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# On the origin of the oldest borrowed Christian terminology in Icelandic

## 1 Introduction

The Icelandic borrowed lexicon is semantically vast. Among the various semantic fields in which it might be subdivided, the focus of this article will be on the religious, i.e. Christian, sphere. Its oldest core will be presented here: i.e. those words which are most likely to have reached the North in the period ranging from the first evangelical missions in Scandinavia (9<sup>th</sup> c.) to the establishment of the archbishopric of Niðarós in 1153.

The article<sup>1</sup> is organised as follows: in section 2, an overview of the

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank here those who, with their valuable suggestions and comments, helped me when writing the present article, whose main idea actually stems from reviewing my M.A.-thesis for publication (Tarsi 2014b). The people I wish to thank for the above-mentioned reasons are: Jón Axel Harðarson (University of Iceland), Marco Battaglia (Università di Pisa) and Alessandro Parenti (Università di Trento) for having reviewed and commented on a very early version of this article; the editor-in-chief of the present journal, Ari Páll Kristinsson, for his patience and brilliant suggestions; the two anonymous peer-reviewers, whose insightful comments I tried to follow as well as possible. I wish also to thank Margrét Jónsdóttir, who during my second year at the University of Iceland, suggested to me that I take a course in the history of the Icelandic language. Her suggestion turned out indeed to have been one of the most inspired I have ever been given. Last but not least, special thanks go to Charles Gittins (Morgunblaðið) and Ryan Eric Johnson for having accurately corrected the final draft of this article.

historical period under discussion is given. Its main aim is to supply the subsequent discussion with the most important historical dates and events concerning both the conversion of Scandinavia and Iceland. In section 3, the corpus (45 words) is presented, of which a semantic classification is given alongside a chronological (text-based) reading. Section 4 is devoted to the discussion of a sample of ten words which have been chosen for two reasons: in order to investigate the importance of Old Saxon speakers in the early Christian period, both in Scandinavia and in Iceland, and to revise some of the etymologies proposed by the three main Icelandic etymological dictionaries, namely Jan de Vries' *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (AeW), Alexander Jóhannesson's *Isländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (IeW) and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon's *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (ÍOb).

## 2 A brief account of the period 9<sup>th</sup> c.–1153 in relation to the introduction of the Christian lexicon

The Christian lexicon most probably became known initially in the North no later than in the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the evangelical missions sent by the Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen to convert the pagans of that region and to the contacts the Scandinavians had had with the more southern European populations and with those of the British Isles during the Viking Age (793–1066) (Schottmann 2002:403).

As regards the Christian terminology introduced into Old West Norse, i.e. the variety of Old Norse from which Icelandic developed (see Kjartan G. Ottósson 2002), in the period 9<sup>th</sup> century–1153, two phases can be distinguished: firstly, 9<sup>th</sup> c.–1000, when the Christian religion was introduced in Scandinavia and thence in Iceland, and secondly, the period in which the Church strengthened its institutional power both in Scandinavia and in Iceland.

The first phase is primarily characterised by two historical facts: 1) the Danish conquest, under the rule of Haraldr I Gormsson, of the region around the Oslo fjord known as 'the Bay' (Icel. *Víkin*), around the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (cf. below); 2) the important missionary activity spearheaded by the Norwegian kings Hákon I Aðalsteinsfóstri (934–961) and Óláfr I Tryggvason (995–1000). According to

the *Landnámabók*, in fact, not few of the Norwegian settlers, some of which had already embraced the new religion, came from the region that Haraldr I had previously conquered (Sigurður Línal 1974:232–236). Moreover, it is a well-known fact that Hákon I, King Æþelstán's foster-child, organised some evangelical activity upon his return to Norway with the help of Anglo-Saxon missionaries (Sigurður Línal 1974:229). Of even greater importance is the activity of King Óláfr I Tryggvason, who was the promoter of two out of three evangelical missions to Iceland (995 and 997),<sup>2</sup> the last of which was led by the Saxon bishop Þangbrandr, of whom Ari fróði Þorgilsson gives an account in his *Íslendingabók* (Ari Þorgilsson 1968:14–15).

