Ólafr Rögnvaldsson (active 1450–1495) as the likely place of origin (xlv–xlvii). This is a significant revision of the twelfth century origin proposed by Tveitane (1965).

Dario Bullitta's volume is a welcome addition to scholarship on the Scandinavian transmission of the *visiones* in general, and the highly influential *Visio Pauli* in particular. Even though the text exists in two previous editions, and Bullitta might well have devoted a few lines to clarifying the need of a new edition or its scholarly contribution compared to the existing ones, the present volume certainly makes the Norse translation available to a larger audience than hitherto. It will be especially useful for critics interested in the influence of Latin religious narratives on Norse literature and culture, and in the 'cultural turn' involved in the adaptation of such a work to the local context.

Bibliography

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