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ECHOES OF THE *BOOK OF JOSEPH AND ASENETH*,
PARTICULARLY IN *YNGVARS SAGA VÍÐFÖRLA*

BY RICHARD COLE
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ONE OF THE GREAT JOYS OF READING the Old Testament lies in that work's proclivity for unanswered questions. A case in point is the question of Aseneth, the wife of Joseph of snazzy coat fame. Aseneth appears three times in the Hebrew Bible. She is introduced in Genesis 41:45: 'And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnathpaaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.' She appears again fleetingly in Genesis 41:50: 'And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.' Finally, and all too soon given how much we are yet to be told of her, she departs from the story in Genesis 46:20: 'And unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.' We are then left with several points of uncertainty. Is Potipherah the same man as the 'Potiphar' of Genesis 37:36, the man whose amorous wife caused Joseph's false imprisonment? If so, Aseneth must have had an embarrassing 'meet the parents' moment. When or how did Aseneth die? The Bible text provides no answers on that point. Most importantly, from the perspective of Christians and Jews alike, how can it be that Joseph, a Patriarch and pious servant of God, married an Egyptian pagan? Surveying only the original scripture, one finds no suggestion that she ever abandoned her native religion.

The pseudepigraphical *Book of Joseph and Aseneth* confronts these issues surrounding Joseph's marriage. It tells the story of Joseph's meeting with Potipherah's daughter, her attraction towards him, her miraculous conversion to Judaism, their marriage, and her escape by chariot from the jealous son of Pharaoh, who wished to have Egypt's greatest beauty for his own. The story is often characterised as a 'Biblical romance' or 'Hellenistic Romance' (Wright 1987, 79; Whitmarsh 2013, 47; Chesnutt 1995, 39–40). This is quite a fitting description, as its blend of heartfelt sighing, martial action and court intrigue will be instantly recognisable to any reader of medieval romance.

The ultimate provenance of the work is uncertain. Suggestions have ranged from 200 BC to 300 AD from North Africa in the west through to Palestine and Syria in the east (Chesnutt 2003, 76–85; Kraemer 1998, 225–85; Burchard 1996, 307–10). My own feeling is that we are best served by locating the very first *Book of Joseph and Aseneth* somewhere in Hellenistic Egypt or perhaps Syria. I would suggest that the author might be found somewhere on the spectrum of Abrahamic religious opinions in the first century AD when Judaism and Christianity were not separate identities but rather two tendencies within the same continuum. The original language of *Aseneth* was most likely Greek (Burchard 1965, 91–99). Versions are also attested in Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Early Modern German, Latin, Middle English, Old French, Romanian, Serbian and Syriac (Brooks 1918, vii–viii; Burchard 1983, 179).

***Aseneth* in the West: Clerical and lay receptions**

The entry point upon which most Western vernacular renderings of the text depend is its adaptation by Vincent of Beauvais in his *Speculum Historiale* (c. 1250). But free-standing Latin versions of the complete *Aseneth* existed before this date, having been translated directly from the Greek, and these translations continued to be copied thereafter. For example, the manuscript Cambridge CCC MS 288 contains one *Liber de asenech et quomodo ioseph duxit eam in uxorem*, probably from the middle to late thirteenth century according to the manuscript's association with Nicholas of Sandwich (fl. 1250s). Cambridge CCC MS 424 from the fourteenth or fifteenth century also contains a complete *Liber de Joseph et Aseneth* (in addition to Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*). Following Vincent's compilation, *Aseneth* was often circulated in manuscripts alongside another piece of pseudepigrapha, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which was also inserted into the *Speculum Historiale*. The attribution of *The Testaments* to Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253) was then wrongly applied to *Aseneth* too. But despite the claims of many early-modern chapbook versions of *Aseneth* to the contrary, Grosseteste had no hand in the creation of the first Latin *Aseneth*, which was most likely translated from Greek while he was still a child.¹

¹ The attribution of *The Testaments* to Grosseteste is from Matthew Paris (1877, 232–33, cf. 1880, 284–85). The association became all the stronger in the Early Modern period, when *The Testaments* and *Aseneth* were commonly printed in the same volume.

It is worth noting at the outset that, even though it has not attained the fame of other apocrypha, the story of Aseneth was by no means an arcane peculiarity during the Middle Ages. Western European engagement with *Aseneth* began relatively early, and is attested in both religious and secular literature. Christoph Burchard and M. R. James both suggested that the Latin *Aseneth* was produced as early as the twelfth century (Burchard 1996, 367–69; James 1927, 340–41). The tradition now represented by Cambridge CCC MS 288 was probably translated from the Greek at Canterbury. For a Greek-to-Latin translation, then, *Aseneth* was undertaken comparatively far north of the Mediterranean, and long before the explosions of Greek learning during the High Scholastic period and in the 1400s. Drawing on the relative antiquity of this achievement, Ruth Nisse (2006, 748) has suggested that ‘one implication of this early a date for the Latin *Liber de Aseneth* is that it could have contributed to the subsequent portrayals of conversion in the chansons de geste.’ If so, *Aseneth* would be right at the heart of one of the most popular genres of medieval literature. The best surviving example of the secular reception of *Aseneth* is arguably the Middle English verse *Storie of Asneth* (c.1450s). Taking away and adding no details at all, save for the complicating addition of a narrative frame, the anonymous poet produces an astoundingly competent translation of Vincent’s *Aseneth* into rhyming couplets, for example (*Storie*, 22):

As I on hilly halkes logged me late,
 Biside ny of a Ladi sone was I war;
 La Bele desired in Englysh to translate
 The Latyn of that Lady, Asneth Putifar.
 I answered, ‘Ma Bele, langage I lakke
 To parforme youre plesir, for yt ys ful straunge
 That broken tuskes shold wel harde nuttis crakke
 And kerve out kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge;

Of particular interest to the Scandinavianist is the Old Swedish *Siälinna Thröst*. The text, originally by St. Catherine of Vadstena (d. 1381), contains an *Aseneth* potted as an *exemplum*, beginning (*OSwSt*, 401–02):

Ther war j landeno then mäktoghe herran Putifar som hafðhe latit ioseph j tornit kasta. Han atte ena mykyt ärlika oc sköna dottir oc engin man matte koma henne swa när at han granlika hona see finge, Hon heeth assenech.²

² Aseneth’s name commonly fell victim to the confusion between ‘c’ and ‘t’ which afflicts most medieval scripts. ‘Aseneth’ is the proper rendering of how the name is spelt in Greek. The Hebrew spelling would be most precisely transliterated as ‘Ôsənat (hence the King James Version’s ‘*Asenath*’). The medieval and Early Modern spellings are varied, e.g. Senec, Asseness, Asneth.

Its Old Danish counterpart, *Siälinna Thröst*, follows suit (*ODSt*, 44):

Thær var i landit thæn mæktoghe hærran putifar som hafðhe ladit josep i tornit
casta han hafðhe ena migít skjöna dottir. oc ingin man matte coma hænne swa
nær at han fik hænne granliga at se. hon heet assenech.

There was in the country that mighty lord, Putifar, who had had Joseph thrown
into the dungeon. He had a very pretty daughter, and no man could get close
enough to her to see her clearly. She was called Aseneth.³

Aseneth also appears in a Marian verse from AM 76 8vo (1470–1500),
an Old Danish miscellany (*Klosterbog*, 29):⁴

Putifar han hafðhæ en dotter soo geff,
han luctæ hynnæ i tornet ynæ,
han gaff hennæ Josep til hosfru leff,
Asnech then skjönestæ quinnæ
enthæ lygnes hun veth then,
Som iek dyerres aff at quedhæ,
hun kan vell løsæ aff al hannæ vene,
i hymmerigh hauer hun glæthe.

Potiphar, he had a daughter so stubborn,
he locked her in a tower,
he gave her to Joseph as a dear wife
Aseneth, the most beautiful lady,
but when even she is compared to the one
of whom I am honoured to compose [i.e. Mary]
she might well lose all her beauty,
in heaven she takes her joy.

There is a point here which will be important later: *Aseneth* did not operate in a literary vacuum, confined to the esoteric interests of a few exegetes. It was freely adapted into vernacular languages and genres, from bouncing Middle English rhyme to East Norse *exempla*. This is hardly surprising. Upon its reception by the Latin West in the early twelfth century it must have been recognised as ‘romance before romance’—and romance was a genre which exerted a considerable grip upon the medieval imagination. As Nisse (2006, 750–52) has shown, *Aseneth* had a dialectical relationship with chivalric romances. The *Aseneth* story predated and prefigured tropes such as the ‘Saracen princess’ (Kay 1995, 31–39); it may even have inspired that particular trope in part. Yet even after the rise of chivalric romance in the High

³ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ The lively rhythm of this verse and the repeated musical sections elsewhere in the manuscripts suggest that it may also have been a hymn.

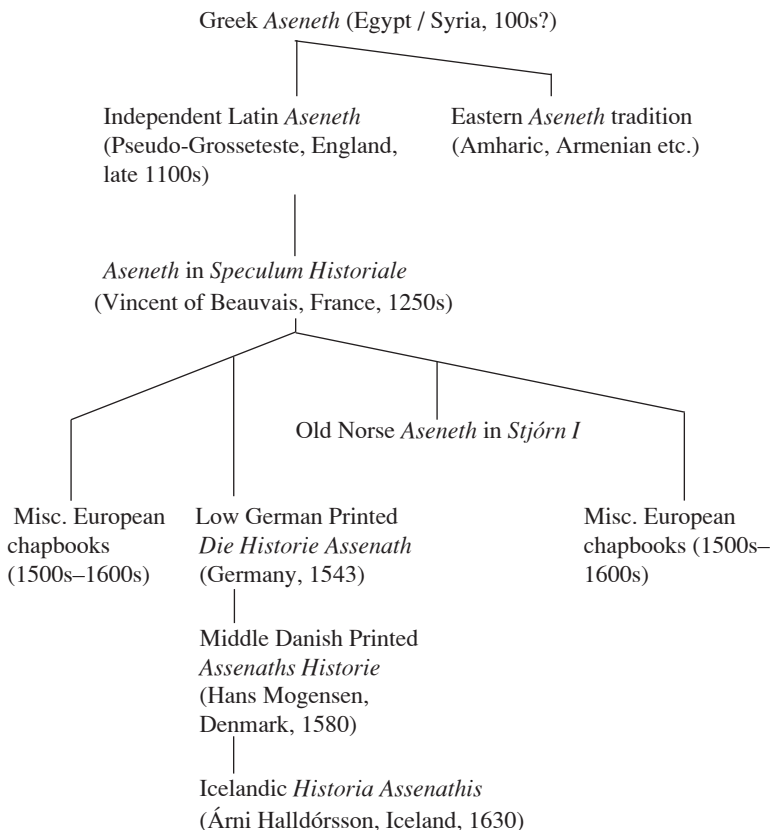
Middle Ages, certain readerships continued to appreciate *Aseneth* as a distinct but analogous artefact.

The Old Norse *Aseneth* in *Stjórn I*

Germane to the present study is the attestation of an Old Norse *Aseneth*. Vincent's *Speculum* was one of the principal sources of the collection of pentateuchal and exegetical material designated *Stjórn I*. It is therefore in this conglomeration that we find our surviving Old Norse version (*Stjórn I*, 310–19, 339–47). The origins of the tripartite *Stjórn* complex are murky and contested (see Wolf 1990, who provides the most lucid account of the debate). *Stjórn I* is traditionally dated to the reign of Hákon Magnússon V (r. 1299–1319), making the early fourteenth century our *terminus ante quem* for the surviving Norse *Aseneth*. It has been supposed that *Stjórn* may in part be a fourteenth century reworking of older, presumably thirteenth-century materials, but the *terminus post quem* of the surviving Old Norse *Aseneth* stands unchanged by this possibility. As it is based on Vincent's text, the Old Norse *Aseneth* which now survives cannot have assumed its present form any earlier than the 1250s. However, in this study I will argue that an *Aseneth* text was already known in Iceland during the late 1100s, several decades prior to the Vincentian version which we have received today. We cannot say with any certainty that the independent Latin *Aseneth* was ever translated into Old Norse (the scant arguments will be sketched in the conclusion). Moreover, even if it was, the relationship this putative text would have with the one preserved in *Stjórn I*, if any, is unknown. It is for this reason that I will mostly cite the independent Latin *Aseneth* as the model text, and reluctantly set aside the later Norse adaptation. For convenience, the situation can be summarised in the stemma on the following page.

Introducing *Yngvars saga víðförla*

In what follows, it will be argued that the earlier twelfth-century version of *Aseneth* had already reached Iceland by the time that Vincent's version was translated in *Stjórn I*. The central argument will be that certain elements in the Old Icelandic *Yngvars saga víðförla* are drawn directly from *Aseneth*. The story of Yngvarr will need little introduction to Scandinavianists, but for the general reader it may be helpful to summarise its plot: the saga tells of how the young Yngvarr víðförlri 'the widely travelled' goes on an expedition from Sweden into the East. Along the way he and his men visit exotic cities and face various monstrous and magical foes. He dies during his journey, and so his son, Sveinn, later follows in his footsteps, finishing the missionary work that his late father had begun. A series of runestones



in southeast Sweden appear to indicate that a personage named Yngvarr really did undertake an expedition into *Serkland* ‘Saracen-land’ during the Viking Age, although attempts to argue that *Yngvars saga víðförla* is a ciphered historical account generally require a great deal more inventiveness than studies which begin by accepting the saga’s obviously literary character and its free borrowing from a variety of narrative traditions (e.g. Phelpstead 2009, esp. 334–37, Lönnroth 2014, Mitchell 1991, 81).

It will also be suggested that two further Old Norse works, *Kormaks saga* and *Gylfaginning*, each have an episode where *Aseneth* can be proposed as a viable source, although these latter examples are far less certainly inspired by *Aseneth* than the case of *Yngvars saga víðförla*. In the present study they are presented as afterthoughts considered worthy

of mention, while *Yngvars saga* is considered to be a concrete example of influence from *Aseneth*. There can be virtually no doubt that *Gylfaginning* dates from the thirteenth century, even amongst those who would reject Snorri's authorship, and therefore it postdates the early Latin *Aseneth* and antedates *Stjórn I*. The dating of *Yngvars saga víðförla* has historically been somewhat less secure. The epilogue from the saga itself gives an unambiguous account of how it came to be written (*Ysv*, 48–49):

Enn þessa sögu höfum uer heyrð ok ritat epter forsaugn þeirar bækr, at Oddur munkur hinn frodi hafði giora latit at forsaugn frodra manna, þeira er hann seger sialfur j brefi sinu, þui er hann sendi Joni Lofzssyni ok Gizuri Hallssyni. Enn þeir er uita þiciast innuirduligar, auki uid, þar sem nu þiker a skorta. Þessa sögu segizt Oddr munkur heyrð hafa segia þann prest, er Isleifr hiet, ok annann Glum Þorgeirsson, ok hinn þridi hefer Þorer heitit. Af þeira frasaugn hafði hann þat, er honum þotti merkiligast. En Isleifr sagdizt heyrð hafa Ynguars sögu af einum kaup[manni], enn sa kuezð hafa numit hana j hird Suiakongs. Glumur hafði numit af fodor sinum. Enn Þorer hafði numit af Klaukku Samsyni, en Klacka hafði heyrð segia hina fyrri frændur sina.

And we have heard and written this saga according to the testimony of those books which Oddr the Wise Monk had made according to the testimony of learned men,⁵ those whom he mentions himself in his letter which he sent to Jón Loftsson and Gizurr Hallsson. And those who think they know [the story] better should supplement it where it seems to come up short. Oddr the Monk is said to have heard this saga told by that priest who was called Ísleifr, and [by] a second, Glúmr Þorgeirsson [*alt.* Þorgilsson], and the third was called Þórir. He took from their testimony that which he thought most remarkable. And Ísleifr was said to have heard the saga of Yngvarr from a merchant, and he was said to have learnt it in the court of the king of the Swedes. Glúmr had learnt it from his father. And Þórir had learnt it from Klakka Sámsson, and Klakka had heard it told before by his kinsmen.

The epilogue makes it apparent that the surviving text is not Oddr's original work. Rather, it is a retelling or representation thereof. Oddr's hypothetical lost autograph has been supposed to have been in Latin, being dubbed the **Vita Yngvari* by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1989, 2–7, cf. Phelpstead 2009, 338–40). It is therefore conceivable that our Norse version is a great deal later than the missing work which it claims to re-create. Nonetheless, the identifiable names here present a coherent image

⁵ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1989, 68) translate *Enn þessa sögu höfum uer heyrð ok ritat epter forsaugn þeirar bækr* as 'We have heard this story told, but in writing it down we have followed a book . . .' This may or may not communicate the sense that the author intended, but I have chosen to retain the plural of *bækr* and the lack of opposition between *heyrð* and *ritat*.

of a late twelfth-century context: Jón Loptsson (d. 1197), Gizurr Hallsson (d. 1206), Oddr munkr (*fl.* late 1100s). The first editor of the saga, Emil Olson (1912, xcvi–ci), was not convinced and dismissed the saga’s self-professed dating out of hand. A reappraisal came with the intervention of Dietrich Hofmann, who used mostly onomastic and contextual arguments to argue that the attribution to Oddr was in fact credible (Hofmann 1981, 1984a, 1984b, summarised by Phelpstead 2009, 338). Haki Antonsson has complemented this theory with thematic arguments (2012), showing that *Yngvars saga víðförla* discusses the subject of salvation in a manner that would have been relevant and accessible in Oddr’s intellectual milieu. In the following analysis I will offer some further typological observations, in addition to one onomastic argument concerning the name ‘Heliopolis’, to suggest that certain details from the saga are best understood as echoes of the late twelfth-century *Aseneth*.

The City of the Sun

In Genesis, the city in which Putiphar and therefore Aseneth are resident is known by its Hebrew appellation, יִצְחָן. *Aseneth* uses the Hellenistic name, Greek Ἡλιούπολις, in Latin: Heliopolis, ‘the city of the sun’. This is also the name of the city ruled by the eastern potentate King Júlfr in *Yngvars saga víðförla*.⁶ An adjacent city is called Citopolis, and is ruled over by Queen Silkisif, to whom we shall return later. In her commendable study of the potential origin of Heliopolis in *Yngvars saga víðförla*, Galina Glazyrina presents a number of theories. Two tendencies emerge as most likely: 1) That Heliopolis, like Siggeum later in the saga, is derived from St Isidore’s *Etymologiae*, or 2) That Heliopolis is drawn from certain *vitae* of St Barbara.⁷ *Barbare saga* (1300s–1400s) closes with a vignette that records that after St Barbara’s death

nökkurr heilagr maðr kom leyniliga ok tók á braut líkam innar helgustu meyjar Barbare ok gróf í þeim stað er kallaðr er Sólaraðr. (Wolf 2000, 154)

a certain holy man came stealthily and took away the body of that most holy maiden Barbara, and buried it in that city which is called *Sólaraðr* ‘The City of the Sun’.

⁶ It has been suggested that Citopolis refers to Kutaisi in Georgia. This proposition is phonetically unsound, and also ignores *Yngvars saga*’s generally literary rather than historical character. See Larsson (1986–89, 104–05) and Shepard (1984–85, 278).

⁷ On the reception of the name Heliopolis elsewhere in medieval Scandinavian letters, see Wolf (2000, 10–11, 58–59).

Militating against the St Barbara theory is the fact that, as Kirsten Wolf points out, ‘there is little evidence of the veneration of Saint Barbara in Scandinavia before the mid-fourteenth century’ (2000, 45), well after the date when Oddr supposedly composed *Yngvars saga víðförla*.

Whether the *Etymologiae* really inspired the name of King Jólfr’s city will never be known for certain, but we can bring into further relief the appropriateness of the name ‘Heliopolis’ to the central meaning or spirit of *Yngvars saga víðförla*. That is to say, one can outline what intertextual shading the choice of the name Heliopolis might have brought to the saga’s core themes. Glazyrina has already attempted this to some extent, and not unfruitfully (Glazyrina 2003, 177):

the semantics of the place-name [Heliopolis] could have been easily interpreted by any person with even a very limited knowledge of Greek as ‘The City of the Sun’. This is an additional feature of the place-name that might have led the author of YS to choose the name *Heliopolis*. Icelandic religious skaldic poetry preserved kennings depicting Christ or God with solar components as part of their structure. The first instances of such compositions are known as early as in the tenth or eleventh century, and the tradition lasted for centuries. Thus the local poetic tradition known to the audience assisted it in interpreting the *Heliopolis* of *Yngvars saga* as ‘The City of the Sun’ and facilitated an understanding of the saga as a story about Christian missionaries who led the way to the Holy Land and fought for the Christian faith against pagans.

In the article alluded to above, Haki Antonsson enriches the missionary theme in *Yngvars saga víðförla*, which Glazyrina finds to be intrinsic to the name Heliopolis (see above). For Haki, the driving mechanism of the saga is not restricted to mission, rather it encompasses the entire process of salvation. Haki identifies a late twelfth-century division in the Icelandic élite, with one demographic tending more towards secular power struggles and another increasingly identifying with the Church: ‘From both sides of the divide the idea that redemption was a particular preserve of ecclesiastics must have gained ground and been a source of mounting concern’ (2012, 73). Hofmann read *Yngvars saga víðförla* as a relatively straightforward allegory (e.g. 1981, 217–20), wherein Yngvarr stood as a proxy for King Óláfr Tryggvason (r. 995–1000), and the whole effort was to prove the certain salvation of the latter, despite his identity as a secular authority. In Haki’s eyes, the story is more complex than a simple *roman à clef*. The pervading sense of *Yngvars saga víðförla* is really one of doubt. A rich collage of typological associations is assembled to articulate the argument that although there are things one can do to make sure one definitely does *not* get into heaven, such as to be a pagan like Sóti or a secular ruler who disregards holy authority, such as the fictional

King Haraldr of Sweden, the question whether anybody is really saved is unknowable (Haki Antonsson 2012, esp. 90–91). Even the missionary warrior Yngvarr must rely on God’s inscrutable grace. If, as Haki suggests, Oddr’s enterprise was intended as a profoundly eclectic meditation on the journey towards salvation, then evoking the *Aseneth* story with a nod to Heliopolis would have been a sensible authorial strategy. Humility in seeking God’s grace is integral to Aseneth’s conversion (Gerber 2009, 204–07; Burchard 1983, 192–93). The overarching moral in *Aseneth* is that it is possible for anybody to attain perfect salvation regardless of how godless, ignorant or proud they have been in the past.