As regards the second phase (1000–1153), when ecclesiastical activity in Iceland finally became part of the Church's organisational system (Magnús Stefánsson 1975b), it is of primary importance to focus on the activity of Óláfr II Haraldsson. He was, in fact, the promoter of evangelical missions during the first years following the conversion (1016–last quarter of the 11<sup>th</sup> century), which were carried out by 'itinerant bishops' (Icel. *farandbiskupar*), who mostly came from the Low German and Old English speaking area (cf. Hjalti Hugason 2000:146). During that very period, in 1056, the first Icelandic bishop, Ísleifr Gizurarson, was appointed in Bremen, while the first bishopric was established at Skálholt by his son, Gizurr Ísleifsson, in 1082.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the local Church reached institutional maturity with the establishment of another bishopric at Hólar in 1106, the writing of the Church law (Icel. *kristinna laga þáttur*) in 1122–1133 (cf. Magnús Stefánsson 1975a:66–68), and the establishment of the first monasteries (1975a:81–85).

If one looks at the populations with which Scandinavians and subsequently Icelanders, had contact during the aforementioned period, it is clear that the languages from which the very first Christian vocabulary was borrowed are Old English<sup>3</sup>, Old Saxon, and Middle Low

<sup>2</sup> The first evangelical mission to Iceland took place in 981–986 and was carried out by Þorvaldr víðförli Koðránsson and the Saxon bishop Fredrik (Sigurður Línal 1974:236).

<sup>3</sup> With 'Old English' is meant the oldest variety of English known to us. It was spoken mainly in England in a period ranging from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Hogg & Denison (eds.) 2006:2–3).

German<sup>4</sup>. Direct borrowing from Latin<sup>5</sup> was of course present, albeit to a minor extent (cf. Halldór Halldórsson 1969b:109–112).

### 3 Semantic classification

The words which, according to my research, constitute the oldest borrowed Christian terminology in Icelandic total 45. These words are all first attested either in prose or poetry, thought to have been produced between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, although the manuscripts in which these literary works are preserved are sometimes more recent copies.

The corpus is semantically multifaceted, as it consists of words denoting several different, albeit complementary, aspects of the early life of the Church in the North.

For the sake of presenting the corpus in a way which, although schematic, is mainly aimed at giving a bird's-eye view on its semantic variety, a basic classification into four categories is proposed, namely ECCLESIASTICAL TITLES, BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURAL PARTS, LITURGY-RELATED TERMS and BEINGS AND PLACES OF THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

<sup>4</sup> With 'Old Saxon' and 'Middle Low German' is actually meant two different but consecutive stages of the same language, namely Low German. Chronologically, the former, most ancient, stage is said to range from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, while the latter ranges from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to 1500 (cf. Veturliði Óskarsson 2003:147).

<sup>5</sup> Latin borrowings in Icelandic are of two kinds, namely indirect and direct. The former comprises all those borrowings which ultimately stem from Latin but have been mediated by one or more languages before entering the Icelandic language. The latter are loanwords which, albeit being directly borrowed from Latin, are classifiable in two subgroups, namely early and late borrowings. Under the former label are all those common Germanic borrowings which stem from early contacts between Latin and Germanic speakers while the latter comprise the so-called learned borrowings (see also Raschella 1988:91–93 and Tarsi 2014a:3). Late direct, as well as some indirect, Latin borrowings in Old Icelandic are usually considered to stem from the so-called Vulgar, i.e. nonstandard, Latin, as opposed to Classical Latin. The notion of Vulgar Latin is, however, somehow fuzzy, as it aims to comprise all the Latin sociolects spoken in the Roman Empire, from which the Romance languages later arose. Vulgar Latin words are often also very difficult to find in texts and are therefore often reconstructed. However, Vulgar Latin also constitutes a "serviceable term" – as Adams (2013) puts it – when investigating those particular varieties of Latin, which laid the ground for the Romance languages in the Middle Ages (cf. Adams 2013:3–11). It is in fact with this latter spirit, that this label has been used in this article.

The century during which each word is first attested in Icelandic sources according to *ONP* and *LP*, together with its lending language (mainly on the authority of *AeW*, *IeW* and *ÍOb* with some corrections according to the present article, Tarsi 2014b and Halldór Halldórsson 1969b) are given in round brackets.

