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*Austrfararvísur* and interreligious contacts in conversion age Scandinavia

In my contribution I wish to consider Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* 'stanzas about a journey to the east' in the context of Old Norse conversion age poetry and later medieval narratives of encounters between Christians and pagan in Scandinavia. Such encounters are quite common in medieval sagas and in the *þættir* of conversion and pagan contact, but they are most often staged in strictly antagonistic terms and usually end with successful conversion of the non-Christians to Christianity.

The *Austrfararvísur* are remarkable when seen in this context in that they avoid the customary ridicule, demonization and eradication of pagan cult. While they do poke fun of the pagans, they take a more lighthearted approach. Far from ending with the successful conversion of the pagans, the Christian poet self-deprecatingly describes how he has no other option than to play by the rules of the pagans. Another noteworthy aspect of the stanzas is their depiction of the exclusivity of the *álfablót* celebration; Sigvatr is being denied entry at the farm where the festivities are held because he is a Christian. This prohibition diverges noticeably from the common conception that pre-Christian religion valued orthopraxy over orthodoxy; as illustrated most clearly by the description of the Yule celebration at Hlaðir where the people of Þrændalög coerce the Christian king Hákon góði to participate.

While the *Austrfararvísur* present their own problems of interpretation and should not necessarily be taken at face value as a wholly authentic description of an actual encounter, the poem can be considered a contemporary source to the Christianization of Scandinavia. As such it has the potential to help us nuance the dominant narrative of the conversion process as it is presented in the medieval literary sources.