The Rejected Kiss

Aseneth’s conversion takes place across three degrees. At first, she is pagan. Second, she sees and falls in love with Joseph. This causes her to reject her native faith, but she has not yet accepted the faith of her love. Rather, the Archangel Michael effects her conversion by allowing her to eat from the honeycomb of the bees of Paradise. This ritual also gives her eternal youth. Silkisif, the queen of Citopolis, has a similar three-stage conversion where, just as in the case of Aseneth, the character who introduces her to the faith will not be the character who formally inducts her.

The conversion of Aseneth to Judaism

STAGE 1: Pagan

STAGE 2: Meets *Joseph* → wishes to reject paganism but not yet considered converted

STAGE 3: Fully converted by *Archangel Michael*

The conversion of Silkisif to Christianity

STAGE 1: Pagan (?)

STAGE 2: Meets *Yngvarr* → wishes to reject paganism but not yet considered converted

STAGE 3: Fully converted by *Sveinn*

Pivotal in the trajectories of both these female pagan converts are very similar episodes where they attempt to kiss a hero and are rejected. The Latin *Aseneth* describes the scene where Joseph refuses her eager kiss thus (*Liber*, 96, my emphasis):

[8:4] Et dixit Putifar filie sue: ‘Adveni et osculare fratrem tuum’. [8:5] Et cum advenisset Aseneth osculari Ioseph, extendit Ioseph manum suam dexteram, et apposuit ad pectus eius medio duarum mamillarum, et mamille eius prominebant foras, et ait: ‘Non decet viro colenti Deum benedicere in ore

suo deum viventum, et manducare panem benedictum vite, et bibere calicem benedictum incorruptionis, *osculari mulierem alienigenam* que benedicit ore suo idola surda et mortua, et manducat a mensa eorum panes anchonis, et bibit de spondis eorum calicem anedras, calicem oculum, et ungitur oleo inscrutabili. [8:6] Sed vir colens deum osculatur matrem suam, et sororem de tribu et de cognatione sua, et uxorem qua cubat cum eo, quales benedicunt in ore suo deum viventum. [8:7] Similiter vero mulieri colenti deum non est fas osculari virum alienigenum, quia abominatio est hoc in conspectu domini dei.'

And Putifar said to his daughter: 'Go and kiss your brother.' And when Aseneth went to Joseph so as to kiss him, Joseph reached out with his hand and placed it on her chest, in between her two breasts, and her breasts pouted forth, and he said: '*It is not right for a man who worships God*, who blesses with his mouth the Living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed chalice of incorruptibility, *to kiss a foreign woman*, who blesses with her mouth deaf and dead idols, and who eats at the table of the bread of the gallows [?], and who drinks upon the couch from the chalice of wickedness [?], a secret chalice, and anoints herself with mysterious oil. But the man who worships God kisses his mother and his sister in the tribe and of blood, and the woman with whom he sleeps, as they bless with their mouths Living God. In the same way, it will not do for a woman who worships God to kiss a foreign man, for it is an abomination before the Lord God.'

Understandably embarrassed by this rejection, Aseneth retreats to her tower. It is there that the Archangel Michael finds her and completes her journey into the faith of the Abrahamic God. In *Yngvars saga víðforla*, it is the missionary warrior Yngvarr who introduces Queen Silkisif to Christianity. She is well disposed to the faith, and seems to accept the Christian God. However, she is not baptised or in any way officially received into the faith (Ysv 16):

Þann uetur var Ynguar þar j godu yferlæti, þuiat drottning sat huern dag a tâli uid hann ok hennar spekingar, ok sagdi huort þeira audru morg tidindi. Jafnan sagdi Ynguar henni af almætti guds, ok fiell henni uel j skap su trua. So unni hun micit Ynguari, at hun baud honum at eignazt allt rikit ok kongs nafn, ok sialfa sic gaf hun at lyktum j hans valld, ef hann uilldi þar stadfestast.

That winter Yngvarr was there [Citopolis] in good favour, because the Queen sat every day in conversation with him and her philosophers, and they told each other many stories. Yngvarr always told her about Almighty God; this faith was well suited to her temperament. She loved Yngvarr so much that she invited him to take possession of the whole kingdom, and the name of a king, and in the end she even gave herself into his power, if he wanted to stay there.

Rather, her conversion will not be complete until Yngvarr's son, Sveinn, follows in his father's eastward footsteps and arrives in Citopolis (Ysv, 43, my emphasis):

Pä biöst Sveinn þadan hvatlega, ok fer, vnns hann kemur j rijke Silkesifar drottningar. Hun geingur j möte þeim med micille sæmd. Enn þegar þeir Sveinn ganga af skipum, þä geingur Ketill þeira firstur j möt drottningu, enn hon gaf eckj ad honum gaum ok snere ad Sveine ok villde kissa hann; enn hann hratt henne fra sier ok qvadst *eij vilia kissa hana heidna konu*. 'Eður firer hvij villtu mic kissa?' Hun svarar: 'þviat þu einu hefur augu Jngvars, ad þvi er mier sijnest.'

Then Sveinn quickly makes ready to get away from there, and travels until he arrives at the kingdom of Queen Silkisif. She goes to meet them with great honour. But when Sveinn and his men disembark the ships, Ketill goes up to the queen first, but she paid him no attention and turns to Sveinn and wished to kiss him, but he pushed her away and said that *he did not want to kiss her, a heathen woman*. 'Why do you want to kiss me anyway?' She replies: 'Because I can see that you alone have Yngvarr's eyes.'

At this point, the notion that Oddr knew of *Aseneth* and borrowed details therefrom seems extremely likely. Our first clue is his use of the place-name Heliopolis. Our second is the arresting typological affinity between *Aseneth* and *Silkisif*. The resemblance between Joseph and Sveinn's words when they reject the kiss speaks for itself. Indeed, there is also a hint that *Aseneth* is not just the model for *Silkisif*, but perhaps in some way *Silkisif* is *Aseneth* herself. As will be discussed below, a particularly fantastic element in the *Aseneth* story is the detail that *Aseneth* has been given eternal life by the Archangel Michael, like a positive mirror-image of the Wandering Jew. No medieval account exists of *Aseneth* dying. This does not necessarily indicate a universal acceptance of *Aseneth*'s immortality by medieval authors. It is surely in part due to the broadly anti-female trend that increases the focus of the story on Joseph at the expense of *Aseneth*, to the point where eventually what becomes of *Aseneth* is outside the scope of the narrative. Nonetheless, it does mean that those medieval commentators who were inclined to accept the literal reading of *Aseneth*'s eternal youth were never challenged by written arguments to the contrary. We never see the death of *Silkisif* either. Moreover, she first has a relationship with Yngvarr, then Yngvarr's son, Sveinn, is raised to maturity, and when he finally arrives in her city as a young man she is apparently still of marriageable age. Given the allusions to the city of Heliopolis and the rejected kiss, did Oddr intend his audience to wonder whether the queen was in fact *Aseneth* in person, still living since the days of Joseph, still young and beautiful and waiting for her second conversion, this time to Christianity? We cannot know, but if that was Oddr's intention he surely only intended to suggest the most teasing of hints—not least because despite all their affinities, *Aseneth* is of the Israelite faith while *Silkisif* is *heidin*.

The Beauty behind her Idols

One of the key themes in *Aseneth* is the rejection of idolatry. The matter would have been particularly important in the Classical era when *Aseneth* was most likely composed. Chesnutt situates the Greek text in a Jewish missionary context, where conversion from polytheism would have been a frequently arising issue (Chesnutt 1995, 129–31, 171–72, 183–84; cf. Gager 1983, 30–97). By the High Middle Ages, when the Latin text entered the domain of Western Christians, there were no idol-worshipping heathens left to convert in Western Europe. What remained from the original concerns about idolatry were vestigial but aesthetically pleasing descriptions of Aseneth's idols and the building which houses them. In *Aseneth* the eponymous heroine is secluded in a tower, surrounded by effigies of the Egyptian gods which she worships devotedly (but from a Christian perspective, erroneously) (*Liber*, 90):

[2:1–3] Et erat Aseneth despiciens omnem virum, elata et superba ad omnem hominem, et nullus vir intuitus est eam aliquando. Siquidem turris erat Putifar's coniuncta domui eius magna et excelsa valde, et desursum turris illius erat cenaculum habens decem thalamos. Eratque primus thalamus magnus et decorus, lapidibus porfireticis constatus, et parietes eius lapidibus preciosis polimitis induti, et laquearia thalami illius aurea, et erant intus thalami illius infixi in parietibus dii Egyptiorum multi aurei et argentei, et omnes illos colebat Aseneth et timebat, et sacrificium eis cotidie offerebat.

[2:1–3] And Aseneth was despising all men, and was gloating and arrogant towards all men, and no man had ever seen her. This was because there was a grand and very tall tower which Putifar had on the side of his house, and at the top of this tower was a loft, having ten chambers. The first chamber there was great and splendid, bedecked with stones of porphyry, and its walls were covered with a variety of precious stones, and it was in this chamber that the many gods of the Egyptians were affixed to the walls, made of gold and silver, and Aseneth worshipped them all and feared them, and she offered them sacrifices every day.

Aseneth has never been seen by male eyes because of her self-imposed seclusion in her tower. This does not mean she has never seen a man. The tower has plenty of vantage points from which the maiden in the tower can survey the world outside. According to *Aseneth* 2:7: *Et erant fenestre magno thalamo Aseneth ubi virginitas illius nutriebatur* 'And there were windows in the great chamber where Aseneth's virginity was preserved'. There are four such portals, one facing each compass point, *et tertia prospiciens ad aquilonem in plateam deambulantium* (*Liber*, 91) 'and the third faced north onto a plaza where people milled about'. It is from this perch,

her pagan idols around her, that she will spy the face of her suitor-to-be, Joseph. She will then utterly lose her heart to him. Presumably Aseneth has spied upon previous visitors to her father's house, but Joseph appears to be the first to feel her eyes upon him, and he shocks her by asking '*Que est mulier illa que erat in cenacula ad fenestram?*' (Liber, 95) 'Who is that woman who was in the chamber, by the window?' Vincent of Beauvais subtitled this episode *De sublimatione eiusdem & arrogantia Asseneth* (*Speculum*, 42) 'On the Promotion of the Aforementioned [Joseph] and the Arrogance of Aseneth'. The suggestion that Aseneth is exhibiting undue haughtiness simply by rejecting suitors is rather suspect by modern standards, but let us bear in mind that both Vincent and the original text are keen to emphasise this notion.

The premise sketched out above, the proud beauty amidst heathen idolatry who goes to spy on her suitor-to-be but is herself discovered, is not unparalleled in Old Norse literature. A similar scene is found in *Kormaks saga*.⁸ In the following excerpt, the titular hero and his fellow shepherd, Tósti, stop for the night in Gnúpadalr. It is there that he will meet the great love of his life, Steingerðr. The episode is presented thus, somewhat abridged for the present purpose (*Kormaks saga*, 207–10):

Um kveldit gekk Steingerðr frá dyngju sinni ok ambátt með henni. Þær heyrðu inn í skálann til ókunnra manna. Ámbattin mælti: 'Steingerðr mín, sjám vit gestina.' Hon kvað þess enga þörf ok gekk þó at hurðunni ok sté upp á þreskjöldinn ok sá fyrir ofan hlaðann; rúm var milli hleðans ok þreskjaldarins; þar kómu fram fœtr hennar. Kormákr sá þat ok kvað vísu . . . Nú finnr Steingerðr, at hon er sén; snýr nú í skotit ok sér undir skegg Hagbarði. Nú berr ljós í andlit henni. Þá mælti Tósti: 'Kormákr, sér þú augun útar hjá Hagbarðs-höfðinu?' Kormákr kvað vísu:

Brunnu beggja kinna
björt ljós á mik drósar,
oss hlægir þat eigi,
eldhúss of við felldan;
enn til ökkla svanna
ítrvaxins gatk líta,
þrjú muna oss of ævi
eldask, hjá þreskeldi.

. . . Tósti mælti: 'Starsýn gerisk hon á þik.' Kormákr kvað:

Hófat lind, né ek leynda,
líðs, hyrjar því stríði,

⁸ Traditionally Kormákr has been spelt with a long *á*, i.e. 'Kormákr', though as Einar Ól. Sveinsson pointed out (1966), 'Kormakr' is more correct.

bands mank beiða Rindi,
 baugsoem af mér augu,
 pás húnknarrar hjarra
 happþægi-Bil krapta
 helsisæm á halsi
 Hagbarðs á mik starði.

In the evening Steingerðr left her bower and took her serving girl with her. They heard unknown men out in the parlour. The serving girl said: 'My dear Steingerðr, we should look at the guests!' She [Steingerðr] said there was no need for that, but she did still approach the door and climbed up onto the threshold and peered over the woodpile. There was a gap between the woodpile and the threshold. There, her feet stuck out. Kormakr saw that and recited a verse . . . Now Steingerðr realises that she has been seen. Now she turns into a corner and looks out from under Hagbarðr's beard. Now the light falls on her face. Then Tósti said: 'Kormakr, do you see eyes out there by Hagbarðr's head?' Kormakr recited a verse:

Her face, shining my way.
 No cause for hope,
 there in the doorway.
 By the flames I snatched a glance
 of that swan's tail.
 It will be burnt into my mind
 as long as I live.

. . . Tósti said: 'It looks as if she's staring at you.' Kormakr recited:

I could not control
 my burning desire, nor could I conceal it.
 I remember the woman,
 adorned with her rings, she couldn't keep her eyes off me.
 Standing there in the doorway,
 after beating me at every board game.
 Looking out from the neck of Hagbarðr,
 she gazed my way.⁹

I contend that had an Icelandic author wished to adapt, plagiarise or create a scene inspired by *Aseneth* but set in Iceland, he would have come up with something very like this. The mighty tower becomes a humble *dyngja*, a 'bower'. The effigies of Egyptian deities are replaced by a simple carving of Hagbarðr. The reference to Hagbarðr, found in both the verse and the prose portions of *Kormaks saga*, was probably originally intended

⁹ My translation. As it is the details of the scene that are important for our purposes, rather than the details of the poetry, I have levelled the kennings to their base referents.

as a shade of sympathetic backgrounding (Huth 2000). In the version of the Hagbarðr and Signý story provided by Saxo Grammaticus, Signý and Hagbarðr are doomed lovers, kept apart by Signý's father, who has Hagbarðr sentenced to death (on the wider tradition, see Landolt 1999). In *Kormaks saga*, Steingerðr's family are similarly ill-disposed towards Kormakr, although there are further reasons why the relationship can never be, not least the self-destructive behaviour of Kormakr himself. But the Christian author of the prose in *Kormaks saga* may further be implying that there is something effigy-like about the statue: The carving of Hagbarðr is evidently of such stature that Steingerðr can hide behind its apparently sizeable beard, and for a medieval Christian imagination it would be no leap from the idea of pagans fashioning large statues of their heroes to the implication that those statues were being idolatrously worshipped (e.g. the likeness of Óðinn in the euhemerist accounts of the *Gesta Danorum* and the *Danske Rimkrønike*, which begins as an aesthetic adornment before becoming an object of worship, see also Lassen 2009; Wellendorf 2013, esp. 164–66). Thus both Aseneth and Steingerðr first lay eyes on their future lovers whilst hiding behind or in the vicinity of statues liable to be understood as pagan idols.

There is also no doubt that Steingerðr, like Aseneth, has a rather likeable *arrogantia* about her. She blithely assesses Kormakr's appearance to his face, in badinage with her serving-girl (*Kormaks saga*, 210):

Ambáttin kvað Kormákr vera svartan ok ljótan. Steingerðr kvað hann vænan ok at qllu sem bezt—'þat eitt er lýtit á, hárit er sveipt í enninu.'

The serving-girl said that Kormakr was dark and ugly. Steingerðr said he was handsome and in every way best—'the only thing that's a bit off is that his hair is wavy upon his brow.'

Or later, with a gentle but noticeable derision (*Kormaks saga*, 212):

Ambáttin mælti til Steingerðar: 'Hér ferr nú inn væni maðr, Steingerðr.' Hon segir: 'Víst er hann vaskligr maðr.'

The serving girl said to Steingerðr: 'Here comes that handsome man now, Steingerðr.' She says: 'He's certainly a *noble* man.'

Both Aseneth and Steingerðr have serving girls, though there are some differences: Aseneth has seven to Steingerðr's one, and we see Steingerðr engage in playful banter with her handmaid, while Aseneth's female companions remain silent throughout the story (*Liber*, 90):

Et reliquos septem thalamos septem virgines habebant, erantque septem virgines iste ministrantes Aseneth, unius etatis universe et in una nocte cum Aseneth genite.

And there were also seven chambers where seven virgins lived, who were the seven virgins who attended to Aseneth, all of the same age and born on the same night as Aseneth.

Ultimately, the serving girl of *Kormaks saga* has more in common with the handmaidens of female love-interests in chivalric literature than she does with the seven virgins of *Aseneth*, but this does not detract from the fundamental resonance between the meeting of Steingerðr and Kormakr and Aseneth and Joseph: the trope of the spying woman, who is caught peeping by her newly-arrived suitor. We have already seen how this sequence is depicted in *Kormaks saga*. In *Aseneth*, it appears thus:

[6:1] Et vidit Aseneth Ioseph et compuncta est fortiter, et defecit anima eius et remissa sunt genua eius, et contremuit toto corpore suo, et dixit in corde suo: . . . [6:4] Misserima ego, quoniam locuta sum patri meo verba pessima. [6:5] Et nunc pergam et abscondam me a facie eius et non videat me Ioseph filius dei, propter quod pessima dixi de eo, [6:6] et iste omne occultum videt et nihil occultorum latet eum propter lumen magnum quod est in eo. [6:7] Et nunc propicius esto mihi, domine deus Ioseph, propter quod locuta sum verba in ignorancia. [6:8] Et nunc det me pater meus Ioseph in ancillam magis et in servam, et servam ei in eternum seculi . . . [7:2] Et ait Ioseph Putifari et omni cognationi eius: 'Que est mulier illa que erat in cenaculo ad fenestram? Abeat nunc de domo ista.' (*Liber*, 94–95)

And Aseneth sees Joseph and is strongly remorseful, and her soul shrinks and she goes weak at the knees, and all her body trembles, and she says in her heart: . . . 'Woe is me, for those wicked words which I spoke to my father [about Joseph]. And now I will go and hide my face so that Joseph, son of God, will not see me, because of the wicked words which I said before, and everything that is hidden is seen by him, and nothing that is hidden escapes his notice, because of the great light that is in him. And now be good to me, Lord God Joseph, for I said those words in ignorance. And now may my father give me to Joseph, more as a slave than a servant, and a servant for an everlasting age.' . . . And Joseph said to Putiphar and all his kinsmen: 'Who is that woman who was in the chamber, by the window? Now let her come out of that building.'

The 'great light' in Joseph, which allows him to see 'everything that is hidden' is rather striking in its similarity to Kormakr's first vision of Steingerðr, herself 'a thing hidden' behind Hagbarðr. Just as Aseneth is caught out by Joseph's divine luminescence, a mysterious source of light reveals Steingerðr: *Nú berr ljós í andlit henni* 'Now the light falls on her face'. Given the previous parallels of premise between *Aseneth* and chapter 3 of *Kormaks saga*, I cannot help but wonder if the Old Norse *ljós* here was in some way inspired by the Latin *lumen magnum*. A saga author inspired by the *Aseneth* scene could not copy the detail that the

light which revealed the hidden admirer had some sort of divine source; Kormakr is a pagan, and a poor candidate for the archetype of the ‘noble heathen’. This potentially explains why the source of the *ljós* is not given (e.g. torchlight, moonlight). The resulting ambiguity allows the audience to locate another allusion to *Aseneth*.

Obviously, there are some important differences between the two settings: Steingerðr is no bashful, recalcitrant Aseneth. Kormakr is very far indeed from the pious Joseph. It would thus be overly imaginative to propose that the episode at Gnúpadalr was intended as a precise rehearsal of *Aseneth*. The Latin *Aseneth* must postdate the basic frame of the Kormakr–Steingerðr romance, if one accepts the view that *Kormaks saga* was constructed around verses which existed in the oral record long before the saga was committed to vellum—verses as old as the 900s if one accepts the historicity of Kormakr Ögmundarson (on the scholarly debate around this problem, see O’Donoghue 1991, 7–16). But if the verses are products of the tenth century, it is worth noting that it is the prose narrative that provides the details which, presented in concord, do the most to evoke *Aseneth*: the flight from the suitor’s gaze, the light which finds the one who hides, the lady’s feistiness.

I would suggest that the author of the prose, which is described by Theodor Möbius via Heather O’Donoghue (1991, 16) as ‘a useful preserving fluid’ for the verses, recognised the inherent affinity of *Kormaks saga* with *Aseneth* and subtly allowed his work to amplify that affinity accordingly. A logical following question, then, is to what extent *Kormaks saga* is of an age where engagement with *Aseneth* is plausible? We will return to the implications of dating in the conclusion, but it may be noted that *Kormaks saga* has been posited as one of the very earliest *Íslendingasögur*, written perhaps as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century (Bjarni Einarsson 1964, 142–44). An early date for *Kormaks saga* would explain the sparsity of its prose and the profusion of its verses, suggesting that the prose was composed at a time when vernacular literary culture was still in its infancy, but when the culture of orally recorded poetry was still strong. The putative influence from *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* on *Kormaks saga* might be thought to indicate a *terminus post quem* of 1226, although Bjarni Einarsson pushed the window of dating back still earlier, arguing that it need not have been the surviving Old Norse *Tristan* produced by Brother Robert which provided the saga author’s inspiration (1961, 162–63).¹⁰ This would locate *Kormaks saga* in the period when *Aseneth*

¹⁰ Bjarni Einarsson’s dating of *Kormaks saga* is complicated by the fact that he rejected the otherwise generally accepted pre-existence of the verses before the

was in vogue. If the man who supplied the prose for *Kormaks saga* had a clerical background, as most scribes presumably did, he could well be expected to know the story. However, it is more plausible to identify the appropriation of imagery from *Aseneth* in *Kormaks saga* as the work of a layman. This would explain why the images which the two works share are not religious or didactic, but purely aesthetic. As previously seen, Nisse has shown that *Aseneth* did enjoy a degree of secular appeal, and the tale continued to circulate alongside the romantic literature it had helped to inspire. If the author of *Kormaks saga* knew of Tristan and Isolde, then why not also Joseph and Aseneth?