- **Ecclesiastical titles:** *abbadís* (12<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *ábóti* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *biskup* (10<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *djákn* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *erkibiskup* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *kardínáli* (13<sup>th</sup>, Vulg.Lat.), *klerkur* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *magister* (12<sup>th</sup>, Lat.), *meistari* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *munkur* (11<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *nunna* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *páfi* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *prestur* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *prófastur* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.)
- **Buildings and architectural parts:** *altari* (11<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *kapella* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *kirkja* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *klaustur* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *kór* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *musteri* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.)
- **Liturgy-related terms:** *bagall* (12<sup>th</sup>, ME.), *kaleikur* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *kóróna* (13<sup>th</sup>, Lat.), *kristinn* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *kross* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *krúna* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *kufi* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG. or OE.), *kyrtill* (11<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *messa* (11<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *mirra* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.), *mitur* (13<sup>th</sup>, Lat.), *nón* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *obláta* (13<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *páskar* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *prósessía* (13<sup>th</sup>, Vulg. Lat.), *saltari* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *sálmur* (11<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *sekoensía* (13<sup>th</sup>, Vulg. Lat.), *signa* (13<sup>th</sup>, Vulg.Lat.), *vers* (13<sup>th</sup>, MLG.)
- **Beings and places of the Christian doctrine:** *djöfull* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *engill* (11<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *paradís* (12<sup>th</sup>, OSax.), *postuli* (12<sup>th</sup>, OE.), *prófeti* (13<sup>th</sup>, Lat.)

If crossed with a chronological classification based on the century during which each word is first attested, the semantic classification eventually reveals four borrowing “layers” which roughly mirror some actual changes within the Church’s institutional and doctrinal sphere, i.e. new words are more likely to be recorded in writing very near in time to the introduction of the novelty they denote. This, however, is not clearly appreciable in all cases, as just a small number of medieval manuscripts have survived to our time. A good example of how far back in time the first attestation of a supposedly early loanword might be is OIc. *kristinn* ‘Christian’, whose first record in Icelandic sources we have is from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, while its importance for the Christian doctrine, its early record in the Jelling-2 rune-stone

inscription, and the absence of a native synonym<sup>6</sup> in Old Icelandic strongly suggest that the word must have been borrowed earlier (see section 4 for further discussion). Also, other borrowings are, in my opinion, to be regarded as of primary importance in the evangelisation of Iceland, since they denote things and concepts upon which the new religion was fundamentally based; these are: *altari*, *biskup*, *djöfull*, *engill*, *kirkja*, *kristinn*, *kross*, *messu*, *páfi*, *paradís*, *páskar*, *postuli*, *prestur*, *signa*. The main idea behind this sub-categorisation is that primary concepts are bound to be introduced at a very early stage; their function being to lay the ground for the new doctrine. A similar view, i.e. that the Christian vocabulary is at least partially older than the oldest texts in which it is preserved, has already been put forward by Jón Friðjónsson (1997:xxxvii), who also quotes a newspaper article by Stefán Karlsson (1993), where he asserts that “a new religion needed new ways of wording things. New words were in part taken from the international language of the Church, Latin, which had borrowed many of them from Greek. The majority of such loanwords were related to ecclesiastical roles, religious buildings and the liturgy” (1993:30, my translation).

## 4 Some examples from the corpus

In this section a sample of ten words will be analysed. They have been chosen primarily for their importance both from a historico-linguistic and etymological perspective. As regards the former, the words have been chosen (*altari*, *biskup*, *djöfull*, *erki-*, *kristinn*, *páfi*) partly in order to show, as do Halldór Halldórsson (1969b) and Veturlíði Óskarsson (2003:147–153), that the role played by Old Saxon in the lexical enrichment of the early Old Icelandic Christian lexicon is broader than usually acknowledged. As regards the latter, the words have been chosen in order to discuss the etymologies proposed by *AeW*, *IeW* and *ÍOb* and, in most cases, to better define or even amend them.

<sup>6</sup> A native partial synonym of Olc. *kristinn* is Olc. *réttrúaðr*, first recorded as early as 1200 (cf. *ONP*). However, the latter does not seem to be used interchangeably with the former, even though it clearly denotes a moral quality of those who **then** were baptised and therefore became Christians. (Cf. the following example from the *Icelandic Homily Book* (ms. *Holm perg* 15 4to, ca. 1200, f27r:5–6), here given in normalised orthography: [...] *en nú eru allir réttrúaðir kenndir við Krist* |<sup>6</sup> *sjalfan ok kallaðir kristnir menn.*)

**abbadís:** The oldest occurrence of this word (E. ‘abbess’) in Icelandic is found, allegedly, in a *lausavísa* by the skald Einarr Skúlason<sup>7</sup> (12<sup>th</sup> c.), preserved in GKS 1009 fol. (36r15–17), from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, also known as *Morkinskinna* (*SkP*

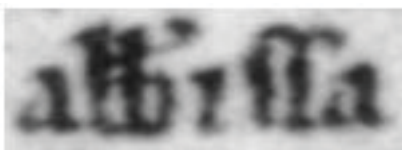


Figure 1. *abbiffa* in GKS 1009 fol., 36r15

*II*, 2:571–572). In the manuscript, the word is abbreviated as *abbiffa*, with a nasal stroke running through both ascenders of the *ff* junction. Finnur Jónsson, in his *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (*Skjald*, A–I:483), gives a diplomatic reading of the word as “abbatissa”. The abbess who is referred to in the poem is that of Bakke, a Benedictine cloister near Trondheim.

