

Father of the People: The Ancient Roman Metaphor for Ruler in the Medieval Icelandic Contexts

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The aim of this paper is to analyse the reception of the metaphor of “ruler as father of the people” and “the people as family”, a conceptual metaphor culture-specific for ancient Rome, in the vernacular and Latin literature originating from the medieval Nordic region, particularly in translations of classical literature into Old Icelandic. Its dissemination in the local Latin and vernacular literature can be used as a marker for Latinization in Nordic Europe to help us determine when the native intellectual elites started thinking in Latin categories, and to what extent. For this purpose, I also examine the resemanticization, i.e. the production of new meaning in a changed context, of this metaphor in the Nordic region after Christianization to determine understandings of the received concept of power relation between a ruler (state), subject (citizens), and territory.

During the 11th century Icelanders accepted Christianity and Church structures were gradually established in Iceland, followed by educational institutions, libraries, scriptoria, cathedral and monastic schools with a Latin-based education, the *trivium* of Latin grammar, logic, and rhetoric (available from the early 12th century). The literary production in Latin and the vernacular began in the local scriptoria in Iceland in the early 12th century. Apart for hagiography and royal chronicles, among the oldest literary works are translations of classical literature concerning the history of the ancient world: “Saga of the Romans”, “Saga of the Trojans”, “Saga of the Jews”, and “Saga of Alexander the Great”.

It is possible to observe the consequent influence of Latin culture in medieval Iceland, reinforced by classical education, as well as literary production and consumption, in the micro scale of language. Non-existent in the Old Norse conceptual world, the paternal and familial metaphors for ruler and the ruled were culturally transferred from Latin Europe to the Nordic Europe after Scandinavians were Christianized and Europeanized in the range of the Latin conceptual system (Andersen 2012, Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1956, Hermanson 2019, Lönnroth 1959, Robberstad, Knut 1949-1951, Sverrir Jakobsson 1999). With the introduction of Latin-based education, the patriarchal metaphors appeared in the regional Latin and vernacular literatures as a loan translation from Latin (e.g. *föðurland*, *föðurlandsfaðir*, *faðir fostriarðar*, *himneskt föðurland*).

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