The Bees from the Great Hereafter

The ritual by which Aseneth is officially converted to Judaism provides the most vivid and fantastical element in the *Aseneth* story. As we have seen, seized with passion for Joseph she attempts unsuccessfully to kiss him. Wounded by the rejection, Aseneth renounces her own pagan religion without knowing how to begin adopting Joseph's. She throws her idols out of the window and dons mourning dress. That night, she notices the morning star increasing in brightness which heralds the appearance of the Archangel Michael, descending in a beam of light. Michael has taken the form of Joseph, although with the important differentiating features that his face radiates like lightning, his eyes shine like the sun and his hair is as bright as fire (*verumptamen vultus eius ut fulgur, et oculi eius ut radius solis, et capilli capitis eius ut flamma ignis. Liber, 102*): He wishes to share a meal with her and instructs her to bring him some honeycomb. She regrets that she has none in her pantry, but he insists that if she looks she will find some. When the miraculous honeycomb is brought out and the pair are sitting on Aseneth's bed in order to eat it, a curious ritual is performed. Michael breaks off a piece of the honeycomb and feeds it to Aseneth. Taking what remains of the honeycomb, he draws a cross in its wax, which then bleeds (a detail not found in the Jewish Greek). The honeycomb has still more wonders to display (*Liber, 105–06*):

prose. In his view (esp. 1976) one author composed both the poetry and the prose frame. The reading presented here is somewhat to the contrary, given that only the prose is found to contain possible *Aseneth* allusions, the verses seemingly having been composed prior to the discovery of *Aseneth* in the West. However, Bjarni's theory on this point need not concern us, as much of his dating was predicated on arguments drawn directly from the approach taken in the prose, which would stand independently even if one were to disregard his conclusions concerning the verses.

Et ait angelus: 'Beata es tu quoniam dimisisti vana idola et credidisti in vivo deo. Et beati advenientes domino deo in penitencia, quoniam comedent de hoc favo quem fecerunt apes paradisi dei de rore rosarum in paradiso. Et ex hoc comedunt angeli dei, et omnis manducat ex isto non morietur in secula seculorum.' Et extendit manum suam dexteram, et confregit de melle partem minimam, et comedit ipse ex eo, et reliquum posuit manu sua in os Aseneth, dixitque ei: 'Ecce comedisti panem vite, et uncta es crismate sancto, et ab hodierno die carnes tue renovabuntur, et ossa tua sanabuntur, et virtus tua erit indeficiens, et iuventus tua senectutem non videbit, et pulcritudo tua in eternum non deficiet. Eris sicut metropolis edificata omnium confugientium ad nomen domini dei regis seculorum.' . . . Et ait angelus: 'Inspice favum.' Et exierunt apes de favo multe valde candide sicut nix, et ale earum purpuree ut iacinctus, et circumdederunt omnes Aseneth, et operabantur in manibus eius favum mellis, et manducaverunt ex eo. Et ait angelus apibus: 'Ite in locum vestrum.' Et abierunt univere versus orientem in paradisum.

And the angel said: 'You are blessed, because you have cast away vain idols and believed in the living God. And blessed are those who come to the Lord God in penitence, because they eat from this honeycomb which is made by the bees of God's Paradise from the nectar of the roses in Paradise. And from this God's angels eat, and all who partake of this will never die forever and ever.' And he extends his right hand, and breaks off a small part of the comb, and he eats of it, and the rest he put with his hand into Aseneth's mouth, saying this: 'Behold, you have eaten the bread of life, and you are anointed with the holy chrism, and from today your flesh will be renewed, and your bones will be purified, and your strength will never fail, and your youth will not see old age, and your beauty will not diminish for eternity. You have been made a fortress city of all who take refuge in the name of the Lord God, king of eternity.' . . . And the angel said: 'Look at the honeycomb.' And bees came out of the comb in great numbers, white as snow, and their wings were of purple and hyacinth, and they circled all around Aseneth, and they made a honeycomb in her hands, and they ate of it. And the angel said to the bees: 'Go to your place.' And they all disappeared eastwards to Paradise.

Much in this scene attracts attention: the overtly Christian symbols of the chrism and the bleeding cross, the apparent sexual undertones to Aseneth inviting Michael to sit on her bed and then being fed from his fingers, or indeed the fact that Aseneth seems not to have been made figuratively immortal—a common Christian turn of phrase—but actually literally immortal, and gifted with eternal youth. We will return to some of these peculiarities, but at present we will turn to the image of the bees of Paradise. Such bees are not unique to *Aseneth*. Indeed, the notion occurs in several genealogically unrelated folkloric traditions that bees are able to travel

between this life and the next, and that they have their origin and proper home in the great hereafter, being only visitors amongst us. Hilda Ransome (2004 [1937], 72, 155, 196–97) catalogues the tradition in orally collected nineteenth-century folklore from Lech in Bavaria, in Islamic legend and in Welsh,¹¹ most explicitly in the law-code *Dull Gwent* (earliest manuscript 1285, though allegedly tenth-century; Roberts 2011, 102–03):

Bonedd gwenyn o baradwys pan ynt, ac o achos pechod Adda, ac yna y doyhant oddyno ac y rrodde Duw rad arnaddvnt, ac wrth hynny ni cheffir yfferennav heb gwy.

The origin of bees, they were in Paradise and are here because of the sin of Adam, and then they came from there and God gave them his grace, and because of that there is no mass without wax.

Importantly for our purposes, the image is also found in *Snorra Edda*, where Snorri grafts his bees from the otherworld onto stanza 19 of *Völuspá* (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 16, p. 19):

Ask veit ek ausinn,
heitir Yggdrasill,
hár baðmr, heilagr,
hvíta auri.
Þaðan koma döggar
er í dali falla.
Stendr hann æ yfir grœnn
Urðar brunni.

Sú döggr er þaðan af fellr á jörðina, þat kalla menn hunangfall, ok þar af fœðask býflugur.

I know an ash,
called Yggdrasill,
a tall and holy tree,
drenched with white clay.
From there come the dews
which fall in the dales.
It stands forever, green over
the Well of Urð.

The dew which falls therefrom upon the earth, people call ‘honeyfall’, and from there bees are born [*alt.* ‘are fed’ (Clunies Ross 1985, 200; Faulkes 1988, 98)].

This brief etiology is typically ‘Snorrionic’: an eclectic combination of native, pre-Christian Eddic verse, perhaps some folklore with the

¹¹ Caution is advised on the Islamic attribution, as it largely relies on the deduction that bees accompany the rivers of honey in the Quran, Surah 47:15.

allusion to *hunangfall*, and then an element that commentators have connected to continental learning: *ok þar af fæðask býflugur* (cf. Clunies Ross 1985, 185–86). On the origin of the dew itself, rather than the bees, Anne Holtsmark (1964, 46–47) and Margaret Clunies Ross (1985, 188–92) have both drawn parallels with Honorius's *De Imagine Mundi* (c.1150–75). Clunies Ross refers to the discussion of beekeeping in Virgil's *Georgics* (218–225 [Lib. 4: 1–115]), notes that the bees in Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* eat a honeydew caused by natural heat condensation (450–51 [Lib. 12, cap. 12: 30–31]) and ultimately concludes that

Snorri seems to be alluding here to an ancient belief, found in classical authors, that honey fell as dew from heaven because bees could be observed feeding on the sweet, sticky substance found on some leaves (Clunies Ross 1985, 192).

These comparisons are sensible, but it should be noted that neither Honorius, Virgil nor Pliny supplies the idea that bees belong to any plane of existence beyond our own.

If the bees are essentially born of Yggdrasill, there is a parallel to be drawn with the bees of *Aseneth*: in Snorri's imaginative subcreation, Yggdrasill does not seem to have been situated in ordinary space. There are no tales of mortals walking up and embracing its trunk. Rather, it is part of the space only accessible to the gods and their enemies. The same is mostly true of Paradise in the Christian imagination (the exception of Christian vision literature notwithstanding). In both *Snorra Edda* and *Aseneth*, then, bees are said to come from the other world. The comparison with *Aseneth* is also worth making if we accept the translation of *fæðask af* as 'are fed from'. Just as in *Snorra Edda* the bees eat the *hunangfall* 'honey fall' which comes from Yggdrasill, in *Aseneth* the bees eat *de rore rosarum* 'of the nectar of roses' which comes from Paradise (again, not a detail to be found in either Virgil or Pliny). Admittedly, the resemblance between the two episodes is not so great as to be conclusive, but it should be remembered that the proposal that Snorri was open to influence from the apocrypha is not novel, as witness Christopher Abram's theory that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* provided a model for Snorri's account of Hermóðr's *helreið* (2006, 22–31).

Conclusion: The late twelfth-century context, and beyond

It will be observed that all the texts principally examined in this study (the independent Latin *Aseneth*, *Kormaks saga*, *Snorra Edda* and *Yngvars saga víðförla*) were probably composed within three decades of one another (c.1190–c.1220). The examples of inspiration from *Aseneth* in *Yngvars*

saga víðforla are integral to the key themes of the saga, repentance and salvation. In contrast, the examples of potential *Aseneth* influence in *Kormaks saga* and *Snorra Edda* appear to be chosen more for their aesthetic appeal than their typological appropriateness. Both types of borrowing chime with Burchard's general assessment of the medieval reception of *Aseneth*: '[the book] was read as a source of inspiration and moral strength, at times for historical information, and indubitably often just for fun' (1983, 196–97).

But if Snorri and the anonymous prose-writer of *Kormaks saga* were not taking *Aseneth* too seriously, they may well have heard the story from people who did. As previously suggested, the late twelfth century was a period of concern about the role of the clergy in securing salvation for the laity, and indeed the extent to which people 'of the world' could be saved at all. Symptomatic of this concern was an increased interest in penitential culture. Robert Swanson describes the changes in spiritual culture of the period thus (Swanson 1999, 138):

Ultimately, this [increased interest] amounted to a shift in the awareness of the possibility of salvation. Hitherto, only monks had been assured of salvation; for others damnation seemed more likely. Over the twelfth century, the net spread more widely: even the laity might be saved; indeed, even the married laity might be saved. Laypeople (or, to be more precise, non-noble laypeople) might even become saints. In 1199 Pope Innocent III formally canonised the first merchant saint, Homobono of Cremona.

Against this intellectual backdrop, *Aseneth* provided a colourful, stylistically well-executed depiction of divine favour being bestowed on someone severely lacking in terms of spiritual advantages, being a heathen, a woman and a layperson. Originating in a milieu of missionising Judaism, the story grafted surprisingly well on to the contours of High Medieval Christianity. *Aseneth*'s heartfelt rejection of idolatry and her subsequent prayer for forgiveness were interpreted as examples of penitence. The similarity between *Aseneth*'s plea and contemporary penitential culture was not lost on Vincent of Beauvais, who entitled the section of his *Aseneth* containing her prayer: *De pœnitentia Asseneth & consolatione Angelica* (*Speculum*, 43) 'Of the penitence of *Aseneth* and the angelic consolation'. Certain learned Icelanders would have been well placed both to observe the late twelfth-century salvation controversy and to become familiar with the independent Latin *Aseneth*. Two bishops of Skálholt in the 1100s are said to have studied in England, where *Aseneth* was first translated into Latin. First came Bishop Þorlákr (r. 1178–93), who had also studied in Paris where he would

almost certainly have encountered the latest thinking on salvation (Arnold 2014, 12; *Bps*, 52):

Þaðan fór hann til Englands ok var í Lincolni ok nam þar enn mikit nám ok þarfsælligt, bæði sér ok öðrum, ok hafði þá enn mikit gott þat af sér at miðla í kenningum sínum er hann var áðr trautt jafn vel við búinn sem nú.

From there [Paris] he went to England and was in Lincoln, and acquired there yet more learning, useful both to himself and others, and he enjoyed sharing his knowledge as much as he had been unwilling to do so before.

His nephew Bishop Páll Jónsson (r. 1195–1211) followed (*Bps*, 297–98):

En síðan fór hann suðr til Englands ok var þar í skóla ok nam þar svá mikit nám at trautt váru dæmi til at neinn maðr hafði jafn mikit nám numit né þvílíkt á jafn langri stundu. Ok þá er hann kom út til Íslands þá var hann fyrir öllum mönnum öðrum í kurteisi lærdóms síns, versagørð ok bókalestri.

And then he went south to England, and was in school there, and there acquired so much learning that it would be hard to name a man who had acquired as much of such learning in a time of equal length. And then when he returned to Iceland he was above all others in the gentlemanliness of his knowledge, poetry and the art of letters.

That neither a Latin nor an Old Norse *Aseneth* manuscript survives from twelfth-century Iceland is not surprising, even though the international connections and personnel existed to procure and translate them. The independent *Aseneth* tradition became a victim of its own success. Its incorporation and abridgement in Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale* in the 1250s appears to have made the independent *Aseneth* redundant in the eyes of most scribes. Just nine Latin manuscripts of the non-Vincentian tradition survive to date, all of them from Britain (Burchard 1996, 367). As has been seen, there is an extant Old Norse *Aseneth* of the Vincentian tradition preserved in *Stjórn I*, but it is more than a century younger than *Yngvars saga víðfjrla*, *Kormaks saga* and *Snorra Edda*, and so has largely been excluded from the present discussion. We might fruitfully compare this situation with that of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which did not become part of an immensely popular compilation, and so independent manuscripts thereof remained quite widespread, as Odd Einar Haugen (1992, 38; 1985, 426–28) has shown to be particularly true in the case of its Old Norse version, *Niðrstigningar saga*. Whether *Aseneth*, like *Nicodemus*, was also translated into Old Norse around the year 1200 is impossible to say. It would not have needed to be rendered into the vernacular in order to influence Oddr Snorrason, who could read and write in Latin. Snorri would probably have been unable to read *Aseneth* in Latin for himself, but some if not

all of his teachers at Oddi would have been Latinate, to say nothing of the learned environment he encountered at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–63). On the whole, the *Aseneth* in *Stjórn I* is a close rendering of Vincent's Latin. The only noteworthy divergence comes in the translator's lexical choice when describing the rejected kiss (*Stjórn I*, 312, my emphasis):

putiphar bað þa dottur sína minnaz við ioseph ok kýssa hann. ok sua sem hun
 etlaði þat at giöra ok gekk at honum. þa retti hann framm handina takandi
 henní ímot hennar briostí ok bringu sua segiandi. Meðr engu moti stendr þat
 at sá maðr sem lifanda guð dýrkar ok lifs brauð etr ok heilsamleghan drykk
 drekkir kýssi þa konu af heiðinni þjóð konna sem hun dýrkar ok kýsser daufr
 ok dumba skurðguð. . .

Then Putifar told his daughter to greet Joseph and kiss him, and when she intended to do that and went up to him, then he extended his hand, placing it upon her breast and bosom, saying: 'In no way can it pass that the man who worships the Living God and eats the Bread of Life and drinks the wholesome drink *may kiss a woman who comes from a heathen nation*, who worships and kisses deaf and dumb idols. . .'

In the *Speculum Historiale* (*Speculum*, 43), Joseph refuses the kiss with the words:

non decet virum colentum Deum viventum, & manducantem panem vitae, & calicem incorruptionis bibentum, osculari mulierem alienigenam osculantem ore suo idole surda & muta.

The Old Norse *Aseneth* translates *alienigena mulier* as *kona af heiðinni þjóð* 'a woman from a heathen nation'. It is a very fitting translation, as elsewhere in Old Norse *heiðin þjóð* is often used to signify 'the gentile nations' as opposed to the Israelites. However, Latin *alienigenus* really just means 'foreign', not specifically 'pagan' as signified by Old Norse *heiðinn*. Indeed, the term usually used for 'gentile' in the Vulgate is simply *gentes*. Vulgate *alienigenus* is used to denote 'foreign' more broadly, e.g. Ezra 10:44: *Omnes hii acceperunt uxores alienigenas et fuerunt ex eis mulieres quae pepererant filios* 'All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children'. Thus the fourteenth-century Old Norse *Aseneth* here provides a very informed translation, but not a literal or particularly close one. Remarkably, the fourteenth-century *Aseneth* appears to be anachronistically echoed in the late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century *Yngvars saga* where we saw Sveinn decline Silkisif's kiss because he *qvadst eij vilja kissa hana heidna konu* 'said he did not wish to kiss her, a pagan woman'. However, this cannot be taken as proof that the *Stjórn I* translator was informed by an

earlier Old Norse *Aseneth* as used by Oddr—especially as I see no other discrepancies between Vincent’s Latin and *Stjórn I*. It is just as likely that the *Stjórn I* translator was replicating a turn of phrase directly from *Yngvars saga víðförla*.¹²

The history of *Aseneth* in Iceland falls silent for several centuries after the *Stjórn I* translation. It seems as though *Aseneth* spoke most to the concerns of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but that authors of subsequent generations did not find sufficient inspiration in its pages to allude to it in their own writing. A curious footnote to the Icelandic reception of *Aseneth* is its retranslation into Icelandic from Danish in the seventeenth century. The Danish churchman Hans Mogensen (d. 1595) translated a Low German chapbook version of the legend into his native language in 1580. The Danish *Aseneth* chapbook was subsequently translated into Icelandic by Árni Halldórsson í Hruni in 1630.¹³ It is mostly a fairly straightforward translation of Mogensen’s Danish, but for one important detail. Árni Halldórsson added an account, apparently of his own devising, of *Aseneth*’s death from grief after Joseph’s passing. As far as I know it is the only account of *Aseneth* dying in any source (*Icelandic Aseneth*, 190–91):

En Assen[at] þá hun <sa Joseph ordenn siúkan kom hun>, og var hiä honum, og griet särlega [og hann] bleðaðe Assenat og hennar tuo sonu, og efter þ[ad] mintest han þrátt vid Assenat, og sagde þau yrde <ad skilia> fyrst litla stúnd, svo munde þau med gleda aftur finnast. Og sem hün var sig sorgande bad hann hana ein stund burtú ad ganga frá sier, og [sem] hun það giorde, andadest hann. Enn fäm dógum efter andadest lyka Assenat, mest af sorg, þui [ad] engin madur matte til hennar koma, ür þui Josep var daúdur.

And *Aseneth*, when she saw that Joseph had become sick, came and was next to him, and wept grievously, and he blessed *Aseneth* and her two sons, and after that he kissed her resolutely,¹⁴ and said that they had to part first for a little while, then they would find each other again with joy. And as she was grieving he asked her to go away from him for a moment, and when she did that he died. And a few days later *Aseneth* died too, mostly from grief, because no man could approach her because Joseph was dead.

By Árni’s time belief in *Aseneth*’s immortality had presumably faded away entirely. Even if any Icelanders did recall the tradition, Árni was

¹² I am grateful to Joseph Harris for this observation.

¹³ On the Danish and Icelandic chapbooks in question, see Overgaard (1991, 203–99).

¹⁴ This is an archaic use of the verb form *minntist við*, particularly indicating a kiss of welcome or parting.

writing in the age of Lutheranism, where such details would readily have been dismissed as Catholic superstition. I doubt he intended to make any profound statement by his addition. Rather, I suspect he wished only to fill a lacuna that he found puzzling. Nonetheless, the result was that an obscure Old Testament woman, made a heroine in Jewish antiquity, found her final resting place in Iceland.

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WHY WAS LEIFR EIRÍKSSON CALLED ‘LUCKY’?

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ACCORDING TO THE ICELANDIC SAGAS, the first man of European origin to discover and explore the mainland of North America was Leifr Eiríksson. He was born in the late tenth century, probably in Iceland, but emigrated to Greenland with his parents, Eiríkr rauði and his wife Þjóðhildr, the first European settlers in Greenland. At the time of his discoveries Leifr was a resident of Greenland. Cognomens were common among Norse people at this time, according to the sagas, and Leifr’s cognomen is said to be ‘lucky’ in English—a translation of *heppinn* (inn *heppni* in the weak form) in the original texts, an adjective obviously related to the English word *happy*. In modern Icelandic the word *heppinn* still exists and has approximately the same meaning as the English word ‘lucky’. This is why Leifr Eiríksson has been called Leif the Lucky in English.

Although it might be said that the discovery of a whole continent was a sufficient justification for such an appellation, the sources do not indicate that Leifr earned his cognomen through discoveries or exploration. As far as we know his discoveries did not bring him any luck either, since he did not settle in the land which he named Vínland (‘Vineland’), on the fruitful plains of North America, but succeeded his father as a farmer at Brattahlíð, Greenland, and probably as a leader of the Norse settlement in the country. Thus the question why Leifr was given this cognomen is something of a riddle. This article is an attempt to solve that riddle.¹

Leifr’s cognomen appears in seven Icelandic texts. In two of them, *Landnámabók* (1968, 163; *The Book of Settlements* 1972, 61) and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (1991, 115; *Bard’s Saga* 1997, 242) he is simply mentioned as ‘Leifr enn/inn heppni’ in genealogies, without any explanation

¹ This is a slightly reworked and expanded version of an article by the author in Icelandic: Gunnar Karlsson 2014, 87–97. This version, besides adding a few minor ideas that have occurred to the author since the publication of the original article, develops an aspect of particular concern to a wider audience, that of the translation of *heppinn* into English. Therefore it seems appropriate to bring the study to the attention of non-Icelandic readers.

of the cognomen. Five texts, on the other hand, have something more to say about this.

Eiríks saga rauða relates that King Óláfr Tryggvason sent Leifr to Greenland to convert his fellow countrymen to Christianity. The ship was carried off course on its passage from Norway and sailed past Greenland:

Leifr lét í haf þegar hann var búinn. Leif velkði lengi úti, ok hitti hann á lond þau er hann vissi áðr öngva ván í. Váru þar hveitakrar sjálfsánir ok vínviðr vaxinn; þar váru ok þau tré er mǫsurr heita, ok höfðu þeir af öllu þessu nokkur merki.

Leifr fann menn á skipflaki ok flutti heim með sér ok fekk öllum vist um vetrinn. Sýndi hann í því hina mestu stórmennsku ok gæzku af sér. Hann kom kristni á landit. Var hann síðan kallaðr Leifr hinn heppni.

(*Eiríks saga rauða* 1985, 415)

Once he had made ready, Leif set sail. After being tossed about at sea for a long time he chanced upon land where he had not expected any to be found. Fields of self-sown wheat and vines were growing there; also, there were trees known as maple, and they took specimens of all of them.