The three main etymological dictionaries for Icelandic give two paths for the borrowing: from Lat. *abbatissa/abbadissa* via MLG. *abbadisse* (*AeW*, *IeW*, *ÍOb*) or directly from Vulg.Lat. *abbadissa* (*AeW*, *ÍOb*). *AeW* also proposes OE. *abbudesse* as an intermediary between Latin and Old Icelandic, but this hypothesis should be discarded due to phonemic difficulties in explaining OE. /u/ > OIc. /a/ since OE. /u/ would more reasonably have been adapted as OIc. /y/. Moreover, Finnur Jónsson’s interpretation of the abbreviation is doubtful, although kept unchanged by the editors of The Skaldic Project (cf. *SkP II*, 2:571–572). In fact, according to *ONP*, the word form *abbatissa*, i.e. with <tt> instead of <d>, is not attested. It is therefore most probable that Finnur Jónsson thought that the word was a direct loan from Latin, although in *LP* the citation form where the aforementioned line by Einarr Skúlason is quoted, is indeed *abbadissa*.

The oldest occurrence of the modern word form, *abbadís*, is from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century (*ONP*). The form arises from a paraetymological parallel with OIc. *dís* ‘goddess’ (*IeW*), thanks to the metonymical semantic extension of this noun, chiefly in the poetic language, where *dís* is a common *heiti* for ‘woman’.

<sup>7</sup> *Oss lét abbatissa / angri firð of svangan, / dugðut víf en vígðu / víti fyr þat gyrða; / en til áts með nunnum / (ógnar rakks) á Bakka / (drós gladdit vin vísa) / vasat stallari kallaðr* (*Skjald*, B–I:455). The abbess, removed from worries, made us [me] tighten the belt around the flank, although men may reproach the faithful consecrated women [for that]. And the marshal was not summoned to eat with the nuns at Bakke; the lady did not cheer the friend of the battle-brave leader. (Transl. Kari Ellen Gade, *The Skaldic Project*.)

The correct etymology is then the following: Icel. *abbadís* – OIc. *abbadissa* < MLG. *abbadisse* < Vulg.Lat. *abbadissa* < Lat. *abbatissa*, where the Latin noun is a derivative of *abbās* ‘abbot’ < AGr. ἀββᾶς < Aram. ‘*abbā*’ ‘father’ (cf. also *ábóti*).

**altari:** The oldest occurrence of this word (E. ‘altar’) is to be found in *Glælognskviða*, a skaldic poem from the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Þórarinn loftunga, preserved in the *Óláfs saga helga* and Snorri Sturluson’s homonymous saga in *Heimskringla* (LP, *Skjald*, A–I:324–325)<sup>8</sup>. Given its early occurrence, there are two most probable languages from which Icelandic might have borrowed the word, namely Old English (*altar*) and Old Saxon (*altāri*). According to Halldór Halldórsson (1969b:112), Latin is to be excluded as a source of direct loan because, he argues, there must have been little direct influence from Latin in the period immediately before and after conversion.

Following Halldór Halldórsson’s (1969b:112–114) argument, OSax. *altāri* appears to be the most likely source for OIc. *altari* for three main reasons, both from a linguistic and historical perspective:

1) Lat. *altāre* has been borrowed in Old English as *altar*. However, two native coinages, namely *wīgbed* and *wēofod*, seem to be used considerably more frequently than the Latin loanword (1969b:114, ASD). Moreover, there are no native coinages for this word in Old Icelandic, neither with a structure resembling the Old English ones such as *\*\*vīgbeðr*, *\*\*vīgbjóðr* or *\*\*vēbjóðr*, nor with a different one. In other words: Old Icelandic does not have a native word to label Lat. *altāre*, which – I posit – would have been the most probable outcome of Old English influence.

2) A variant of OIc. *altari* is attested, namely *altári*<sup>9</sup>, which is phonemically most similar to its Old Saxon and Old Frisian (*altāre*) counterparts, i.e. with /ā/ in the unstressed syllable. The /ā/ in OIc. *altári* later underwent shortening causing a merge of the two variants (see also Raschellà 1988:93 for a different explanation).

3) As has been shown above, this word occurs very early in Old Icelandic and was most probably introduced as early as the first evangelical mission (cf. footnote 2), if not earlier via Norway. In both cases it is natural to think more of an influence from the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen, i.e. an Old Saxon influence.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete list of the mss. in which the poem is preserved see *SkP I*, 1:872.

<sup>9</sup> For instance in the *Icelandic Homily Book* (ms. *Holm perg* 15 4to), f. 96r and 97r (cf. de Leeuw van Weenen (ed.) 1993 and ONP).



Therefore, the path to be reconstructed here is Icel. *altari* – OIc. *altari/altári* < OSax. *altāri* < Lat. *altāre*.

ÍOb agrees on this etymology and so does, at least partially, *NDeW*, who ascribes the loan to continental West Germanic. *AeW* and *IeW* treat the word as a borrowing from Old English while Fischer (1909:56) most erroneously considers it to be a loan from Middle Low German.

**ábóti:** The word (E. ‘abbot’) was most likely borrowed into Old West Norse twice and from different lending languages, as witnessed by the two variants, *ábóti* and *abbati/abbáti*, the former occurring from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the latter from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Their difference in respect to the borrowing language is easily appreciable by a comparison between their phonemic shapes. In *Figures 2–3* the word is used in the same sentence<sup>10</sup>: the former comes from an Icelandic manuscript which contains homiletic texts, *AM 237 a fol.* (ca. 1150), while the latter is from the *Norwegian Homily Book*, *AM 619 4to* (ca. 1200).



Figure 2. *abbatar* in *AM 237a fol.*, 1rb10

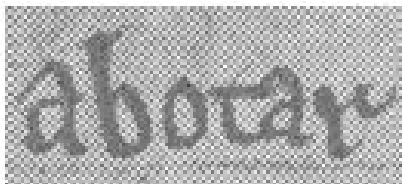


Figure 3. *abotar* in *AM 619 4to*, 48v1

As regards the etymology of the two variants, *ábóti* doubtless comes from OE. *abbot* (< Lat. acc. sg. *abbātem*, nom. sg. *abbās*) (*AeW*, *IeW*), while *abbati/abbáti* is considered to have been borrowed from a continental West Germanic language (*IeW*), more precisely from MLG. *abbet* (Fischer 1909:56)<sup>11</sup>. This, however, can hardly be true. First of all, because of the early occurrence of the word and, more convincingly, due to phonemic reasons, as MLG. /e/ could hardly have been adapted as OIc. /a/ when a more similar phoneme was at hand, i.e. OIc. /e/.

<sup>10</sup> (*AM 237 a fol.*, 1rb8–11, diplomatic transcription): þeir merkia forráþs menn. þa es l<sup>9</sup> setter ero til stiornar oc til eflíngar l<sup>10</sup> cristennar. sva sem abbatar ýuer munc l<sup>11</sup>om. eþa hæfþíngiar ýuer lýþ.

(*AM 619 4to*, 48r30–48v1, diplomatic transcription): þæir merkia forráðsmenn þa er settir ero til stiornar ok til [48v] eflíngar cristennar sva sem abotar yfir muncum eða höfðíngiar yfir lýð.

<sup>11</sup> ÍOb lists the two words, *ábóti* and *abbati/abbáti*, together and simply gives a common etymology for the two, i.e. from Lat. *abbās* (acc. *abbātem*) < AGr. ἀββᾶς < Aram. ‘abbā ‘father’.

A more probable etymology for OIc. *abbati/abbáti* is that the word had been borrowed directly from Vulg.Lat. *ab(b)atis*, where the phonemic resemblance with the Old Icelandic loanword is the highest. During the adaptation process in Icelandic, then, the Latin word would have lost the final /s/ being inflected according to the Old Icelandic masculine weak declension.

**bagall:** The oldest occurrence of this word (E. ‘crosier’) in Icelandic is preserved in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century copies of Ari fróði Þorgilsson’s *Íslendingabók* (AM 113 a–b fol.), originally composed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. All three major Icelandic etymological dictionaries treat the word as a Latin loan via OIr. *bachall*. This etymology is, however, to be considered partial: In fact, as pointed out by de Vries (*AeW*), who quotes Björkman (1900:259), and also as reported by *ÍOb*, it is probable that the word had first reached Norway via English (cf. ME. *baghel*). A more complete etymology would then be: Icel./OIc. *bagall* = ONorw.< ME. *baghel* < OIr. *bachall* < Lat. *baculus*. A derivation via Middle English is also favoured by the higher likeliness of ME. /gh/ [ɣ] than of OIr. /ch/ [x] to be adapted as OIc. /g/ in-between vowels, i.e. [ɣ].