Leif also chanced upon men clinging to a ship's wreck, whom he brought home and found shelter for over the winter. In so doing he showed his strong character and kindness. He converted the country to Christianity. Afterwards he became known as Leif the Lucky.

(*Eirik the Red's Saga* 1997, 8)

Two other sagas tell basically the same story as *Eiríks saga rauða* about these events, but add nothing of interest about Leifr's cognomen. These are on the one hand the saga of King Óláfr Tryggvason in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–45, I 347; 2011, 217; cf. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* II 1961, 200),² and on the other *Kristni saga*, an account of the adoption of the Christian religion in Iceland (2003, 30; *Kristni saga* 2006, 47). Further, a short summary of the story is found in a geographical treatise preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript, AM 194, 8vo (*Alfræði íslenzk* I 1908, 12).

Grænlendinga saga gives the most elaborate account of Leifr's travels, which differs somewhat from those of the other sagas. Here Leifr leaves Greenland in order to search for countries which the Icelandic seafarer Bjarni Herjólfsson had seen to the west of Greenland, without landing in any of them. But as in *Eiríks saga*, Leifr finds the stranded ship's company on his way back from Vínland to Greenland:

² Leifr is not mentioned in the earliest saga of King Óláfr, written by Oddr Snorrason (Oddr Snorrason 2006, 271–72, 389).

Sigla nú síðan í haf, ok gaf þeim vel byri, þar til er þeir sá Grænland ok fjöll undir jöklum. Þá tók einn maðr til máls ok mælti við Leif: 'Hví stýrir þú svá mjök undir veðr skipinu?' Leifr svarar: 'Ek hygg at stjórni minni, en þó enn at fleira, eða hvat sjái þér til tíðenda?' Þeir kváðusk ekki sjá, þat er tíðendum sætti. 'Ek veit eigi,' segir Leifr, 'hvárt ek sé skip eða sker.' Nú sjá þeir ok kváðu sker vera. Hann sá því frammar en þeir, at hann sá menn á skerinu. 'Nú vil ek, at vér beitum undir veðrit,' segir Leifr, 'svá at vér náim til þeira, ef menn eru þurftugir at ná várum fundi, ok er nauðsyn á at duga þeim; en með því, at þeir sé eigi friðmenn, þá eigu vér allan kost undir oss, en þeir ekki undir sér.' Nú sækja þeir undir skerit ok lægðu segl sitt, koptuðu akkeri ok skutu litlum báti qðrum, er þeir hofðu haft með sér. Þá spurði Tyrkir, hverr þar réði fyrir liði. Sá kvezk Þórir heita ok vera norrœnn maðr at kyni: 'Eða hvert er þitt nafn?' Leifr segir til sín. 'Ertu sonr Eiríks rauða ór Brattahlíð?' segir hann. Leifr kvað svá vera. 'Nú vil ek,' segir Leifr, 'bjóða yðr qllum á mitt skip ok fémunum þeim, er skipit má við taka.' Þeir págu þann kost ok sigldu síðan til Eiríksfjarðar með þeim farmi, þar til er þeir kómu til Brattahlíðar; báru farminn af

They headed out to sea and had favourable winds, until they came in sight of Greenland and the mountains under its glaciers.

Then one of the crew spoke up, asking, 'Why do you steer a course so close to the wind?'

Leif answered, 'I'm watching my course, but more than that. Do you see anything of note?'

The crew said they saw nothing worthy of note.

'I'm not sure,' Leif said, 'whether it's a ship or a skerry that I see.'

They then saw it and said it was a skerry. Leif saw so much better than they did, that he could make out men on the skerry.

'I want to steer us close into the wind,' Leif said, 'so that we can reach them; if these men should be in need of our help, we have to try and give it to them. If they should prove to be hostile, we have all the advantages on our side and they have none.'

They managed to sail close to the skerry and lowered their sail, cast anchor and put out one of the two extra boats they had taken with them.

Leif³ then asked who was in charge of the company.

The man who replied said his name was Thorir and that he was of Norwegian origin. 'And what is your name?'

Leif told him his name.

'Are you the son of Eirik the Red of Brattahlid?' he asked.

Leif said he was. 'Now I want to invite all of you,' Leif said, 'to come on board my ship, bringing as much of your valuables as the ship can carry.'

After they had accepted his offer, the ship sailed to Eiríksfjörð with all this cargo until they reached Brattahlid,

³ In the saga text it is Tyrkir, Leifr's shipmate, who asks this question.

skipi. Síðan bauð Leifr Þóri til vistar með sér ok Guðríði, konu hans, ok þrimr mǫnnum ǫðrum, en fekk vistir ǫðrum hásetum, bæði Þóris ok sínum félagum. Leifr tók fimmtán menn ór skerinu. Hann var síðan kallaðr Leifr inn heppni. (*Grænlendinga saga* 1935, 253–54)

where they unloaded the ship. Leif then invited Thorir to spend the winter with him there, along with his wife Gudrid and three other men, and found places for the other members of both his own and Thorir's crew. Leif rescued fifteen men from the skerry. After this he was called Leif the Lucky. (*The Saga of the Greenlanders* 1997, 23–24)

It is not known for sure how these accounts are related. According to the most recent major research into the relationship between *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlendinga saga*, neither of them was based on the other and they were written at a similar time, probably around the turn of the thirteenth century (Ólafur Halldórsson 1978, 378–81, 398–400). The two other accounts, those of *Heimskringla* and *Kristni saga*, are probably based on *Eiríks saga rauða* and have no value as sources for this subject. At first sight it would seem most likely that *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlendinga saga* are both based on oral tradition, which would be some indication of their authenticity as sources for material on which they are in agreement. Of course a widespread oral tradition may well be untrue, but at least we can be sure that this story was not invented at the desk of a thirteenth-century saga writer but is somewhat closer to the historical reality. It has also been suggested that the stories of the discovery and exploration of Vínland are based on a poem, now lost, which the saga authors sometimes understood imperfectly and therefore differently, although they have essential points in common (Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 2000, 48–49). That, of course, is no proof of reliability either, but the poem would probably have been generations older and thus closer to the events and hence somewhat more trustworthy than the sagas.

Whatever the truth of the matter, it must be considered probable that Leifr was given his cognomen, *inn heppni*, because he managed to rescue people who had been shipwrecked. An interpretation of the account in *Eiríks saga* is that its author found Leifr's rescue insufficient as an occasion for the cognomen, and therefore added the information that he also converted his fellow countrymen to Christianity. In *Grænlendinga saga*, on the other hand, the Christianisation of Greenland is attributed neither to Leifr nor to the instigation of King Óláfr Tryggvason, and there is strong evidence to support the argument that Greenland was not converted on the initiative of the king (Jón Jóhannesson 1974, 100–01; Ólafur Halldórsson

1978, 381–89; Ólafur Halldórsson 1981, 205–14). The conclusion must be that the most reliable source for information about Leifr's cognomen is *Grœnlendinga saga*, which unequivocally states that it is derived from his saving of a shipwrecked crew, and nothing else.

Is it plausible for a man to be called 'lucky' because he saved people's lives? Would it not be more appropriate to say that the members of the ship's company were lucky that Leifr was there, caught sight of them and ventured to save them? Of course it could be argued that Leifr earned himself the goodwill of God and good people by saving the shipwrecked people. But there is no mention of that in the sagas. No doubt it was also quite an achievement to take these people in for the winter in a small locality in a country with severe winters. Nevertheless it would be rather far-fetched to call Leifr 'lucky' for the rest of his life, and longer, for that reason.

It is worth noting that the sagas put considerable stress on Leifr's good qualities. *Eiríks saga rauða* is quoted above regarding 'his strong character and kindness'. In *Grœnlendinga saga* these words are not used in connection with the rescue. But at the end of the previous chapter a passage reads, with no obvious context: *Leifr var mikill maðr ok sterkr, manna skörluigastr at sjá, vitr maðr ok góðr hófsmaðr um alla hluti* (*Grœnlendinga saga* 1935, 252) 'Leif was a large, strong man, of very striking appearance and wise, as well as being a man of moderation in all things' (*The Saga of the Greenlanders* 1997, 23). Without having any reason to doubt Leifr's good qualities, I suggest that this was written in order to support his descendants, the Brattahlíð family, as leaders of the settlement in Greenland. Perhaps Leifr was considered to be a better candidate for a role model than his father, as Eiríkr was known for his long-lasting feuds in Iceland before he moved to Greenland. But *heppinn* in modern Icelandic, like 'lucky' in English, refers especially to a person who gains more from life than can be explained and justified by his or her qualities, more than can be explained by strong character and kindness, wisdom and moderation. Thus it seems to be something of a misnomer to call Leifr Eiríksson *heppinn* if it means the same as 'lucky' in its usual sense.

Is it possible then that the adjective *heppinn* had a further meaning beyond the one it has in modern Icelandic, and has been believed to have had in Old Norse? Is it possible that it could refer to a person who brought luck to other people rather than to him- or herself? Before we deal with that question it should be taken into consideration that the society which gave Leifr his cognomen and preserved it in written

accounts may have lived with a concept of luck rather different from the one we know. The Swedish scholar Peter Hallberg (1973, 143–83) has discussed what he calls ‘fortune words’ in Old Norse texts, the nouns *auðna*, *gípta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja*. Hallberg’s main point is that the concept expressed by these words is of old, native origin in Norse culture and not a Christian, southern borrowing as the German scholar Walter Baetke had maintained. Hallberg does not deal in detail with the meaning of the ‘fortune words’ although he argues in his article on the subject that a person’s *hamingja* was a quality, or even a being, which benefited the person but could also be transferred to others. Thus, when the Icelander Hjalti Skeggjason takes off on a dangerous mission for King Óláfr Haraldsson, their exchange suggests that the king’s *hamingja* can be conferred on Hjalti and his companions:

Hjalti gekk at konungi ok kvaddi hann—‘ok þurfum vér nú þess mjök, konungr, at þú leggir hamingju þína á þessa ferð.’ . . . Konungr segir: ‘Bæta mun þat til um þessa ferð, at þú farir með þeim, því at þú hefir opt reyndr verit at hamingju. Vittu þat víst, at ek skal allan hug á leggja, ef þat veigr nokkut, ok til leggja með þér mína hamingju ok öllum yðr.’

(Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, II 88)

Hjalti went up to the king and took his leave.

‘And it is very important to us, king, that you give this expedition your blessing.’ . . .

The king says: ‘It will be a great benefit to this expedition, that you are going with them, for you have often proved lucky. Be sure of this, that I am going to set my whole heart on this, if that makes any difference, and give you and your whole party my blessing.’

(Snorri Sturluson 2014, 56)

In this passage both Hjalti and the king are considered to have *hamingja*, but while, in the translation, Hjalti is simply said to be ‘lucky’, the translators have opted for the word ‘blessing’ for the king’s *hamingja*, since it can be conferred on others.⁴ Hallberg does not discuss the specific term *heppni* ‘good luck’, but it seems possible that it could carry a similar transferability.

The basic question here is whether *heppinn* could refer to someone who tended to or was qualified to do something good or have some positive influence on others. Adjectives ending in *-inn* in the nominative masculine, describing a person in terms of an effect he/she has on someone else, are common in Old Norse. Johan Fritzner’s dictionary,

⁴ See also Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957, s.v. *hamingja*: ‘One might also impart one’s own good luck to another, hence the phrase *leggja sína hamingju með e-m*, almost answering to the Christian ‘to give one’s blessing to another’.’

Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog, includes the following adjectives with broadly this kind of meaning and the ending *-inn*: *áfenginn*, *afskiptinn*, *áhleypinn*, *áhlyðinn*, *áleitinn*, *baldinn*, *bellinn*, *breytinn*, (*orð*) *bæginn*, *bölfenginn*, *eirinn*, *fáskiptinn*, *fastheitinn*, *fenginn*, *fjölræðinn*, *framfærinn*, *fréttinn*, *frændrækin*, *fylginn*, *fælinn*, *gárfenginn*, *gefinn*, *gestrisinn*, *geyminn*, *glettinn*, *glíminn*, *glæpinn*, (*orð*) *gætinn*, *harðsnúinn*, *heiptfenginn*, *hlutdeilinn*, (*orð*) *hittinn*, *hlýðinn*, *hræðinn*, *hugleikinn*, *hæðinn*, *hæfinn*, *hælinn*, *hætinn*, *kífinn*, *leiðinn*, (*harð*) *leikinn*, *leyninn*, *lyginn*, *málræðinn*, *málrætinn*, *margbreytinn*, *mótsnúinn*, *níðskældinn*, *ráðleitinn*, *reiðinn*, *sakgæfinn*, *skefinn*, *skilinn*, *snúinn*, *stikkinn*, *stirfinn*, *tilfyndinn*, *tilleitinn*, *viðfellinn*, *vífinn*, *væginn*, *ýfinn* (Fritzner 1886–96).⁵ Thus, for instance, *fáskiptinn*, translated as ‘little meddler, quiet’ in Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1957, 147), occurs in *Laxdæla saga* where it is said about Þorgerðr Egilsdóttir that she was *skorungr mikill, en fáskiptin hversdagliga* (1934, 66) ‘a woman of strong character . . . though she was not one to waste words’ (*The Saga of the People of Laxardal* 1997, 33). The adjective *frændrækin*, translated as ‘attached to one’s kinsmen’ (Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957, 177), occurs in *Hungrvaka* where it is said that Bishop Þorlákur Runólfsson was *frændrækin ok forsjáll í flestum hlutum* (2002, 23) ‘attached to his kinsmen and foresighted in most things’ (Basset 2013, 58). Both these words, *fáskiptinn* and *frændrækin*, are common in modern Icelandic with the same meaning, as are many more of the *-inn* adjectives.

Would not *heppinn* go well with these words? It would, but it does not in Fritzner’s dictionary. There it is explained only as ‘heldig, som kan glæde sig ved *happ*’ (Fritzner 1886, I 791) without a word about the effect of a *heppin(n)* person on other people. The Icelandic–English dictionary by Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon gives the same meaning: ‘lucky’ (and ‘ready-tongued’ for *orð-heppinn*) (1957, 256). In Geir T. Zoëga’s *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (1910, 194) two English words are given as equivalent to *heppinn*: ‘lucky’ and ‘fortunate’. In Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson’s dictionary of Old Norse poetry, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis*, *heppinn* is translated into

⁵ The words were found by searching for the string inn, adj. in a digital copy of Fritzner’s dictionary. Words with prefixes like *all-* (very) and *ú-* (= *ó-*) (not) are omitted. Many of them can also be found in the Icelandic–English dictionaries which are referred to in the article, Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957 and Zoëga 1910.

Danish as ‘eg[ent]l[ig]’ ‘fuld af *hopp*, held, heldig’ (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, 244). What is meant by ‘fuld of *hopp*’? Is it possible that the author was thinking about *hopp*, instances of good luck, which the person in question could bestow on others?

If so, that interpretation escaped the attention of E. H. Lind, whose dictionary of Norwegian-Icelandic cognomens in medieval texts is the standard work on the subject. He gives only the usual modern Icelandic meaning. Under the noun *heppni* he refers to two saga characters, Leifr Eiríksson and a certain Hogni Geirþjófsson, a second-generation Iclander, mentioned, with his cognomen, in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (1987, 1). Lind’s explanation of the cognomen is ‘Svaga formen av adj. *heppinn* “lyckosam”’ (Lind 1920–21, 143).

Translators into German have used the word *glücklich* for Leifr’s cognomen (*Isländersagas* IV 2011, 512, 536). In the most recent Danish translation the usual word *lykkelig* has not been used, but *lykkerig* (*Islændingesagaerne* 2014, I 336, 358; II 266). According to dictionaries the meaning of this word is the same as that of *lykkelig* (lucky). But it is a rare word and may therefore suggest the possibility of a wider meaning.

What, then, can be concluded from Norse texts other than those that refer to Leifr Eiríksson? A detailed account of the word *heppinn* is not yet available in the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* / *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, but its online database lists sixteen instances of the adjective *heppinn*. In fact there are only fourteen occurrences: the cognomen of Hogni Geirþjófsson is listed twice, and in one case it seems to me that the verb *heppnast* ‘succeed’ has been mistaken for a superlative of the adjective *heppinn* or a cognate adverb (*Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* 1917, 133). Of these fourteen cases I believe that only four unequivocally have the usual meaning: *lucky*, ‘apt to live with luck’. As an example I take an instance in the romance *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* which includes a story of two warriors, Hástigi and Hörðr, who try their strength by pulling the hide of an ox between them. The saga says: *Var Hástigi sterkari, en Hörðr heppnari ok mjúkari* (1954, 228) ‘Hástigi was stronger but Hörðr more *heppinn* and nimbler’. It seems obvious here that Hörðr’s *heppni* (to use the noun) was to his own advantage, not to anyone else’s. Seven cases have already been quoted here because they refer to the cognomen of Leifr Eiríksson. There is one case in addition to those that have been discussed above because two cases are taken from two different but related sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason. Two cases appear to refer to the advantage either of the person himself, or of other people.

One of them is the cognomen of Högni Geirþjófsson, because no stories are preserved about him that reveal the nature of his *heppni*. The other is in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. The hero of the saga was travelling in wintertime along the coast of Norway with Norwegian merchants. They found themselves in bad weather and managed to get ashore, but could not light a fire. They saw that a fire had been lit on the opposite side of a sound and *töluðu þeir til, at sá væri heppinn, er honum gæti nát* (1936, 129) 'They said it would be a fortunate man who could have some of it' (*The Saga of Grettir the Strong* 1997, 110). I suppose that this has usually been understood as if it was the person who fetched the fire who would have the luck. But in fact the others would have gained just as much from his deed, so that the word could equally well refer to their luck. Actually, the remark is rather ironic if it is taken to mean that the person who managed to fetch the fire would be lucky, because Grettir did it without gaining any luck in return. On the contrary, the owners of the fire took him for a monster and turned against him armed with firebrands, thereby setting the house on fire and burning themselves to death. The men were Icelanders, and in Iceland Grettir was tried for killing them and sentenced to lifelong outlawry (1936, 127–34, 146–47; 1997, 110–13, 119). This, however, does not make it any less likely that the words *at sá væri heppinn, er honum gæti nát* were meant to refer to Grettir's luck, since irony is common in the sagas.

Finally, the corpus of the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* includes one example where it seems likely that a man is called *heppinn* because he is supposed to have brought luck to other people rather than himself. It is in a rather complicated and obscure episode in the chivalric romance *Mágus saga jarls*. A certain Vilhjálmur, a member of a royal family, disguises himself as a beggar, puts a guard named Hermóður to sleep with wine and food, strangles him and changes clothes with him. After that he meets other guards of the town, tells them that he has killed a beggar and informs them where to find the corpse. They believe his story, and the king's son, Sigurður, thanks the person he believes to be Hermóður for his deed, *og sagði, að hann var jafnan heppnastur* (1949, 385–91) 'and said that he was always the most *heppinn* one'. Although it is not clear why it was considered such a deed to kill a beggar, it seems likely that Sigurður means that Vilhjálmur was beneficent to other people rather than to himself.

The *Ordbog* only covers prose, but the dictionary of old Norse poetry, *Lexicon poeticum*, has a total of six examples of *heppinn* from Norwegian and Icelandic poetry (Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, 8 (*allheppinn*), 244

(*heppinn*: four occurrences), 439 (*orðheppinn*)). Two of them are in poems about Norwegian kings which contain rather hollow praise about them (*Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* I 2012, 260; II 2009, 196). I see nothing in the texts which indicates that they refer to the luck of anyone other than the kings themselves. Still, in theory kings were of course meant to spread luck among their subjects rather than to enjoy it themselves, so that the sentences may be ambiguous.

One more instance can be understood either way. In *Sturlunga saga*, in the section which is believed to have belonged originally to Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga*, is a stanza which 'came up' in Northern Iceland in the second decade of the thirteenth century and was attributed to a certain Tannr Bjarnason. It contains a libel about five farmer's sons, of which this is the first half:

Upp hafa eigi heppnir	Five spear-wielding, ill-minded,
ullstakks boðar vaxit	Byrnie-bound warriors—brothers—
fimm ok fullir vamma	Born to one household,
fleinveðrs á bæ einum.	Luckless and vicious, as often occurs,
(<i>Sturlunga saga</i> I 1946, 262)	No good intending to other men then. . .
	(<i>Sturlunga Saga</i> I 1970, 155)

The English translation is somewhat inaccurate, but the main point is that five brothers are said to have grown up on one farm, being not *heppnir*. The stanza could mean that they were luckless in either sense: that they brought no luck to themselves or to others. Finnur Jónsson's interpretation rather points to their lack of luck for themselves; he construes as a kenning *ullstakks boðar* (woolcoat's offerers > men) who are *eigi heppnir fleinveðrs* (not *heppnir* in fight) (Finnur Jónsson 1915, 58). In *Sturlunga saga* 1946 the kenning for men is taken to be *fleinveðrs ullstakks boðar* (in fight woolcoat's offerers) who are (generally) not *heppnir* (1946, 588–89). That could mean that they were not good for others to deal with.

Finally, there are three cases where the word *heppinn* seems definitely to refer to someone who brings luck to other people. One is in Snorri Sturluson's *Háttatal* 'List of Metres' in his *Edda*, where the second half of stanza 38 describes sailing (Snorri Sturluson 2012, 296–97):

svipa skipa sýjur heppnar	the fortunate planks flex the fine
sönum frömmum í byr römmum;	ships' gunwales in the powerful wind;
Haka skaka hrannir blökkum	the waves shake the sides of Haki's (sea-
hliðar; miðar und kjöl niðri.	king's) horses (ships);
	there is movement down under the keel.

It is difficult to imagine how planks of a ship can be *heppnar* (to use the feminine plural as in the original text) in any other way than by

bringing their owners or crew good luck. They can carry luck but hardly enjoy it. The English translation, if read literally, must be considered dubious.

Then there are two examples from a Christian religious poem composed in the twelfth century, *Leiðarvísan* 'Way-Guidance'. One of them is in stanza 22, which relates Mary's Annunciation:

Engill kom við unga
allheppinn mey spjalla,
burð ok buðlungs dýrðar
bauð hann frðmum svanna

...

Allheppinn engill kom spjalla við unga mey, ok hann bauð frðmum svanna
burð buðlungs dýrðar.

...

An altogether fortunate angel came to speak with a young maiden, and he announced to the foremost lady the birth of the king of glory [= God (= Christ)].