**biskup:** The word occurs for the first time in a *níð* verse about the Saxon bishop Fredrik and his assistant, Þorvaldr víðförli Koðránsón.<sup>12</sup> The verse is considered to have been composed in the last quarter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, albeit preserved in later manuscripts (*LP* and *Skjald*, A–I:178)<sup>13</sup>. *IeW* treats this loanword as a common Germanic borrowing from Lat. *episcopus* (< AGr. *ἐπίσκοπος*), while *AeW* and *ÍOb* consider OE. *bisceop* as an intermediary language between Latin and Old Icelandic.

Given the fact that the first occurrence of this loanword designates a Saxon bishop and that Old Saxon missionaries played an influential role in early Icelandic and Norwegian ecclesiastical matters, the etymology proposed by *IeW* is to be discarded as well as those of *AeW* and *ÍOb*. OSax. *biskop* shall be preferred as an intermediary form, giving the following: Icel. *biskup* – OIc. *byskup/biskup* < OSax. *biskop* < Vulg.Lat. *piscopu* < Lat. *episcopus*. In favour of this etymology is the phonemic similarity between the Old Saxon and the Old Icelandic

<sup>12</sup> *Hefr börn borit / byskup níu, / þeira’s allra / Þorvaldr faðir* (*Skjald*, B–I:168). The bishop has borne nine children, and Þorvaldr is father to them all. (My translation.)

<sup>13</sup> For a complete list of the mss. in which the poem is preserved see *The Skaldic Project*.

words, whereas more difficult would be to explain the adaptation of OE. /ʃ/ as OIc. /sk/.

The variant *byskup* is derived from *biskup* where the original /i/ has been subject to *u*-umlaut due to the peculiar phonetic context which surrounded the original /i/, i.e. immediately preceded by a bilabial consonant and followed by a back vowel in the next syllable (Noreen 1923:71).

**djöfull:** Even though the word (E. ‘devil’) has a fundamental importance in Christian doctrine, its first occurrence is relatively late, namely in Halldórr svaldri’s *Útfarardrápa*, a poem from the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (*Skjald*, A–I:486–488)<sup>14</sup>. The word, on whose etymology *AeW*, *IeW* and *ÍOb* agree, is undoubtedly a borrowing via Old Saxon: Icel. *djöfull* – OIc. *djøfull* < OSax. *diuþal* < Lat. *diabolus* < AGr. *διάβολος* ‘slanderos, backbiting’.

**erki-:** The prefix (E. ‘arch-’) usually occurs in compounds with the words *biskup* ‘bishop’, *djákni* ‘deacon’, *engill* ‘angel’, *prestur* ‘priest’ and *stóll* ‘see’. The compound appearing the earliest in Old Icelandic sources is *erkistóll* (E. ‘archbishopric’), the first occurrence of which is in Markús Skeggjason’s *Eiríksdrápa*, a poem from the first decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (*Skjald*, A–I:444–452)<sup>15</sup>. *AeW* and *ÍOb* consider the prefix to have been borrowed from OE. *ærce-* (< Lat. *archi-* < AGr. *ἀρχι-*), while *IeW* considers it to have been borrowed directly from Latin.

Here, again, Old Saxon might be a more suitable intermediary than Old English for similar reasons as those listed for *biskup*, given that a direct loan from Latin is a hypothesis that one would discard because Lat. /a/ > OIc. /a/, not /e/, and a palatal umlaut of /a/ > /e/ could hardly have taken place here.

The etymology proposed here is therefore as follows: Icel./OIc. *erki-* < OSax. *\*erke-* (cf. MLG. *erce-*) < Lat. *archi-* < AGr. *ἀρχι-*.

**kristinn:** In the Icelandic sources this word occurs relatively late, given its major importance for the religious Christian lexicon. Its first occurrence is, in fact, recorded in a 12<sup>th</sup>-century *lausavísa* by the skald Einarr Skúlason (*Skjald*, A–I:483), preserved in GKS 1009 fol. (cf. *SkP* II, 2:572–573). *AeW* and *ÍOb* consider the word to be a borrowing from OE. *cristen*. While mentioning that it is a religious loanword from Lat. *christiānus* < AGr. *χριστιανός*, *IeW* names two possible lending

<sup>14</sup> For a complete list of the mss. in which the poem is preserved see *SkP* II, 2:489.