(*Poetry on Christian Subjects* 2007, 160)

It is not my intention to belittle the luck of the angel who was chosen to bring Mary the message. Still, it definitely fits better with Christian doctrine to assume that we are all the receivers of the luck. According to the legend the angel brought much more luck than he got.

The other instance in *Leiðarvísan*, in the second half of stanza 14, could in my opinion be considered conclusive. It is:

Ok heimstýrir, harra,
heppinn, þás skóp skepnu
þann setti dag, dróttinn
dýrðar mildr til hvíðar.

... ok heppinn heimstýrir setti þann dag til hvíðar, þás dróttinn harra, dýrðar
mildr, skóp skepnu.

... and the fortunate world-ruler [= God] established that day for rest, when the lord of lords [= God], generous in glory, brought creation into being.

(*Poetry on Christian Subjects* 2007, 153)

It is difficult to imagine that a Christian poet could say of God that he was *heppinn* in the meaning which the word has now in Icelandic, which would be properly translated into English as *lucky*, that he gained more than he deserved; the words must mean that God was a benefactor to the world over which he ruled.

It has been demonstrated here that in Old Norse the word *heppinn* could have the sense 'one who brings luck'. I have argued that this is

the sense in which it is applied to Leifr Eiríksson in the texts in view of the deed that appears to prompt the giving of his cognomen. The word *lucky* in modern English can be applied to an object that brings luck, such as a ‘lucky penny’ or ‘lucky charm’, but its application to a person implies the primary sense ‘attended by good luck; fortunate, successful, prosperous’. Calling him Leif the Lucky in English is misleading.

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A STEMMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE *PROSE EDDA*

BY HAUKUR ÞORGEIRSSON

Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum

Introduction

THE *PROSE EDDA*, attributed to Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), is preserved in eight manuscripts predating 1600. They are as follows:

R = r = Codex Regius, GKS 2367 4to (c.1300)

T = Codex Trajectinus, Traj 1374 (c. 1595)

W = Codex Wormianus, AM 242 fol. (c.1350)

U = Codex Upsaliensis, DG 11 (c.1300–25)

H = w = AM 756 4to (15th century)¹

A = AM 748 I b 4to (c.1300–25)

B = AM 757 a 4to (c.1400)

C = AM 748 II 4to = AM 1e β fol. (c. 1400)²

For some time the prevailing view has been that it is difficult or impossible to elucidate satisfactorily the relationship between these manuscripts.

The introduction to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2 (Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages II)* contains no fewer than eleven stemmas for the various sources used in it, including for example *Orkneyinga saga*, *Knýtlinga saga* and *Heimskringla*. But the edition declines to draw up a stemma for the *Edda*, noting rather that ‘it is very difficult to establish a stemma for the mss of *SnE*’ (Gade 2009, lxxvii), and citing Anthony Faulkes’s edition of the first part of the *Edda*. Faulkes has this to say (2005, xxx):

Attempts have . . . been made to establish a stemma of the relationships of the principal manuscripts, but these have resulted in little agreement. While R, T and AM 748 II 4to clearly form one group and AM 748 I b 4to and AM 757 a 4to another, the relationships of these groups to W and U are more complicated than a conventional stemma can indicate.

On an even more dire note, Heimir Pálsson (2012, cxvii) has stated that any attempt to draw up a stemma is ‘doomed to failure’.

¹ H is a fragmentary copy of preserved parts of W. Since it is a *codex descriptus* it is typically excluded from the stemmas. By happenstance H sometimes agrees with other manuscripts against W. In a future investigation of possible contamination in the Eddic tradition, H might serve as a control.

² For a handy comparative table of RWUABC see Guðrún Nordal 2001, 216–21.

With these warnings in mind it was not without trepidation that I began to study this subject. To my surprise I found more agreement between scholars than I had expected.

This article begins with a defence of stemmatics and then reviews previous work on the stemmatics of the *Prose Edda*. Then it moves on to build a case for what seems to me to be the most likely stemma. My results are closely aligned with those of van Eeden (1913) and Boer (1924).

Two types of editions

When it comes to the editing of texts, medieval or otherwise, more than one method exists. One popular method, that of Joseph Bédier, is to select a ‘best manuscript’ and base the text on that, only bringing in text from other manuscripts when the main manuscript seems clearly wrong. Another method, the stemmatic method, attempts to establish the relations between the surviving witnesses and uses that to reconstruct, to the extent possible, the archetype from which all witnesses are descended.

The two most important editions of the *Prose Edda*, those of Finnur Jónsson and Anthony Faulkes, exemplify these two philosophies. Faulkes spells this out very clearly:

The text (from 5/13) is based solely on R: readings from other manuscripts are only quoted when the text of R is incoherent or has obvious omissions (Faulkes 2005, 73).

Reconstruction of the author’s original or of the archetype have both been judged impossible, and the text is based on R, supplemented where necessary (where the text does not give acceptable sense or is clearly damaged) from T, W and U (Faulkes 2007, xxiii).

Finnur Jónsson (1931a, xxxviii–xxxix) presents a stemma and then notes that he uses it, though not in a fully systematic way, to correct the text of R:

Vistnok er det så, at de for grupperne fælles læsemåder repræsenterer den oprindeligste tekst; deres ordlyd er da også meget hyppig optaget i hovedteksten i denne udgave. Fuldtud systematisk er dette dog ikke gennemført.

The textual difference between these two editions is smaller than the different statements of intent imply. Finnur is more loyal to the text of R than his stemma would allow him to be. And Faulkes—rightly, in my view—takes a fairly broad view of what constitutes a clear error in R. Two examples will illustrate this.

The description of Baldr in *Gylfaginning* has a sentence which goes like this in R (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 29):

Hann er vitrastr Ásanna ok fegrstr taliðr ok líknsamastr

‘He is the wisest of the Æsir and he is considered the most beautiful and the most merciful.’

As far as I can see there is nothing incoherent or even odd about this sentence. If this were the only text we had it seems unlikely that anyone would have found it deficient or in need of emendation. But the other manuscripts containing this sentence (TWHU) all agree on ‘fegrst talaðr’ (most beautifully spoken) instead of ‘fegrstr taliðr’ (considered most beautiful) and Faulkes (2005, 23) emends the text based on this. Presumably he felt that the other manuscripts had the *lectio difficilior*—the participle of *telja* occurs several times in the *Edda* but the participle of *tala* only here.

There is another example in the description of the golden age of the Æsir. R has this sentence (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 20):

öll búsgögn hǫfðu þeir af gulli
‘they had all their household goods out of gold.’

This is a perfectly coherent sentence but Faulkes emends it to follow the other manuscripts (Faulkes 2005, 15):

öll búsgögn ok öll reiðigögn³ hǫfðu þeir af gulli
‘they had all their household goods and all their equipment out of gold.’

This is probably a case of the common form of scribal error (*homeoteleuton*) whereby the scribe accidentally jumps from one instance of a word (*gögn*) to another instance of that same word, leaving out the text in between. Faulkes rightly rectifies the omission.

In defence of stemmatics

I will now bring up and answer various objections that have been raised to stemmatics and stemmatic editions, particularly in the context of the *Prose Edda*.

Objection 1: In order to establish a stemma, scholars proceed on the false assumption of a perfect original which is gradually degraded by careless copyists. But in reality, medieval scribes creatively shaped and improved the text they were working with. A scribe can correct errors in his exemplar—rendering futile the project of filiation by common errors. There is no guarantee that the most coherent and most sensible text is the most original.

³ The word *reiðigögn* is a *hapax legomenon* and the exact meaning is difficult to pinpoint.

Reply: It is certainly true that scribes can, and often do, correct errors in their exemplars and that this fact makes stemmatics more difficult than it would otherwise be. And it often happens that the most attractive text is actually an innovation. But stemmatics is still not impossible, merely difficult. No copy made by a normal human being is without innovations. Certain errors and innovations are characteristic of scribal transmission and very hard for subsequent copyists to correct. And even when no single error offers absolute proof, the cumulative weight of the evidence can point strongly to a particular conclusion.

In practice, no philologist adheres to the nihilistic view that no conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between preserved witnesses. Faulkes declines to draw up a stemma for the *Prose Edda* but he is certainly not in a state of zero knowledge about their relations. He believes, for example, that H is a copy of W and hence not worth citing variants from, while T is not a copy of R—or any preserved manuscript—and *is* worth citing variants from. How do we know that H isn't a sister manuscript to W? How do we know that T isn't a copy of R in which many of R's errors have been fixed? A careful investigation will show that these possibilities are not tenable. And exactly the same sort of investigation can establish the evidence needed to build a stemma.

Objection 2: The project of building a stemma to reconstruct a putative archetype is misguided and places the focus in the wrong place. Attempting to establish one text using many manuscripts denies the fertility and multiplicity of the Eddic tradition. There is no one true *Edda* for scholars to reconstruct but rather each manuscript contains its own redaction and this should be brought forth and studied rather than swept under the table.

Reply: It is quite true that the medieval manuscripts contain different redactions, each of which is worthy of detailed study. But in no way does a stemmatic investigation detract from this. On the contrary, having a stemma assists us in understanding the sources of the redactors and the novelty of each redaction.

Objection 3: The manuscripts of the *Edda* might not all go back to the same authorial version. If there were two authorial versions there is no one true version to reconstruct and the whole project is revealed as ill-conceived.

Reply: If there were two authorial versions then one was based on the other and a stemma is still possible and informative. As an example,

Lorenzo Valla's analysis of the *Donation of Constantine* is extant in two authorial versions and this is no hindrance in building a stemma (Trovato 2014, 163).

Perhaps more to the point, I do not think the arguments for two surviving authorial versions of the *Prose Edda* are strong. I find Daniel Sävborg's (2012) account of the differences between RTW and U more persuasive than that of Heimir Pálsson (2010).

Objection 4: Basing an edition on one manuscript ensures consistency of style and delivers to readers an authentic medieval text; this is far preferable to a hybrid scholarly construction based on multiple manuscripts.

Reply: It is a valid and worthwhile task to publish the text of each *Edda* manuscript separately. But an edited text intended for a broad audience gains greatly from making use of all the witnesses. This is certainly true of Faulkes's edition, where the other manuscripts are used to correct the text of R on practically every page—much to the benefit of the text.

The point on authenticity of style is an important one. Certainly, a stemmatic edition should proceed with an analysis of the stylistic tendencies of the witnesses and an awareness of their age. Finnur Jónsson's edition tends to preserve archaic word forms in R even when the other manuscripts are united against it and this is a very reasonable choice—the archetype was, of course, more archaic than any extant manuscript.

I do not think it is generally true that an extant manuscript is more stylistically consistent than a reconstructed archetype. Two examples will illustrate this. In the first chapter of *Gylfaginning* (found only in RTW), the manuscripts have this text on Gefjun's oxen (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 8):

en þat váru synir jötuns ok hennar (R)
 en þat váru synir jötuns nokkurs ok hennar (TW)

Finnur Jónsson emends the text based on TW here but Faulkes does not (2005, 7). Which choice leaves us with more stylistic consistency? We can compare with a chapter later in *Gylfaginning* (Faulkes 2005, 44):

ok kom einn aptan at kveldi til jötuns nokkurs (R)

Since we have *nokkurs* here it would seem more stylistically consistent to include it also in the first sentence.

Another example is found in *Gylfaginning* where Þórr's helper, Þjálfi, is introduced. Faulkes has this text, following R (Faulkes 2005, 37):

Sonr búa hét Þjálfi
 'The farmer's son was named Þjálfi'

Finnur (1931a, 49) emends *búa* to *búanda* based on the other witnesses. And this makes for a more consistent text since the word *búandi* is found multiple times in the *Edda* but *búi* only this once in R.

These examples are not cherry-picked. As far as I can see there is no general tendency for the innovations in R to improve stylistic consistency.

Objection 5: The *Edda* quotes a vast amount of poetry, some of which is also extant in other sources. The poetry quoted (apart from *Háttatal*) was not composed by the author of the *Edda* and a stemma of the *Prose Edda* cannot establish the original text. Making things more complicated, the individual scribes sometimes knew the poetry being quoted and followed their own memory rather than their exemplar.

Reply: This is all true. While the archetype had a good text of most of the poetry quoted in it, it did not have a flawless text. Indeed, sometimes it had text which we cannot make sense of. A coherent text will sometimes have to be sought in other sources, in anti-stemmatic readings or through conjecture. But a stemma still makes things easier rather than harder; it allows us to keep better track of what we are doing.

Objection 6: There is clearly a case for emending the main manuscript in cases where it is incoherent or where the other witnesses indicate that another sense is superior. But a stemmatic edition will also emend the text in cases where there is no real difference in meaning between the manuscripts. Take this sentence in Finnur Jónsson's edition (1931a, 43):

ok þaðan af falla þær ár er svá heita

R actually has *en* rather than *ok* and *ár þær* rather than *þær ár* but based on the agreement of the other manuscripts, Finnur has emended the text. This does not change the meaning in any appreciable way. What is the point of fiddling with the text like this?

Reply: It is useful for stylistic research to get as close as we can to the style of the original work—including such seemingly inconsequential details as word order or the choice between *en* and *ok*. This facilitates comparison with other works which might be by the same author or from the same time period. This can be a productive pursuit (see e.g. Hallberg 1968).

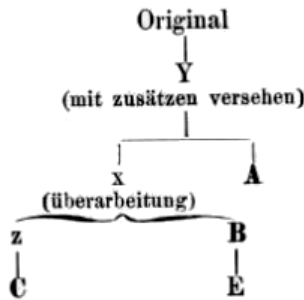
Objection 7: It is ironic to see so much effort expended in defence of Finnur Jónsson's edition. In a later section a different stemma is favoured over Finnur's, presumably rendering Finnur's editorial decisions invalid. This reveals the perils of stemmatic editing—a *best manuscript* edition is not subject to this sort of 'disproof'.

Reply: I argue for a stemma different from the one Finnur presented but one similar enough for the great majority of Finnur's emendations of R to be, in my view, justified. Most crucially, both stemmas imply that R should be emended when the other manuscripts agree against it. This accounts for a high percentage of Finnur's corrections.

For a much more detailed defence of classical stemmatic methods see Trovato 2014.

Early work on the stemmatics of the *Prose Edda*

The oldest stemma of Eddic manuscripts which I am aware of is one by Ernst Wilken, published in 1878—though I am not sure that his elaborate and idiosyncratic diagram is properly understood as a stemma (Wilken 1878, 220). A more conventional stemma was presented a year later by Eugen Mogk:



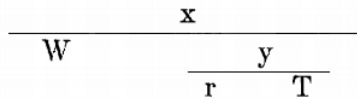
Mogk's stemma of RWHU (1879, 61); A = U; B = W; C = R; E = H

Mogk's result for the manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* is that H is a copy of W and that R and W share innovations against U. As far as I can tell, every subsequent scholar has agreed with this—though there has been plenty of disagreement on the extent to which the text was revised in the common ancestor of RW.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the importance of the Codex Trajectinus was announced to the scholarly world with Finnur Jónsson's 1898 article on the original form and composition of the *Edda*. Finnur does not draw up a stemma for the manuscripts; his principal concern is whether U or RTW better represent the original form of the *Edda*. This question is dealt with in a number of later publications including Mogk 1925, Müller 1941, Zetterholm 1949, Baetke 1950, Krogmann 1959, Heimir Pálsson 2010, 2012 and Sävborg 2012. None of these works contains a new stemma.

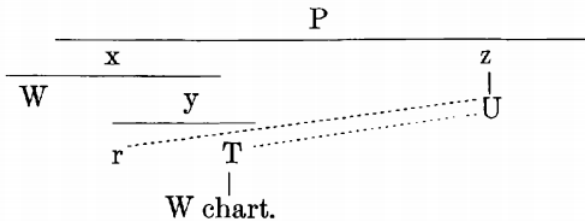
Willem van Eeden's stemma

In 1913, Willem van Eeden published the text of Codex Trajectinus with an introduction dealing extensively with the question of the relationship between the manuscripts. First he devotes eighty pages to the relationship between R, T and W, using his editorial judgment to evaluate hundreds of variants, sometimes in considerable detail. He reaches the conclusion that R and T share many errors against W and must have a common ancestor. He draws up the following stemma:



Van Eeden's stemma of RTW (1913, lxxxvii)

Having established this, van Eeden tosses U into the mix and soldiers on with evaluating variants for another forty pages. His ultimate result is that the U text is independent of RTW with a final stemma as follows:



Van Eeden's stemma of RTWU, including (some of) the young paper leaves in W

The dotted lines between r, T and U represent van Eeden's idea that R and T have, in a handful of cases, been contaminated with U text. I have reservations about this theory; van Eeden seems rather quick to assume contamination where coincidence and independent corrections seem attractive possibilities. I will not deal with this further here since it is a thorny question which should not be allowed to obscure the main issue.

Van Eeden's investigation is representative of the high tide of traditional philology—vigorous and self-assured. I will not deny that van Eeden is overconfident in his editorial judgment but it also seems clear to me that he is right more often than he is wrong. The excruciatingly detailed case he made for his stemma stands unrefuted.

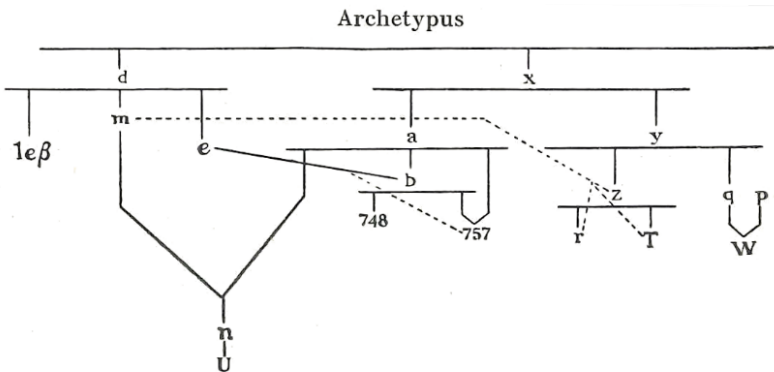
R. C. Boer's stemma

The next work on Eddic stemmas appeared nine years later: a 128-page article by another Dutchman, Richard Constant Boer (1924, 156). The great advance in this work is that Boer considers not only RTWU but also ABC. Thus he is the first to produce a stemma of all the manuscripts.

Boer starts by comparing R, T, W and U. To demonstrate the independence of U, he adduces selected variants from throughout the text. He then demonstrates the special relationship between R and T by a close reading of selected passages. Nine pages into his article Boer pauses to note that his results agree entirely with van Eeden's even though the two scholars investigated different parts of the text. So far so good.

Boer then moves on to expand on van Eeden's work by including ABC. Another contrast with van Eeden is that Boer is not only concerned with variants at individual places in the text but also bases much of his argument on the overall arrangement and organisation of the material in each manuscript.

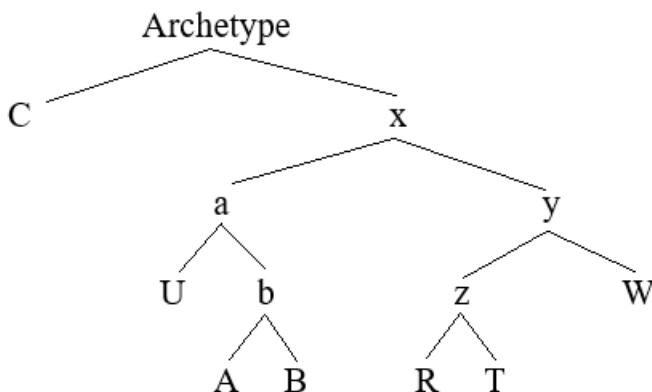
Ultimately Boer produces the following stemma:



R. C. Boer's stemma of the *Edda* (1924, 263)

When I first saw this tangled mess I was highly sceptical and I read Boer's article with the intention of finding out where he had gone wrong. But as things turned out, Boer's arguments prevailed and ended up convincing me. To be sure, I am as sceptical of Boer's contamination theories (the dotted lines) as I am of van Eeden's. But Boer, too, realised that here he

was operating on the very edge of what could be ascertained: ‘Vi er i det hele nået til grænsen, måske lidt over grænsen af det, som kan opnås med de til vor rådighed stående midler’ (Boer 1924, 263). If we leave aside the difficult question of contamination and of secondary sources for W, U and B⁴ we can produce a more readable stemma which I believe captures the essentials:



**A stemma based on Boer's but considering only
the primary source of each manuscript**

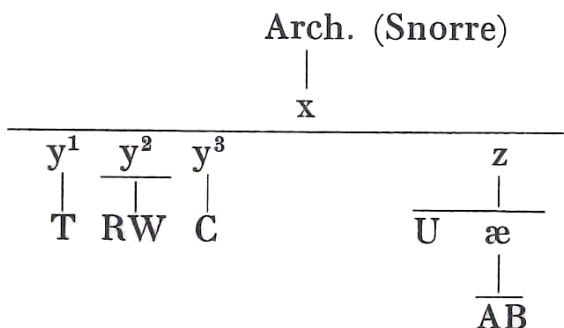
Before discussing this stemma further it will be necessary to consider Finnur Jónsson's alternative.

Finnur Jónsson's stemma

In his 1931 critical edition of the *Edda*, Finnur devotes some space to the relationship between the manuscripts. He briefly discusses van Eeden's study, notes that his main result is correct ('er hans hovedresultat dog rigtigt', xxxvii) and reproduces his stemma (without the dotted lines). Then he moves on to Boer and notes that he is also largely correct ('I det hele og store må man give Boer ret i hans gruppering', xxxviii).

We now come to the crucial part. Finnur notes that he disagrees with Boer on the placement of C, stating that it is closer to the RWT group than Boer had thought. Directly following this, Finnur produces a stemma of his own:

⁴ For valuable discussion of the sources of W and U see not least Johansson 1997 and Mårtensson 2009.



Finnur Jónsson's stemma (1931a, xxxviii)

Finnur does indeed place C closer to RTW than Boer did. But what comes as a surprise is the placement of RW as a subgroup instead of the expected RT. This is motivated by nothing in the preceding text and seems to contradict Finnur's discussion of *Grottasngr* where he says (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, xxxii):

Digtet, der i RT er uden indledning mekanisk føjet til kapitlet, mangler iøvrigt helt i C. Her kan der næppe være nogen tvivl om, at C byder den oprindelige tekstform. I originalen for RT har skriveren bestemt at optage hele digtet; da måtte ordene »og dette er begyndelsen dertil« med verset bortfalde.

For this to make sense we must assume that R and T have a common ancestor not shared by C, in contradiction to the stemma as printed.

I am unsure how to explain the putative common ancestor of R and W in Finnur's stemma. At any rate Finnur presents no argument for this part of his stemma and, as the following section demonstrates, the evidence is incompatible with it.

The common ancestor of RT

After this theoretical and historical preamble it is time to get down to the nuts and bolts. I will argue that the stemmatic conclusions reached by van Eeden and Boer are correct. Their own arguments for this stand unrefuted but I will attempt to make the case in an efficient manner, concentrating on the most convincing evidence. It is convenient to begin with the relationship between R, T and W.

In Faulkes's edition of the *Edda* I have found forty examples where Faulkes finds a bad text in R and T, emending the text based on W and

U.⁵ But even counting quite marginal cases I can only find five instances where Faulkes identifies a common error in R and W, emending based on T and U⁶—and some three instances where Faulkes finds a common error in R and U, emending based on T and W.⁷

Why would R share so many errors with T alone? The most natural explanation is that these two manuscripts share an ancestor not shared by the other manuscripts. This common ancestor had a number of errors and innovations. One of the most obvious scribal errors is found in the prose following stanza 7 of *Háttatal*. Faulkes prints the text as follows (2007, 7):

Í þessi vísu eru allar oddhendingar <inar fyrri hendingar>, ok er þó þessi háttar dróttkvæðr at hætti.

The words within brackets are lacking in RT and supplied from WU. It is likely that they were dropped owing to homeoteleuton in the ancestor of RT. The scribe's eyes jumped from one instance of *hendingar* to the next and the text in between was lost.

The evidence for a common ancestor for RT is very much stronger than that for a common ancestor for RW. The handful of cases where RW share bad readings against TU are easily explained as two scribes independently making the same mistake or the same correction.

The common ancestor of RTW

All previous analyses have come to the conclusion that RTW share innovations against U, and I agree. There are many such innovations, but the three examples which seem clearest to me are as follows.

Stanza 38 of *Háttatal* is in the correct place only in U. In R it appears at the end of the poem and in W it appears after stanza 54. It is not found in T but probably appeared at the end there, as in R, when the manuscript was complete. The stanza's location in U is the only one which fits the organisation of the poem. What probably happened here is that the common ancestor of RTW accidentally omitted the stanza and then, when the mistake was realised, wrote it on the margin of a page, leaving it unclear where it fitted in the poem.

⁵ Faulkes 2005, 5/36, 9/23, 9/32, 10/26, 11/11, 16/38, 18/11, 19/13, 21/33, 23/32, 27/19, 28/5, 33/19, 33/24, 34/24, 43/1, 47/13, 50/28, 51/8; Faulkes 1998, verses 37/4, 38/2, 58/5, 148/2, 189/1, 243/3, 246/4, 267/1; Faulkes 2007, 6/14, 7/5, 7/9, 12/11, 13/9, 13/11, 14/9, 16/13, 17/16, 18/17, 19/11, 51/12, 55/7.

⁶ Faulkes 2005, 39/21, 53/9; Faulkes 1998, 4/39, verse 289/4; Faulkes 2007, 48/1.

⁷ Faulkes 1998, verses 34/1, 297/1; Faulkes 2007, 21/4.

The fourth line of a stanza in *Skáldskaparmál* attributed to Eilífr kúlnasveinn has the acceptable text *einn sólkonungr hreinni* in U (and A) whereas RTW have the senseless (in context) *ein Márú sveini* (Faulkes 1998, 77, 144). This line has migrated from the following stanza, where line 2 reads *hrein Márú sveini*. A scribal mistake in the ancestor of RTW is the most straightforward explanation.

Chapter 2 of *Gylfaginning* begins in W with an introduction of King Gylfi. This is out of place since Gylfi has already been introduced in chapter 1. The reason for this becomes clear when we realise that chapter 1 is not found in U; it must have been awkwardly tacked on in the common ancestor of RTW. The text has been smoothed over in RT by removing the introduction of Gylfi from chapter 2 while W has preserved a more original state of affairs. This one chapter, thus, gives us the whole stemma for RTWU: RTW show a common innovation against U and RT show a common innovation against W.

I now move on to three further errors in the common ancestor of RTW. They turn out to be a special case and need to be analysed together.

In a stanza attributed to Gunnlaugr ormsunga, UAC correctly have the first word of line 3 as *lág*. That this is correct is independently confirmed by the manuscripts of *Gunnlaugs saga*. But in the common ancestor of R, T and W this word has gone missing. In T the stanza is written out with no attention to the missing word. In W some empty space is left in the appropriate location. This space is loyally transmitted in H, the fifteenth-century copy of W. In R, the word *þá* has been inserted to fill out the stanza; this helps with the syllable count but not with the internal rhyme or the semantics. In summary, the manuscripts have the following text:

R:	þá	var ek auðs at eiga
T:	{no space}	var ek auðs at eiga
WH:	{space}	var ek auðs at eiga
UAC:	lág	var ek auðs at eiga ⁸

It is plainly the case that UAC preserve the original text while RTWH have a common error. It should be noted that several avenues were open for scribes interested in restoring the defective verse. To begin with, anyone with a copy of *Gunnlaugs saga* could have obtained the complete verse there. Second, anyone with another copy of the *Edda* could have obtained

⁸ I have normalised the spelling and used the following sources: **R**: f. 33r, Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 146; **T**: f. 34v, van Eeden 1913, 104; **W**: p. 76, Finnur Jónsson 1924, 79; **H**: f. 15v; **U**: p. 63, Grape 1962–77, II 63, 144–45, Heimir Pálsson 2012, 172; **A**: f. 16v, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 435; **C**: f. 4v, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 584.

the verse from there. Boer theorises that R, T, W and the exemplar of RT have all been contaminated with text from other manuscripts. If the scribes had other manuscripts at hand this would have been a good time to consult them. Third, the prose introduction to this stanza mentions the words *lág* and *lóg* as base words for women kennings. The structure of *dróttkvætt* indicates that an internal rhyme in *g* is required and that a monosyllabic word would fit. It should not have taken an especially keen philologist to put the pieces together. Yet, in H, W, T and the exemplar of RT no attempt was made to rectify the omission and in R an incorrect word was inserted instead.

There is a closely similar error in a stanza by Óttarr svarti where the words *ógnar stafr* are missing in RTW (with an empty space in W) but present in UAC. Again it is worth looking at the possibilities the scribes had for restoring the defective verse. First, the stanza is preserved in a great many manuscripts of the Kings' Sagas which share the reading in UAC (Townend 2012, 781).⁹ Second, the quotation in the *Edda* is introduced with the words *Stafr, sem Óttarr kvað*. The word *stafr* forms the required full rhyme with the rest of the verse and it should not be difficult to surmise that it forms a part of what is missing. Third, the same half-stanza is quoted again later in *Skáldskaparmál* so that R and T actually have the full text a few leaves down the road. To be sure, that section is omitted from W but it was certainly present in the last common ancestor of RTW.

In W, the missing words were eventually filled in with a younger hand. This presumably happened before the copy in H was made since H has the complete verse.

There is a third case in a half-stanza attributed to Einarr skálaglam. Two syllables are missing from the first line of the quotation in RT. The line has been completed by conjecture in WH:

RT: hjálm	bauð hildi
WH: hjálm	bauð hildi ólmum
UA: hjálmfaldinn	bauð hildi
C: hjálmeldum	bauð hilmi ¹⁰

⁹ **R**: f. 33v, Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 148; **T**: f. 35r, van Eeden 1913, 105; **W**: p. 77, Finnur Jónsson 1924, 80; **H**: f. 16r; **U**: p. 63, Grape 1962–77, II 63, 144–45, Heimir Pálsson 2012, 176; **A**: f. 16v, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 437; **C**: f. 5r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 586.

¹⁰ **R**: f. 34r, Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 150; **T**: f. 35r, van Eeden 1913, 106; **W**: p. 77, Finnur Jónsson 1924, 81; **H**: f. 16v; **U**: p. 64, Grape 1962–77, II 64, Heimir Pálsson 2012, 178; **A**: f. 17r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 439; **C**: f. 5v, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 588.

This case is more difficult to evaluate than the previous ones since UA and C do not have the same reading and the stanza is not preserved anywhere but the *Edda*. Nevertheless this is clearly a part of the same pattern.

The text in RTW is generally quite good—the common ancestor did not frequently leave out words. Thus it is surprising to see three serious omissions common to RTW in such a short stretch of text. It would be good to have an explanation and it turns out that we have one. The textual interval between error 1 and 2 is exactly the same as the interval between error 2 and 3. And this interval corresponds to one page of text in a manuscript of modest proportions. It would seem that the ancestral manuscript had suffered damage—perhaps a fraying of the top margin—to two adjacent folios. On the verso side of the first folio the short word *lág* had been lost while on the recto side the damage was presumably slight enough not to prevent a full reading. The second folio was harder hit, wiping out *ógnar stafr* on the recto side and *faldinn* or *eldum* on the verso side.

How large was the damaged manuscript? It would have had about as much text per page as H; in that manuscript *ógnar stafr* is in line 17 on f. 16r while *hjálmbauð* is in line 17 on f. 16v. If the lost manuscript had the *Edda* and nothing else (like T) it would have had a size of approximately seventy-four folios.

It is possible that RT and W derive from independent copies of the damaged manuscript. But damage is usually progressive and since the lacunae in RTW are exactly the same size it seems more likely that RTW are all derived from the same copy of the damaged manuscript. This copy would have left spaces for the words which could not be read. These spaces were further propagated in W (and the first one further still in H) but ignored in RT. The study of these missing words is useful for what it tells us about scribal procedure in medieval Iceland. The scribes did not usually have the time, resources or inclination to restore words missing in their exemplar successfully.¹¹

The common ancestor of AB

Up to now I have argued for a relationship between RTWU conforming with the stemmas of Boer and van Eeden. I now move on to ABC, each of which contains only a partial text of *Skáldskaparmál*. These manuscripts

¹¹ Compare the interesting case of the corrupt abbreviations in U (Mårtensson and Heimir Pálsson 2008). The scribe was apparently unable to find or uninterested in obtaining a text of *Völuspá* to correct or flesh out his text.

are more challenging to work with since the body of comparative material is significantly smaller than in the case of RTWU. Nevertheless, the evidence is sufficient to allow reasonably clear conclusions.

A and B share numerous innovations in the addition and arrangement of material as well as in individual readings. All commentators have agreed that they share an ancestor not shared by the other manuscripts.¹² Boer (1924, 215–44) makes the case for this convincingly and at great length. There is no opposing view to refute and I have little to add.

Neither A nor B shares the errors common to RT or RTW. Before considering the relationship between AB and U it is helpful to look at C.

The placement of C in Finnur's stemma

Boer and Finnur Jónsson disagreed on the placement of C. Finnur placed it with RTW while Boer placed it near the top of his stemma, proposing that all the other manuscripts shared errors against it.

My initial presumption was that Finnur was right. On a casual inspection C appears quite close to RTW and it may seem outlandish to place it so high in the stemma. But as it turns out, Finnur's theory has much greater problems with the evidence than Boer's.

The simple problem with Finnur's theory is that if RTWC had a common ancestor not shared by UAB,¹³ there should be some common errors in RTWC. But I know of no persuasive example and Finnur produces none.

Furthermore, according to Finnur's stemma there should not be variants, except for the occasional coincidence, where RTW are united in a reading but C has a reading common with U, A or B. But there are a number of such readings. To be sure, the stretch of text found in both C and W is quite limited (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 139–52) so we cannot expect a great many examples. The strongest seem to be as follows:

- ok lífillæti RTW] –UC (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 139)
- hafa til at gefa mér RTW] hafa mér at gefa UC (139)
- til hefir RTW] heldr hefir til UC (139)
- boð RTW] orð UC (140)
- er hann laut niðr RTW] at Aðils laut niðr UC (142)
- haugþok sama RTW] haugþak saman UABC (143)
- gæddi RTW] gladdi UABC (143)

¹² Faulkes (1998, xlv) puts it like this: 'B has an arrangement of parts of *Skáldskaparmál* that is similar in various ways to that in A, and these two manuscripts are clearly closely related.'

¹³ This is how I read Finnur's stemma, with an implicit y which y₁, y₂ and y₃ are derived from.

gunnveiti RTW] gunnveitir UABC (143)

skeggjum RTW] seggjum UAC (151)

leyg RTW] leygr UAC (151)

This appears to rise above the level of coincidence and is difficult to explain if Finnur's stemma is correct.

The placement of C in Boer's stemma

Even if Finnur's stemma is wrong this does not automatically mean that Boer's stemma is correct. To prove that C constitutes a branch separate from all the other manuscripts we would need to demonstrate that there are errors or innovations common to RTW as well as U and AB but not present in C. Establishing the top of a stemma is usually the most difficult task and I will not claim that the arguments leave no shadow of doubt. Nevertheless, there are some surprisingly strong indications—especially considering the shortness of the text we have for comparison.

In his discussion of C, Boer (1924, 205–15) begins with the comparison of certain short passages that are in a different order in C from that in the other manuscripts. In each case Boer argues that C represents the original state of affairs. While the arguments are not without merit, none of them is decisive. I find Boer's discussion of individual variants (1924, 250–52) to offer stronger evidence and I will discuss the two that seem most interesting.

In a discussion of kennings for war gear the following is found:

RWH:	kalla hjálma	hjálmhött	eða fald
T:	kalla hjálma	eða hjálmhött	eða fald
A:	kalla	hjálmhött	eða fald
U:	kenna	hjálmhött þeira	eða fald
C:	kalla má	hjálmhött	eða fald ¹⁴

The sentence in RTWH is nonsensical and the text in A and U is laconic. The text in C flows naturally and makes sense. If Boer (1924, 251) is right, C has the original text and <ma hialm> led to a scribal dittography of <hialma hialm> in the common ancestor of the other manuscripts. The dittography survives in RTWH but was removed in U and A (the relevant leaf of B is lost), leaving an understandable but rather rough text. This does seem like a very plausible account.

¹⁴ **R:** f. 33v, Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 149; **T:** f. 35r, van Eeden 1913, 106; **W:** p. 77, Finnur Jónsson 1924, 81; **H:** f. 16v; **U:** p. 64, Grape 1962–77, II 64, Heimir Pálsson 2012, 178, xxxix; **A:** f. 17r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 438; **C:** f. 5r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 587.

The strongest case where only C appears to have the original text is in a segment on kennings for gold:

RTWHAB:	Gull er	kallat í kenningum
U:	Gull er	kallat
C:	Gull er ok kallat	í kenningum
RTU:	eldr handar eða liðs	eða leggjjar
WH:	eldr handar	liðs eða leggja
AB:	eldr handar eða liðar	eða leggjjar
C:	eldr	eða ljós handar eða leggjjar ¹⁵

The text in RTWHU fails to make sense and must be corrupt: *eldr . . . liðs* ‘fire of the host’ is no gold kenning. Traditionally *liðs* has been understood here as genitive of *liðr* ‘limb’ rather than *lið* ‘host’ but this is anachronistic. It is true that in post-medieval Icelandic, following the collapse of the distinction between u-stems and i-stems, words of this type sometimes form a genitive with s. But this should not confuse us as to thirteenth-century Icelandic.

To dig into this further, I have searched for relevant genitive forms of *liðr* and the u-stems most phonetically similar to it: *fríðr*, *kviðr*, *siðr*, *viðr* and *litr*. The *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* and the *Lexicon poeticum* between them record something close to 200 instances of these words with a genitive ending in -ar against two instances ending in -s. Both the cases in -s turn out to be from post-medieval manuscripts: one instance of *tíl fríðs* in an eighteenth-century copy of *Sturlunga saga*, and one instance of *úlfliðs* in a hopelessly corrupt half-stanza found only in the seventeenth-century *Laufás-Edda* (Finnur Jónsson 1931b; Faulkes 1979, 348).

Snorri’s *Edda* itself has several instances of *viðar* and *fríðar* as well as one of *liðar* (in *Háttatal*; Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 235). There is nothing to support the idea that its author could write *liðs* in the sense ‘of limb’. The only attested medieval form is *liðar*—which is how the AB manuscripts made sense of the text.

If *liðs* does not make sense then how did it enter the text? And why does C have such a different text here? Boer’s solution to both questions is that C has the original text and *liðs* is a misreading of *ljós*, occurring in a common ancestor of all the other manuscripts. This is paleographically plausible and explains everything. Furthermore, the phrase *eldr eða ljós* is found in a similar context elsewhere in *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 121) and is not unexpected here.

¹⁵ **R**: f. 32v, Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 143; **T**: f. 34r, van Eeden 1913, 103; **W**: p. 75, Finnur Jónsson 1924, 78; **H**: f. 15r; **U**: p. 61, Grape 1962–77, II 61, Heimir Pálsson 2012, 168; **A**: f. 16r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 433; **C**: f. 4r, Jón Sigurðsson 1852, 581.

Could there be other explanations? To be sure. The least bad alternative I have been able to come up with is as follows: The original text had *liðar*. This was corrupted into *liðs* in a manuscript ancestral to all the surviving ones. While *liðs* is senseless in this context it is still an Old Norse word which sometimes occurs in the *Edda* so it is not a wholly implausible scribal mistake. The scribe of C or a manuscript ancestral to it then misread *liðs* as *ljós*, perhaps influenced by the earlier occurrence of *eldr eða ljós*. This is not impossible but it is less economical than Boer's explanation since it involves two misreadings rather than one.

The text in C

If Boer is right that C is properly placed so high in the stemma, and I think he is, we may wonder what information this gives us on the style of the archetype. As it happens, very little narrative prose is preserved both in C and in RTWU; essentially only the account of Hrólfr kraki. The text of C is generally quite close to that of RTW, but there are some cases where C has a slightly more expansive text. The following are the most striking examples:

C: Þá er ek var heima með feðr mínum

RTWU: Þá er ek var heima (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 139)

C: Sýnist mér þat ráð at sá okkarr gefi qðrum sem heldr hefir til.

U: Nú skal sá qðrum gefa er heldr hefir til.

RTW: Nú skal sá gefa qðrum er til hefir (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 139)

C: Slongvir hét hestr hans ok var allra hesta skjótastr er með Svíum var.

RTW: Slungnir hét hestr hans, allra hesta skjótastr.

(sentence omitted in U) (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 141)

It is tempting to conclude that C's longer text is closer to the original. It contains no additional information and there is no obvious motivation to expand the RTW(U) text in this way. But it is easy to see why a scribe might abridge the text slightly to save on time and parchment.¹⁶

There are a number of similar examples in the narrative segments found only in RTC. I find the following particularly interesting (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 133):

¹⁶ For instances where the most loquacious text has been taken to represent the original best see e.g. *Egils saga* (Sigurður Nordal 1933), *Njáls saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, clv), *Gísla saga* (Guðni Kolbeinsson and Jónas Kristjánsson 1979) and *Hákonar saga* (Sverrir Jakobsson et al. 2013, II lix). A qualified case could perhaps be made for *lectio longior potior* in Old Icelandic prose texts. There is a valuable comparative study in Zetterholm 1949, 73–90.

C: En er Ermenrekr konungr sá haukinn þá kom honum í hug **hvat hann hafði gert** at svá sem haukrinn var ófleygr ok fjaðrlauss svá var ok ríki hans ófært er hann var gamall ok sonlauss.

RT: En er Jormunrekr konungr sá haukinn þá kom honum í hug at svá sem haukrinn var úfleygr ok fjaðrlauss svá var ríki hans úfært er hann var gamall ok sonlauss.

The words *hvat hann hafði gert* are unnecessary and if anything the text flows better without them. Would Snorri have included them? Perhaps he would have, since there is a very similar sentence in *Óláfs saga helga* (Johnsen and Jón Helgason 1941, 519; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1945, 342):

Konungr leit til hans er hann heyrði þetta ok kom þá í hug hvat hann hafði gert.

The account in question is found in other texts (Metcalf 1881, 82; Holder 1886, 346; Unger 1862, 156; Keyser and Unger 1849, 80) but this sentence is unique to Snorri's *Óláfs saga*.

The relationship between U and AB

Boer argued that U and AB had a common ancestor not shared by the other manuscripts. Finnur Jónsson agreed with this. It is most easily proven in the (unfortunately rather short) part of the text where C is also preserved. If the arguments for the independence of C are accepted then agreement between RTWC against UAB shows innovations common to UAB. There follow three good examples of innovations common to UA(B):

a) In the short section of text preserved in all seven manuscripts, the best example of an innovation in UAB is probably *efeigi er annan veg breytt* (UAB) instead of *ef eigi er annan veg greint* (RTWC) (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 144).

b) A stanza is introduced anonymously with the words *sem hér er* in RTWC but with the words *sem Þjóðólfr kvað* in UA (the corresponding section is lost from B) (Finnur Jónsson 1931a, 151).

c) Both U and A include two *dróttkvætt* stanzas with names for women which are absent from the other manuscripts (the corresponding section is lost from B) (Finnur Jónsson 1908–1915, A I 652).

Boer (1924, 244–50) argues the case in more detail with many examples.

Conclusions

There have been two comprehensive attempts to build a stemma for RTWU, one by van Eeden and one by Boer. They agreed that RT have errors against WU and that RTW have errors against U. The case for this is very strong and I have attempted to present it here in an efficient manner.

When it comes to ABC, Boer's is the only detailed study. The case for grouping AB together is very strong,¹⁷ as is the evidence for grouping them further with U. As for C, it agrees alternatively with RTW and with UAB, which makes it plausible that it is independent of both.

Finally, there are many cases where C has a text which seems more attractive than that in the other manuscripts. The variant *ljós / liðs* is a particularly compelling piece of evidence that RTWUAB have a common ancestor not shared by C.

I have reservations about van Eeden's and Boer's theories on secondary sources and there is plenty of work to do on sorting these out. The case for contamination has probably been overstated though it is likely that some did indeed take place. But when it comes to the primary source of each manuscript the Dutch stemmas have a lot going for them.

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¹⁷ Wills (2001) argues that A and B also form a group (against W) when it comes to the text of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*.