<sup>15</sup> For a complete list of the mss. in which the poem is preserved see *SkP* II, 1:442.

languages, namely Old English (according to Fischer 1909) and Middle Low German (according to *SEO*).

Even though this loanword appears in a 12<sup>th</sup>-century source, it could nevertheless be maintained that it is much older and that it reached the North at least during the reign of Haraldr I Gormsson (10<sup>th</sup> c.), as attested by the Jelling-2 rune-stone, where he is celebrated as the king that “conquered the whole of Denmark and Norway, and made the Danes Christian”. The adjective *Christian* is rendered in fuþark as ƿṚlṚ↑ṚṚ (kristna, Christian, acc.m.pl.).

Since the Christian religion had first been brought to the North by a Saxon mission during the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Skovgaard-Petersen et al. 1977:155–159) and that Haraldr I was the first king to promote the new religion in Norway (cf. section 2), it could be said with some confidence that the word had been introduced in Norway during that period, and thence into Iceland, being therefore not a loanword from Old English, but from OSax. *kristin*. Finally, it should be noted that Lat. *-iānus* > OSax. *-in* is most probably due to analogy. Indeed, as Gusmani (1981:46) points out, a foreign suffix might undergo a suffixal adjustment, according to other lexemes, which are either semantically near or are themselves earlier borrowings which have been grouped under the same morphological class (for example Lat. *sūtor* > OE. *sutere*, where the Latin loanword falls under the category of names denoting professions; see also Halldór Halldórsson 1969a:75–76).

In this case, Lat. *-iānus* > OSax. *-in* is – I posit – due to the fact that the loanword was formally adjusted to its semantic opposite, namely OSax. *hēthin* ‘heathen’.

The etymology of this word would then be: Icel./Oic. *kristinn* < OSax. *kristin* < Lat. *christiānus*.

**magister, meistari:** Even though these two loanwords ultimately derive from the same Latin word, namely Lat. *magister*, they are differentiated both as regards their age in Icelandic, their lending language and their use in the modern language.

Oic. *magister* is a direct learned loan from Lat. *magister* and it is first recorded with the meaning ‘teacher, mentor’ in 12<sup>th</sup>-century sources, such as *AM* 674 a 4to, one of

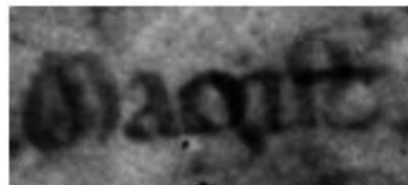


Figure 4. *Magist'* in *AM* 674 a 4to, 1v17

the oldest manuscripts of the Old Norse translation of the *Elucidarius* (Sherabon Firchow & Grimstad (eds.) 1989), along with its native synonym *lærifaðir*. The word seems however to be used there with a precise textual function, i.e. to introduce the teacher's words in the dialogue he has with his counterpart, the *discipulus*. Moreover, it always occurs in its abbreviated form, either *M* or, as Figure 4 shows, *Magist'*. In the text of the dialogue only the native synonyms are used, respectively *lærifaðir* and *lærisveinn*.

The oldest occurrences of OIc. *meistari* date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup>, where the word has the same basic meaning as OIc. *magister*, while in compounds, such as *skólameistari* (the first occurrences of which also date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century) the word acquires the meaning of 'head of *x*', with '*x*' being an institution or such.

OIc. *meistari* is usually considered (*AeW*, *IeW* and *ÍOb*) to be a loan from MLG. *mēster*, *meister* < OFr. *maistre* < Lat. *magister*. It should, however, be noted that the Old Icelandic word is more likely to be derived from the second of the Middle Low German variants, namely *meister*, which is in turn a loan variant from OHG. *meistar* or MHG. *meister* (cf. *EWdS*).

The etymology of this word would then be: Icel./OIc. *meistari* < MLG. *meister* < OHG. *meistar* / MHG. *meister* < OFr. *maistre* < Lat. *magister*.

In the modern language, the meaning of this word has widened: it can, in fact, be used both in its original sense of 'teacher, mentor' but also in its extended sense of 'champion', as in the compounds *heimsmeistari* 'World champion' and *meistaramót* 'championship'.

**páfi:** The oldest occurrence of this word (E. 'pope') dates to the first decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in Markús Skeggjason's *Eiríksdrápa* (*Skjald*, A–I:444–452)<sup>17</sup>. *IeW* and *ÍOb* list two possible sources for this loanword: OSax. *pāfos* and MLG. *pāwes*, while *AeW* considers it to be a loan from Middle Low German.

Given the importance of this term in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the word most likely reached Scandinavia at the latest in the period when Christianity was introduced in that area (9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> c.), making Old Saxon the only possible candidate as lending language (cf. Halldór Halldórsson 1969b:116–118 and Veturliði Óskarsson 2003:170).

<sup>16</sup> The word appears in slightly older Norwegian sources as in a Bergen diplom from about 1170–1190 (*DN* VIII:2).

<sup>17</sup> For a complete list of the mss. in which the poem is preserved see *SkP II*, 1:443–444.

The Old Saxon word had in turn been borrowed from OFr. *papes* (see the discussion in Halldór Halldórsson 1969b:116–117).

The loanword has therefore followed the following path: Icel./Oic. *páfi* < OSax. *pābos* < OFr. *papes* < Lat. *pāpa* < AGr. *πάπας*, whose original meaning was ‘father’ (cf. above).

## 5 Conclusions

The main aim of this article was to present and partially discuss the origin of the core of the borrowed Christian lexicon still preserved in Icelandic. The analysis of this part of the Icelandic lexicon has been carried out in the context of the historical setting in which the words are most likely to have been borrowed. By following a methodology which strongly rests both on historical and on linguistic facts, as outlined by Halldór Halldórsson (1970), an attempt has been made to better define, or even in some cases amend, some etymologies proposed by earlier scholars.

Moreover, it has been shown that the Old Saxon influence on the early Icelandic Christian lexicon is, while smaller, not less important than the bigger, and sometimes overestimated, Old English influence, in particular as regards the earliest Christian vocabulary (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> c.). Its roots cannot be ascribed to a Middle Low German influence for obvious, albeit often overlooked, chronological reasons (cf. footnote 4).

Finally, it should also always be borne in mind that in some cases the century in which a loanword first appears in the texts (cf. section 3) might not coincide with that of the actual borrowing in the language, as shown for e.g. *djöfull* and *kristinn*. Some words in fact, due to their chief importance for the Christian doctrine, cannot have been borrowed later than the 10<sup>th</sup> century. They constitute therefore the primary vocabulary, without which – I posit – no later doctrinal development could have been possible.

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Holm perg 15 4to

## Keywords

Christian religion, Latin, Ancient Greek, loanwords, history of the Icelandic language, language contact, etymology

## Lykilorð

kristni, latína, forngríska, tökuorð, saga íslenskrar tungu, málásamgangur (sem getur leitt til áhrifa eins tungumáls á annað), orðsifjar

## Útdráttur

Grein þessi fjallar um uppruna elsta kjarna kristins tökuorðaforða sem enn er varðveittur í íslensku, þ.e. þeirra tökuorða sem munu hafa komið inn í norrænu á tímabilinu milli fyrstu trúboðsferðanna á Norðurlöndum (9. öld) og stofnunar erkibiskupsdæmis í Niðarósi (1153).

Eftir stuttan inngang (1) er fjallað um áður nefnt tímabil frá sögulegu sjónarhorni (2). Orðasafnið (45 orð) er kynnt ásamt merkingarlegri greiningu þess (3). Um greininguna er einnig fjallað með tilliti til aldurs textanna sem varðveita tökuorðin. Í (4) er athygli beint að tíu orðum sem hafa verið valin vegna mikilvægis þeirra bæði frá sjónarhorni sögu íslenskrar tungu og orðsifjafræði. Þar er annars vegar reynt að varpa ljósi á hlutverk fornsaxnesku á fyrstu öldum kristni á Norðurlöndum og á Íslandi, og hins vegar eru sumar orðsifjar úr íslensku orðsifjabókunum þremur (*AeW*, *IeW* og *ÍOb*) metnar og endurskoðaðar. Í síðasta kaflanum (5) er áhersla lögð á mikilvægi þess að nota aðferð sem byggist á sagnfræði, ásamt mál- og textafræði. Samspil þessara þriggja fræðigreina er nauðsynlegt ef leitað er dýpri skilnings á menningarlegu og málvísindalegu samhengi ákveðinna hluta orðaforðans. Um elsta kjarna kristins tökuorðaforða er hér rætt sem áhugavert dæmi.

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