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NJÁLL'S COMFORTING WORDS:
BRENNU-NJÁLS SAGA, CHAPTER 129

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IN THE CLIMACTIC BURNING SCENE in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, the women in the house begin to panic after Flosi and his men succeed in setting fire to the main house at Bergþórshváll, using the pile of chickweed which Bergþóra's foster-mother has presciently identified as the agent of their destruction (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 328–29; *Njáls Saga* 1960, 265–66):

Síðan tóku þeir arfasátuna ok báru þar í eldinn, ok fundu þeir eigi, er inni váru, fyrr en logaði ofan allr skálinn; gerðu þeir Flosi þá stór bál fyrir öllum dyrum. Tók þá kvennaliðit illa að þola, þat er inni var. Njáll mælti til þeira: 'Verðið vel við ok mælið eigi æðru, því at él eitt mun vera, en þó skyldi langt til annars slíks. Trúið þér ok því, at guð er miskunnssamr, ok mun hann oss eigi bæði láta brenna þessa heims ok annars.' Slíkar fortölur hafði hann fyrir þeim ok aðrar hraustligri.

Nú taka öll húsin at loga. Þá gekk Njáll til dyra ok mælti: 'Er Flosi svá nær at hann megí heyra mál mitt?'¹

They brought the chickweed up and set fire to it, and before those inside knew what was happening, the ceiling of the room was ablaze from end to end. Flosi's men also lit huge fires in front of all the doors. At this, the womenfolk began to panic. Njal said to them, 'Be of good heart and speak no words of fear, for this is just a passing storm and it will be long before another like it comes. Put your faith in the mercy of God, for He will not let us burn both in this world and the next.' Such were the words of comfort he brought them and others more rousing than these. Now the whole house began to blaze. Njal went to the door and said, 'Is Flosi near enough to hear my words?'

To the best of my knowledge, no one has raised the question of the source or sources of the argument of Christian comfort that Njáll articulates at this juncture.² That God would have mercy on the innocent victims of a

¹ Note the relatively rare authorial comment on Njáll's speech.

² Indeed, William Ian Miller specifically comments on Njáll's speech (2014, 303): 'Nothing obliges God to activate his mercy in the next world because one happens to burn to death in this one. Njal's concern here is not about the afterlife or theological accuracy, but that, no differently from Skarphedin, he wants everyone to play his and her final part upon this stage with dignity and courage.'

cruel feud might seem simply a Christian commonplace. Njáll is, however, alluding to a specific idea about the way God acts in history, which was current in the medieval period and which depends upon a variant Biblical text that was widely cited in medieval Latin Christian literature. Njáll is not saying that the women of his household are innocent or sinless, although of course they are innocent of the killing that has brought Flosi and his followers to attack their household; he is rather saying that God will not punish them twice—he will not allow them to be burned in this world and the next. This assertion corresponds to a well-known Medieval Latin Biblical maxim, *non iudicabit Deus bis in idipsum* ‘God will not judge/punish [someone] twice for the same thing.’ One example of how this maxim was interpreted in medieval Latin Christian discourse occurs in the *Sententiae in iv libris distinctae* of Peter Lombard. The question arises whether God acts cruelly at various junctures in the history and prehistory of Israel in destroying the greatest part of the human race in the flood or all of the Sodomites or all of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea and so on. Peter Lombard begins his answer by quoting Jerome, commenting on Nahum, who proposes the answer that God punishes these peoples in this world for their sins so that He need not necessarily have to punish them eternally in the next (Lombard 1971, 326; emphasis mine):

Hieronymus. Ait enim sic: Quod genus humanum diluuiio, sodomiticos igne, aegyptios mari, israelitas in eremo perdidit, scitote ideo temporaliter pro peccatis punisse, ne in aeternum puniret: *Quia non iudicabit deus bis in idipsum*.³

Jerome: Indeed he speaks thus. God destroyed humankind in the flood, the Sodomites by fire, the Egyptians in the sea, the Israelites in the desert. Know therefore [God] punished them in this world [temporaliter] for their sins lest He should [have to] punish them for eternity. *For God will not punish [them] twice for the same thing.*

Peter Lombard goes on to qualify the extent of the mercy which seems implicit in this argument. According to him, only those Egyptians, Sodomites or other sinners who accept their affliction as a penance will be saved. However, since the members of Njáll’s household are Christian and know to seek mercy from the Christian God, Njáll’s teaching still corresponds to Peter Lombard’s more restrictive qualification of Jerome’s views. God will not punish the victims of the burning twice. As the burning unfolds, Flosi, who is essentially an honourable man, allows the women, the servants and the non-combatants out, so that Njáll’s comforting words

³ That is, liber IV, distinction 15, cap. 3. This ‘biblical’ verse is cited four times in this chapter.

are not tested to the utmost. However, the logic of his teaching is relevant to the narrative of the burning as a whole.

The text in question has a somewhat complicated history that perhaps needs some elucidation. This maxim is consistently identified as Scripture—specifically Nahum 1:9—in such standard authorities as the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard, the *Sic et non* of Peter Abelard,⁴ the *Decretals* of Gratian⁵ and in sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux⁶ as well as in a number of other medieval Latin Christian texts. However, the Vulgate version of the verse is significantly different:

bonus Dominus et comfortans in die tribulationis
et sciens sperantes in se
Et in diluvio praetereunte consummationem faciet loci eius
et inimicos eius persequentur tenebrae
quid cogitatis contra Dominum
consummationem ipse faciet
non consurget duplex tribulatio. (Nahum [Naum] 1:7–9)⁷

The lord is good and giveth strength in the day of trouble: and knoweth them that hope in him.

But with a flood that passeth by, he will make an utter end of the place thereof: and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

What do ye devise against the Lord? He will make an utter end: there shall not rise a double affliction.

The maxim in the form in which I have cited it, however, derives from the Septuagint—more specifically from the Old Latin translations of the Greek Septuagint—and was widely cited in various Medieval Latin texts.⁸

⁴ Peter Abailard (Petrus Abaelardus) 1976–77, 59–60.

⁵ Gratian (Gratianus), *Decretals*, *Decretum magistri Gratiani* (*Concordia discordantium canonum*): Pars: 2, causa: 23, quaest.: 5, canon: 6, textus, pag.: 931, linea: 21. Pars 2, 33, 3, de paenitentia, dist.:3, canon: 39, dictum post, pag.: 1224, linea: 24. The *Library of Latin* lists approximately fifty examples of the maxim *quia non iudicabit deus bis in idipsum* in slightly differing forms.

⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux (Bernardus Claraevallensis) 1957–98, ‘Sermones in circumcissione Domini’ 2, 5, vol 4, p. 281; ‘Sermones super psalmum ‘Qui habitat’ ¶ 12, vol. 4, p. 434.

⁷ The Latin is quoted from *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* 2007 by title, chapter and verse. The English is from the Douay–Rheims translation, available at <http://drbo.org>.

⁸ The Vulgate Bible was not defined as the canonical text of the Latin Roman Catholic church until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. However, because early authorities such as Ambrose and Augustine used the Old Latin Bible (the Vulgate was not available to them), Old Latin Biblical readings were widely used and accepted throughout the medieval period.

The Septuagint text is as follows:

τί λογίζεσθε ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον; συντέλειαν αὐτὸς ποιήσεται, οὐκ ἐκδικήσει δις ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐν θλίψει. (Nahum [Ναουμ] 1:9)⁹

Why do you calculate against the Lord? It is He that will make an end. He will not avenge twice added together with affliction! (Nahum [Naoum] 1:9)¹⁰

The modern translation in the Revised Standard version of the Bible is also significantly different from the Old Latin text that was current in the medieval period: ‘What do you plot against the Lord? He will make a full end; he will not take vengeance twice on his foes’ (Nahum 1:9). The translators seem to take the verse in a quite different sense from either Jerome or the translators of the Septuagint. If I understand these verses correctly, they seem to be saying that the Lord is so powerful that he will only need to strike once.

The *Vetus Latina* (the Old Latin Bible) is not, of course, a distinct and separate version like the Vulgate or the King James. It did indeed exist as the Latin Bible in the West which was current before the Vulgate became the dominant version, but no complete *Vetus Latina* text survives. The phrase *Vetus Latina* is thus a convenient way of referring to the thousands of Old Latin readings of the Bible preserved in the writings of such figures as Ambrose or Augustine who did not use the Vulgate translations of Jerome because that version of the Bible was too recent to have been available to them, and of other scholars who cited the *Vetus Latina* either deliberately or by accident. There was also a great deal of textual variation in the *Vetus Latina*, which was essentially a translation from the Greek New Testament and the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The Vulgate version of the Bible was not defined as the authoritative version of the Latin Bible until the sixteenth century and the Old Latin readings of the Bible were widely current, both because of the importance and currency of patristic authorities such as Augustine and because Old Latin texts were often cited in such standard medieval Christian Latin reference books as the ones I have cited.¹¹

A quotation from Gregory the Great illuminates the reception and use of the *Vetus Latina* in the Latin medieval world (Gregorius Magnus (Gregory the Great) 1979–85, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 143, 7):

⁹ The Septuagint text is quoted from *Septuaginta* 2006 by title, chapter and verse number. I wish to thank Dr. Danielle Cudmore, whose knowledge of Greek enabled me to quote the Septuagint in the original with assurance.

¹⁰ I cite Pietersma and Wright (2007) by title, chapter and verse number.

¹¹ For discussion of medieval Icelandic ecclesiastical culture see Orri Vésteinsson 2009, especially 52–92; Sigurdson 2016, 30–95; Gunnar Harðarson 2016, 35–73 and Bandlien 2016, 137–74.

Neque enim haec [regula Donatis] ab ullis interpretibus, in scripturae sacrae auctoritate seruata sunt. Ex qua nimirum quia nostra expositio oritur, dignum profecto est, ut quasi edita soboles speciem suae matris imitetur. Nouam uero translationem dissero; sed cum probationis causa me exigit, nunc nouam nunc ueterem per testimonia adsumo, ut, quia sedes apostolica cui deo auctore praesideo utraque utitur, mei quoque labor studii ex utraque fulciatur.

For neither are these [the rules of Donatus] observed by any interpreters [of scripture] in the authoritative text of holy Scripture. Now as our exposition takes its origin from this, it is plainly manifest that like a child it should imitate the likeness of its mother. I comment on the new translation [Jerome's Vulgate], but when a case to be proved compels me, I cite sometimes the new [translation] and sometimes the old [translation] as authoritative, for since the apostolic throne over which by the authority of God I preside uses both, the labour of my undertaking may have the support of both.¹²

Gregory's attitude towards textual variation in Scripture is direct and simple. His commentary on Job is based upon Jerome's Latin translation of that text and the Vulgate version of Scripture generally (which he discretely refers to as the 'new translation', but if it suits him, 'cum probationis causa me exigit', he cites and exposit the *Vetus Latina*). His attitude towards the problem of textual variation in Scripture seems rather casual to the modern reader, but it is important to remember that the Christian world as Gregory knew it was at least relatively unified and sharp differences in dogma between different confessional groups was not as prevalent as in the modern world. The various authorities who cited the Old Latin version of Nahum 1:9 were presumably aware that the Vulgate text differed. However, they thought the Old Latin text expressed truth which was consonant with Christian teaching and which illuminated various problems that concerned them. Jerome seems to accept the authority of this text as readily as the other scholars whom I have cited.

The maxim in its Latin form raises some issues: it is not hard to think of instances in hagiographic texts in which the persecutor or similar antagonist is punished both by an untimely and unpleasant death in this world and by damnation in the next. (For one striking example, see the account of the death of Herod in Ælfric's homily on the martyrdom of the innocents; Ælfric 1997, 217–23.) But despite these and related objections, the maxim that God will not punish the same crime twice was widely current throughout the medieval period. It was often cited in the context

¹² The translation is based on a version of the *Moralia in Iob* translated in the Fathers of the Church series (Gregory I 1844–50, I 11); I have rephrased it to provide a more literal version of this text.

of penitential discourse—the penitent should undertake the rigours of penance because the punishment of penance will suffice to soften the anger of God, since he does not punish the same offence twice.¹³ Indeed some legal historians think it may have influenced the evolving principle of ‘double jeopardy’ (Rudstein 2004, 4).

Njáls saga is a very rich work of literature, but one of the themes of the saga concerns theodicy in a large sense—how is it that God would allow a good and decent man to be burned to death in his house? One partial answer is that the sacrificial death of Njáll and his family atones for the crime of the death of Höskuldr and allows for the eventual reconciliation of decent and courageous men on both sides of the dispute. The biblical maxim with which I am concerned, ‘quia non iudicabit deus bis in idipsum’, is limited in scope, but it too concerns theodicy: how God seems to permit meaningless evil in the world of history and experience. Njáll’s comforting words and his appeal to the principle expressed in this maxim can perhaps be read as a first intimation of that larger answer which the history of the saga as a whole suggests. The suffering which comes upon Njáll, his sons and Bergþóra suffices to answer the crime of the killing of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði, and the miraculous preservation of Njáll’s body is a public and positive proof that Njáll made the right choice in deliberately calling his sons, Kári and the fighting men of the household into the house, even though he foresaw the consequences of that decision.

Njáll’s choice in this instance has always been a kind of conundrum for readers and critics of *Njáls saga*. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson has written (1971, 173–75):

This is one of the weightiest and most perplexing questions which arise in the reader of *Njála*, and it is necessary to try to disentangle the matter as best we can . . . It must have been obvious to Njáll that Skarphéðinn was right. But many years ago he had gained a mysterious insight into the manner of his death . . . After the slaying of Þráinn he wanted to make amends for Þráinn’s death and not merely in a legal sense: he wanted to heal the wounds and to eradicate the evil consequences of the killing by means of good works. The same desire awakened in him after the abhorrent crime committed by his sons in the slaying of Höskuldr: but this desire has a stronger religious significance than the other one; it is clearly a matter of penance: ‘God is merciful and he will not let us burn in this world and the next.’ The torment which they willingly take on themselves will efface their guilt and redeem them from punishment in the world to come.

¹³ See for example the Old English *Judgment Day* II, lines 87–91, in Dobbie 1942, 60.

While I concur with this interpretation in part, I think it important to note that in addition to the logic of accepting suffering to expiate sin, there are also larger political and legal issues that might have motivated Njáll. When the Njálssynir attack and kill Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði, their act is not only cruel, immoral and utterly unjustified, it is profoundly self-destructive. That killing will inevitably lead to their death; Hǫskuldr was widely loved and respected as a human being, very well connected socially, and after the death of his father, his mother has demanded that Ketill of Mörk make very specific commitments to protect Hǫskuldr when he was alive and avenge him if he were killed. Flosi Þórðarson, who is both personally strong and brave and a shrewd and determined chieftain, is similarly committed. The Njálssynir are great warriors, and if Flosi had turned away from the attack on Bergþórshváll without burning the house, they could have exacted a very high toll on Flosi and his supporters, as well as the Sigfússynir and theirs, but the sheer weight of numbers and the general public sense that the killing of Hǫskuldr was an outrage means that sooner or later they would all have been killed. This is what Valgarðr inn grái prophesies. Mörðr concurs with this prophecy. While there are many reasons for being repelled by these characters, their political skills and instincts are impeccable.

The choice that Njáll faces is not whether to allow his sons to live or sacrifice them in the burning. They are doomed to die in either case, but what is not certain is how they will die. By his accepting death in the burning, not only is the cruel death of Hǫskuldr expiated, but the possibility of a kind of civil war breaking out in Iceland is averted. Flosi brings a hundred men to the attack at Bergþórshváll; feud is on the verge of becoming war, and indeed after the burning, battle breaks out at the Alþing, a hallowed site where parties are supposed to make peace without recourse to deadly violence. Njáll's decision to accept death for himself and his sons at least allows for the possibility of eventual peace and reconciliation. And we may assume (since Njáll is *forspá*) that he is not simply balancing various political possibilities and making a best guess, but rather that at this point he knows what is necessary for the eventual recovery of peace and good order.

Njáll is thus depicted, in my judgment, not simply as a good Christian accepting suffering as penance (although he is accepting a cruel death in part to expiate sin); he is also an Icelandic man of law concerned for the health of the polity as a whole. If we assume that *Njáls saga* was written late in the thirteenth century, then the author of the saga could have experienced as a young man the violence of the civil wars that resulted in Norwegian hegemony over Iceland. Even if he were too young to have

experienced these wars directly, he could have known people of his parents' generation who directly experienced them. In either case, the horror of general war, of a conflict which extended beyond the limits of a family feud, would have been very immediate to him. In writing the story of Njáll, whom we may believe was remembered as a man of peace, he chose to depict him as a Christian who could paraphrase (Old Latin) Scripture and was concerned both about the spiritual state of his sons and the health and welfare of the polity.

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USELESS KNOWLEDGE? THE PARADOX OF *ALVÍSSMÁL*

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ALVÍSSMÁL, THE LAST POEM in the ‘mythological’ section of the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*, is a puzzling and paradoxical work (N–K, 124–29; *Eddukvæði*, I 438–43). In some ways it looks like an Odinic wisdom contest, like *Vaffbrúðnismál* (N–K, 45–55; *Eddukvæði*, I 356–66; Machan 2008) or the verses within *Heiðreks saga* known as *Gátur Gestumblinda* ‘The Riddles of Gestumblindi’ (*Hervarar saga* 36–51), but its divine protagonist is not Óðinn but Þórr, who is not usually notable for his wisdom, while his opponent is not a giant or a wicked king, but a dwarf. Some critics have seen little or no connection between its narrative framework, in which the dwarf is seeking Þórr’s permission for his marriage, and the knowledge contained in his answers to the questions that Þórr puts to him; Lennart Moberg’s comment is an example (Moberg 1973, 299):

It (the narrative framework) plays a subsidiary part in the poem and is really only an excuse for communicating learning of a mythological-lexicographical nature—evidently the real object of the poem.

But if the main intention of this poet (or perhaps these poets) was to communicate or display mythological and poetic information, the narrative framework seems to undermine that object by suggesting that learning the names given to natural and other phenomena by the various mythological races is not merely a waste of time, but actively damaging to anyone who engages in it: it is precisely the comprehensive scale of the dwarf’s knowledge that proves to be his undoing. In the last stanza, Þórr reveals that *Alvíss* has been tricked, and the implication seems to be that the dwarf will be or has already been turned to stone by the rising sun¹ as a direct result of his indulgence in an overwhelming flow of quasi-mythological information. Seen in this way, the poem seems to present mythological learning as the antithesis of common sense.

¹ The familiar dwarf-name *Dvalinn* (probably ‘the Delayed One’, see e.g. *Völuspá* 11,4 and 14,2 (N–K 3–4; *Eddukvæði*, I 294 (K), 309–10 (H) and 317 (*SnE*)); *Hávamál* 143,3 (N–K 41; *Eddukvæði*, I 351); *Fáfnismál* 13,6 (N–K 182; *Eddukvæði*, II 305) and found three times in kennings for ‘poetry’, see *LP* 91) may refer to a similar story. For other figures (a giantess, male or female trolls) who are turned to stone by the rising sun, see Acker 2002, 218–19.

In recent years three academic studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the poem in ways that Moberg could not have anticipated. Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, 111–15) has analysed it as an example of what she calls ‘negative reciprocity’, whereby male Æsir were permitted sexual relations with females of any origin, but did not allow any other race, even the Vanir, to marry or have sexual relations with goddesses; in her view, Alvíss is seeking to marry Þórr’s daughter Þrúðr,² and the marriage rules imposed by the Æsir demand that he must be prevented from doing so. Paul Acker (2002) examines the poem in the light of other conventions about dwarfs, while John Lindow (2007) suggests that the poem has appropriated the genre of the wisdom contest to a new use, in which the dwarf, who may be either allied to the gods or opposed to them, takes over the role usually occupied by Óðinn, and the questions asked by Þórr are linked by a subtle thread of implicit mythological allusions. All these studies are useful, but in this paper I want, in the light of the problem with which I began, to ask a rather different question: how would *Alvíssmál* have been understood by its first audience, who had never heard it before, did not know what to expect from either the narrative framework or the questions and answers, and had to work out its meaning gradually as they went along? I shall suggest that they would have found it ambiguous in some important respects, and that this ambiguity makes up a significant part of the meaning of the poem.

The Opening Framework (stt. 1–8)

Such an audience might know in advance that there would be two performing voices, but they would not know what characters they would represent, where their encounter was supposed to be taking place, or what the narrative situation would be. The first voice begins arrogantly (*Alvíssmál* 1):

‘Becci breiða nú scal brúðr með mér,
 heim í sinni snúaz;
 hratað um mægi mun hveriom þiccia;
 heima scalat hvíld nema.’

² In *Eddukvæði* (I 260) Jónas and Vésteinn also suggest that the object of Alvíss’s desire is probably Þórr’s daughter Þrúðr (‘Strength’), citing the designations of him as *þrúðugr áss* (*Prymskviða* 17,2) and *þrúðvaldr goða* (*Hárbarðsljóð* 9,7); but while Þrúðr was clearly thought of as Þórr’s daughter, the only surviving myth in which she appears concerns her abduction by the giant Hrungnir, who is called *Þrúðar þjófr* in Bragi Boddason, *Ragnarsdrápa* 1,3–4 (*Skj.*, IB 1).

‘Now the bride must set off home with me at once in order to spread the bench; it will seem to everyone that the marriage has been hurried; at home rest will not be taken (?away).’³

The speaker seems to be insisting that, contrary to the usual custom, the wedding feast must be held at *his* home, not the bride’s, and that it must take place at once. The last line is ambiguous: *heimr* probably has the same meaning in line 6 as in line 3, and thus refers to the speaker’s own home, but the line might still mean either ‘at (my) home no one will deprive (us) of rest’, or, with a sexual implication, ‘at (my) home (we) shall not take any rest’. There is a parallel to the situation in this stanza in the speech of the giant Prymr in *Prymskviða* 22 (N–K 114; *Eddukvæði*, I 425):

Þá qvað þat Prymr, þursa dróttinn:
 ‘Standit up, iṭtnar, oc stráið becci!
 nú færið mér Freyio at qván,
 Niarðar dóttur, ór Nóatúnom!’

Then Prymr lord of ogres said this: ‘Stand up, giants, and strew the bench! Now bring me Freyja as my wife, Njörðr’s daughter from Nóatún!’

The poem’s first audience would probably assume at this point that the speaker is an arrogant giant who is trying to obtain a goddess bride and insists on his own superior position by demanding that the marriage feast should be held at his own home, as also happens in *Prymskviða*.

The second speaker reinforces this impression by likening the first to an ogre, but as he asks his identity he first adds the suggestion that the first speaker consorts with the dead (*Alvíssmál* 2):

‘Hvat er þat fira, hví ertu svá fṛl um nasar,
 vartu í nótt með ná?
 þursa líki þicci mér á þér vera,
 ertattu til brúðar borinn.’

‘What man is that? Why are you thus pale in the face? Did you spend last night with a corpse? It seems to me that you have the body of an ogre—you’re not born for a bride.’

The question resembles the giant’s response to an arrogant greeting in *Vafþrúðnismál* 7,1–3 (N–K 46; *Eddukvæði*, I 357):

‘Hvat er þat manna, er í mínom sal
 verpomc orði á?’

‘What man is that, who in my hall attacks me with words?’⁴

³ All translations in this paper are mine.

⁴ For this translation, see Ruggerini 1994, 164.

The first speaker then names himself as *Alvíss* and explains that his home is under a stone, but does not say who his father is or what kind of being he is. Where he lives may suggest that he is a dwarf, but the dead also ‘live’ under the earth, and giants and other mythological beings might have their homes in rocks or deposit their treasure there.⁵ And *Alvíss* ‘All-knowing’ looks more like a giant-name than that of a dwarf: we may compare it with *Fjolsviðr* ‘Wise in many things’, the hero’s giant opponent in *Fjolsvinnsmál*,⁶ and perhaps with *Alsviðr* ‘All-wise’, who according to the paper manuscripts of *Hávamál* 143,4 is the expert on runes among the giants (though the Codex Regius reads *Ásviðr*, see N–K 41). However, the closest parallel is again with *Vafþrúðnismál*, where the giant is repeatedly called *alsviðr* ‘all-wise’ (stt. 6,6 and 34,6), *inn alsvinnr/alsvinni iqtunn* ‘the all-wise giant’ (stt. 5,3 and 42,7) or *inn fróði iqtunn* ‘the learned giant’ (st. 20,6 and 30,6); the last phrase is also applied to the primeval giant *Ymir* at st. 33,5. Acker (2002, 220) suggests another possible link with *Vafþrúðnismál* here: perhaps the dwarf is, like *Óðinn*, adopting a descriptive alias rather than giving his true name. At all events, even when he hints at his dwarf nature, there are also strong suggestions that *Alvíss* is associated with giants and/or the dead.

There is a problem of interpretation in the second half of st. 3:

‘vagna verz ec em á vit kominn,
bregði engi fōsto heiti fira!’

Vagna verz may contain either the masculine noun *verr* ‘man’ or the neuter noun *ver* ‘sea’ (see *LP* 608, 605), so that ll. 4–5 could be translated either ‘I have come to visit the wagon-man (i.e. *Pórr*)’ or ‘I have come to visit the sea of wagons (i.e. the land, the surface of the earth, as opposed to the speaker’s usual underground dwelling)’. Both would make sense, though *Alvíss* does not yet know that he is speaking to *Pórr*, and the evidence for *Pórr* as ‘wagon-man’ (as opposed to ‘lord of goats’) is not very strong; the second interpretation may therefore be preferable.⁷ But the last line of

⁵ See e.g. the runic graffito *Hennøy III* (Sogn og Fjordane, *Niy* no. 422, IV 229–33), which claims that people came from giant-land with a shipload of gold, which is inside the rock (see McKinnell, Simek and Düwel 2004, 130–31); and cf. also the *ármaðr* or *spámaðr* who lives with his family inside a rock on *Koðrán* Eilífsson’s farm at *Giljá* in *Kristni saga* ch. 2 and *Porvalds þáttur víðfjorla I* ch. 3 (*Biskupa sögur I* 2003, 7–8 and 62–68).

⁶ *Fjolsvinnsmál* 4 (*Eddukvæði*, II 442).

⁷ It is implied in *Þrymskviða* 21 that *Pórr* travels to his supposed ‘marriage’ to *Þrymr* in a wagon pulled by goats, but the only explicit description I have found of a statue of *Pórr* in a wagon with two wooden goats is in ch. 268 of the *Flateyjarbók*

the stanza: ‘let no one break a firm promise of men’ implies that *Alvíss* has been promised the bride, though who these men are remains unclear. The second speaker immediately retorts that he will break the promise (*Alvíssmál* 4):

‘Ec mun bregða, þvíat ec brúðar á
flest um ráð sem faðir;
varca ec heima, þá er þér heitið var,
at sá einn er *giǫf er* með goðom.’

‘I will break it (the promise), because I have the biggest say in the bride’s marriage, like a father; I, who among the gods am the only giver (?), wasn’t at home (here) when the promise was made to you.’

In the last line, *giǫf er* is a minor emendation of MS *giafer*, but not a completely satisfactory one, since the feminine noun *giǫf* normally means ‘gift’; perhaps it might be better to emend to *giafi er* ‘is the giver’, but at all events, the speaker refers to himself as one of the gods.⁸ However, the first half of the stanza conceals a more important difficulty: ll. 2–3 are often taken to mean ‘because I have the most important voice in the bride’s match, being her father’ (as for example in *LP* 489, although no comparable usages are listed there), but I can find no other examples in Eddic verse where *sem* means ‘in the role of’, whereas there are many contexts where it is followed by a noun and means ‘like (something or someone else)’, including three involving family relationships.⁹ There is a similar paucity of evidence in

text of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (*Flateyjarbók* 1944–45, I 354–55), in an episode which also appears in ch. 168 of the same saga in *AM* 61 fol. (ed. Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000, I 378–79), and in *Óláfs saga Odds Snorrasonar* (ch. 46 in the S-Version, ch. 56 in the A-Version, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, 280) and ch. 69 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in Heimskringla* (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 317); however, the *Flateyjarbók* version is the only one that mentions a wagon.

⁸ For the masculine noun *gjafi* ‘giver’, see Gull-Ásu Þórðr 2,6 (*Skj.*, I B 422) and the compounds *auðgjafi*, *líðgjafi*, *lífgjafi*, *ráðgjafi*, *verðgjafi*.

⁹ See e.g. *Hávamál* 78,5 (N–K, 29; *Eddukvæði*, I 338), *Skírnismál* 31,6 (N–K, 75; *Eddukvæði*, I 386), *Hárbarðsljóð* 35,2 (N–K, 84; *Eddukvæði*, I 395), *Lokasenna* 24,3 (N–K, 101; *Eddukvæði*, I 413), *Guðrúnarkviða I* 1,8 (N–K, 202; *Eddukvæði*, II 329), *Hamðismál* 30,4 (N–K, 273; *Eddukvæði*, II 413), *Rígspula* 34,8 (N–K, 285; *Eddukvæði*, I 455 (st. 32)). For a full list of occurrences of *sem* in Eddic verse, see Kellogg 1988 and *LP*. For other instances where *sem* refers to comparison with family relationships, see *Gripisspá* 41,4 (N–K, 170; *Eddukvæði*, II 293): *sem þín móðir sé* ‘as if she were your mother’; *Helreið Brynhildar* 12,3–4 (N–K, 221; *Eddukvæði*, II 351): *sem hann minn bróðir um borinn væri* ‘as if he had been born my brother’; *Oðdrúnargrátr* 11,7–8 (N–K, 236; *Eddukvæði*, II 367 (st. 15)): *sem við bræðrom tveim of bornar værim* ‘as if we had been born to two brothers’.

prose: the only possible parallel cited by Fritzner (III 205) is in ch. 62 of *Karlamagnus saga* (ed. Unger, 221) where the emperor places a body of knights under the command of Rollant with the words ‘*at þeir veiti þér allan heiðr sem sínum formanni*’ ‘so that they will pay you all respect as (if) to their leader’, but even here the sense ‘as if’ seems more likely than ‘in your function as’, since Charlemagne clearly does not intend Rollant to replace him as commander, but only to act on his behalf.

This suggests that a better translation of *Alvíssmál* 4,2–3 might be ‘because I have the most important voice in the bride’s match, like a father’, which would mean that the prospective bride is probably *not* the speaker’s daughter. Indeed, she need not be a goddess at all: she is referred to as *brúðr* ‘bride’ or ‘young woman’ (stt. 1,2 and 4,2), *fljóð it fagrglói* ‘the beautifully shining lady’ (5,3), *ip unga man* ‘the young girl’ (6,5), *þat ip miallhvíta man* ‘that flour-white girl’ (7,6) and *mey* ‘maiden’ (8,1), all of which might be applied either to a goddess or to a human woman. And the suggestion that Þórr may be protecting a human family or community, as he claims to have done, for example, in ch. 51 of the S-Version of Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*,¹⁰ may be helpful to the interpretation of the rest of the poem, as I shall try to show.

One might argue against this that the second speaker is trying to assert his familial rights without revealing who he is, though it is hard to see why he should wish to conceal his identity. If that is his motivation, he is remarkably unsuccessful: *Alvíss* asks who this man is who thinks he is involved in the match, and adds the disparaging comment (*Alvíssmál* 5,4–6):

‘fiarrafleina þic muno fáir kunna,
hverr hefir þic baugom borit?’

‘few people will acknowledge you, you vagrant¹¹—who has exalted you with rings?’

The implication seems to be that the second speaker looks like a vagabond and is unlikely to have the financial resources to have any significant influence. For the poem’s first audiences, this may have been a further clue to the identity of the second speaker (who is of course Þórr), for a beggarly

¹⁰ Ólafur Halldórsson, ed., 2006, 288–90, corresponding to ch. 61 in the (probably later) A-Version; for a translation of the A-Version, see Oddr Snorrason 2003, 108–09.

¹¹ Ilona Priebe has pointed out (2001 for 1997, 504) that the same word appears (in the form *fiarrafleina*) in Magnús Hákonarson’s *Landslog* (*Ngl*, II 154), where its meaning is unambiguously ‘vagrant’.

appearance seems to have been one of his traditional characteristics, at least during his journeys; as the disguised Óðinn remarks in *Hárbarðsljóð* 6 (N–K 79; *Eddukvæði*, I 390):

‘Peygi er, sem þú þríu bú góð eigir;
berbeinn þú stendr, ok hefir brautinga gervi,
þatki, at þú hafir bræcr þínar.’

‘But it doesn’t look as if you own three good farms: you stand bare-legged, and are dressed like a beggar—you haven’t even got your trousers.’

The accusation that he looks like a vagrant immediately provokes Þórr into revealing his identity (st. 6,4–6) before he repeats that he does not give his consent to the match. Whether the bride is a human woman or a goddess, this suggests that he is very easily provoked and much less subtle than his opponent.

Alvíss’s reaction is interesting. Not only does he respond more respectfully now that he knows who he is talking to, but he may even imply that obtaining Þórr’s agreement is more important to him than actually getting the bride he wants (*Alvíssmál* 7):

‘Sáttir þínar er ec vil snemma hafa
oc þat giaforð geta;
eiga vilia, heldr enn án vera,
þat iþ miallhvíta man.’

‘I want to have your agreement quickly, and obtain that marriage; I would rather marry the flour-white girl than be without her.’

If he really is more concerned to gain a family relationship with the gods than with the girl herself, that might imply that she is, if not Þórr’s daughter, then at least one of the Ásynjur. But it is equally possible that Alvíss simply recognises that Þórr’s strength and notoriously quick temper make it important to try to obtain his good will, whoever the potential bride may be, and the second half of *Alvíssmál* 7 might alternatively (and perhaps more probably) be read as a poetic understatement of Alvíss’s intense desire, in which case it implies nothing about who the potential bride may be.

Of course Þórr is not really going to give his consent, but Alvíss still has one advantage, namely that he has received a promise, and it will be disgraceful if that promise is flatly broken. Þórr therefore issues a challenge: if Alvíss is as knowledgeable as his name implies, he will surely be able to answer all the questions to which Þórr supposedly wants to know the answers, so he can hardly refuse this as a condition for the marriage. Any audience which knew Þórr’s traditional character would at least suspect

that this is either a delaying tactic or a trick, since he is not normally associated with esoteric wisdom, as Óðinn is.

The conclusion to the opening framework thus leaves the audience with a number of clues for the interpretation of what follows:

1. Although Alvíss is defined by Þórr as a dwarf from st. 9 onwards, he has appeared in the opening section in terms that suggest affinities with giants and with the dead. John Lindow (2007) has pointed out that dwarfs are as often the allies of the gods as their foes, but the opening of this poem casts him as Þórr's opponent.

2. The woman Alvíss wants to marry is probably not Þórr's daughter; whether she is a goddess or simply a woman whose family have called on Þórr for protection remains uncertain. A consequence of this is that we do not know whether the confrontation is taking place somewhere in Ásgarðr or in a human hall akin to the one in which we may suppose that the poem was first performed; the thought that the action might be set 'in a place just like this' would add considerably to the vividness and immediacy of the performance.

3. There have already been some strong echoes of *Vafþrúðnismál*, but they have been used in an inverted way, since it is Alvíss, who corresponds to the giant in the wisdom contest, who is the intruder, and possibly also the one who adopts an alias—the roles usually filled by Óðinn. This suggests the possibility that this will not be a wisdom contest poem but a parody of one.

4. Þórr proposes a contest whose wisdom content is clearly not what really interests him. This rather suggests the opposite of Moberg's view of the poem: the poet may be taking the opportunity to show off his poetic skill, but from the viewpoint of the dramatic action it is the lists of names used by the various mythological races that are secondary, and a mere device to delay and frustrate the dwarf's claim to the marriage.

The Questions and Answers (stt. 9–34)

The questions and answers that follow in the second section of the poem (stt. 9–34) contain further echoes of *Vafþrúðnismál*, but it is Þórr who now takes the 'Odinic' role of main questioner, while Alvíss, like the 'all-wise giant' Vafþrúðnir, is the one who replies. In the four preliminary questions that Vafþrúðnir asks Óðinn, he is only concerned with asking the names of things—the horses that pull the sun and moon (*Vafþrúðnismál* 11, 13), the river that divides the territory of giants from that of the gods

(*Vafþrúðnismál* 15) and the field where Surtr and the gods will meet in battle (*Vafþrúðnismál* 17), so it seems appropriate for Þórr to ask the giant-like *Alvíss* the same kind of question. But the subject matter of Þórr's four opening questions, as opposed to their form, follows that of the first two questions that Óðinn asks *Vafþrúðnir*: he asks the names by which the different races call the earth (*Alvíssmál* 9), the sky (*Alvíssmál* 11), the moon (*Alvíssmál* 13) and the sun (*Alvíssmál* 15); this corresponds to Óðinn asking where earth and sky came from (*Vafþrúðnismál* 20) and then where sun and moon came from (*Vafþrúðnismál* 22).

After that, it is not possible for the poet of *Alvíssmál* to go on following *Vafþrúðnismál* exactly, because Óðinn's third question is about the origins of day and night—and asking about day would risk giving away the means by which Þórr will triumph at the end of the poem. However, he does ask about night later on, in *Alvíssmál* 29, in a phrase that echoes *Vafþrúðnismál* 25:

‘hvé sú nótt heitir, in Nǫrvi kenda,
 heimi hveriom í.’
 (*Alvíssmál* 29,4–6)

‘what night is called, who is attached to (i.e. is daughter of) *Nǫrr*, in every world.’

‘enn Nótt var Nǫrvi borin;’
 (*Vafþrúðnismál* 25,3)

‘but Night was born to *Nǫrr*.’

Þórr's sixth question in *Alvíssmál*, on the names given to the wind, is also reminiscent of Óðinn's ninth question in *Vafþrúðnismál*:

‘hvé sá vindr heitir, er víðast ferr,
 heimi hveriom í.’
 (*Alvíssmál* 19,4–6)

‘what the wind is called, that travels most widely, in every world.’

‘hvaðan vindr um kømr, svá at ferr vág yfir;’
 (*Vafþrúðnismál* 36,4–5)

‘where wind comes from, so that it travels over the sea;’

These correspondences suggest that the poet of *Alvíssmál* was using *Vafþrúðnismál* or a poem very like it, even though he arrives at a very different conclusion.

However, once the sequence of questions established by his source can no longer be followed, the poet seems for the most part to follow an order

governed by commonsense association and contrast. The questions about the names of the heavenly bodies are followed by one about the clouds that often obscure them (*Alvíssmál* 17), then about the wind that drives those clouds (*Alvíssmál* 19), the calm that is the opposite of wind (*Alvíssmál* 21) and the sea which is governed by wind or calm (*Alvíssmál* 23). The link to the next question, about fire (*Alvíssmál* 25), is less obvious, but fire and water are probably to be taken as opposites (as they also seem, for example, to be complementary opposites in many of the deaths or funerals of legendary kings in *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga*),¹² and this is followed by a question about wood, which can be destroyed by fire (*Alvíssmál* 27). John Lindow (2007, 298) may be right in supposing that the fate of Yggdrasill at Ragnarøk was in the poet's mind here; although it is not explicit, the fact that the giants call woodland *eldi* 'firewood' may imply it. The last two questions, about grain and ale (*Alvíssmál* 31 and 33), are obviously connected, since the one is the main source material for the other.

The one question which seriously disrupts this logical sequence is the eleventh, about the names given to Night (*Alvíssmál* 29). It may be, as Klingenberg (1967) has suggested, that this was originally the thirteenth and final question, implicitly paired with a fourteenth question about day which is never actually asked because day arrives and ends the contest; but this is not a wholly satisfactory solution, partly because it would involve recreating the poem in a form that we would subjectively like it to have, and partly because moving the question about night to the end would still leave an unexplained transition from a question about woodland to one about grain. For these reasons, I prefer Lindow's suggestion that we move at this point back into the context of the frame-story, namely the hall, human or divine, in which the contest is taking place (Lindow 2007, 298). It is a hall where people are eating and drinking at night—hence the last three questions—though the fact that the last two questions are about grain and ale rather than meat and wine suggests a rather humble human setting rather than an idealised hall in Ásgarðr, or at least that an evening among the gods is being visualised in terms of the everyday fare on an Icelandic farm.

There is also a prevailing common structure within most of the stanzas in which Alvíss replies to Þórr's questions. In the first half of the stanza the order is usually:

¹² See e.g. Vanlandi (*Ynglingatal* 3, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 13); Dómarr (*Ynglingatal* 6, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 16); Agni (*Ynglingatal* 10, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 19). See *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51, I 28–29, 32–33 and 37–39; *Skj.*, I B 7–9. See also McKinnell 2005, 71–72.

1. Men (all thirteen stanzas);
2. Gods (ten stanzas) or the probably synonymous *Æsir* (three stanzas);
3. Vanir (eight stanzas) or the possibly synonymous *ginnreginn* (two stanzas).¹³

With very few exceptions, therefore, the first half-stanza positions are given to men (who come first) and their allies. The second half of each stanza is largely devoted to the enemies of men and gods:

4. Giants (all thirteen stanzas);
5. Elves (ten stanzas),¹⁴ dwarfs (two stanzas), inhabitants of Hel (one stanza);
6. Dwarfs (four stanzas), inhabitants of Hel (four stanzas), elves (one stanza), *Suttungs synir* (one stanza).¹⁵

The second half-stanza is therefore consistently headed by giants, with elves, dwarfs and the inhabitants of Hel usually seen as their allies.¹⁶

¹³ The three exceptional uses of l. 3 are st. 14,3, where those in Hel call the moon *hverfandi hvél* ‘turning wheel’; st. 16,3, where dwarfs call the sun *Dvalins leica* ‘Dvalin’s plaything’; and st. 28,3, where *halir* ‘noblemen’ call wood *hlíðþang* ‘hill seaweed’; in the second of these, it seems likely that ll. 3 and 6 have become transposed, in which case l. 3 would originally have been occupied by *ása synir* ‘sons of Æsir’ and l. 6 by dwarfs.

¹⁴ Hall 2007, 37 notes that *Alvíssmál* is exceptional among Old Norse sources in grouping *alfar* with *jǫtnar* rather than with *Æsir*, though this would (he thinks coincidentally) be less surprising in Old English (cf. e.g. *Beowulf* 112, see Fulk, Bjork and Niles 2008, 6). Perhaps the presence of elves among the opponents of human beings may reflect folklore rather than mythology.

¹⁵ The three uses of l. 6 which do not fit this pattern are st. 10,6, where the mysterious *uppreginn* ‘higher gods’ (?) rather superciliously refer to earth as *aur* ‘mud’; st. 16,6, where the *ása synir* call the sun *alscír* ‘all bright’, but where, if ll. 3 and 6 have been transposed, the line would originally have been filled by the dwarfs; and st. 28,6, where the Vanir, who have been displaced from l. 3 by *halir*, call wood *vǫnd* ‘wand’.

¹⁶ There are six ‘reply’ stanzas in which the usual order is not exactly followed, two of which can be explained by the need to avoid placing synonymous mythical races next to one another (gods and *ása synir* in st. 16, *iǫtnar* and *Suttungs synir* in st. 34). On the same principle, *halir* appear at 28,3, which makes it necessary to move the Vanir-name to 28,6. In two stanzas (14 and 26) the normal order is disrupted by the fact that there are both dwarf- and Hel-names, which cannot both occupy their normal position in l. 6. St. 10 follows the usual order until the last line, where instead of the usual nether-world name (from the dwarfs or Hel) there

It may seem surprising that men consistently precede gods in this pattern, and also that in asking the questions, Þórr usually uses the name associated with men, not that of the gods.¹⁷ More remarkably, Þórr uses a descriptive phrase in each question, and most of these are also human-rather than god-centred. The one applied to the sky, *erakendi* (*Alvíssmál* 11,5) is incomprehensible and almost certainly a scribal error, but of the other twelve, eight refer specifically to how *men* use or experience the phenomenon concerned:

Earth: *er liggr fyr alda sonom* ‘which lies before the sons of men’ (*Alvíssmál* 9,5);

Moon: *er menn síá* ‘which men see’ (*Alvíssmál* 13,5);

Sun: *er síá alda synir* ‘which the sons of men see’ (*Alvíssmál* 15,5);

Sea: *er menn róá* ‘which men row on’ (*Alvíssmál* 23,5);

Fire: *er brenn fyr alda sonom* ‘which burns for the sons of men’ (*Alvíssmál* 25,5);

Wood: *er vex fyr alda sonom* ‘which grows for the sons of men’ (*Alvíssmál* 27,5);

Grain: *er sá alda synir* ‘which the sons of men sow’ (*Alvíssmál* 31,5);

Ale: *er drecca alda synir* ‘which the sons of men drink’ (*Alvíssmál* 33,5).

A group of three phrases (in questions 5–7) describe some of the forces of nature that human beings experience:

Clouds: *er scúrom blandaz* ‘which are mingled with showers’ (*Alvíssmál* 17,5);

Wind: *er víðast ferr* ‘which travels very widely’ (*Alvíssmál* 19,5);

Calm: *er liggia scal* ‘which must lie still’ (*Alvíssmál* 21,5).

Only one contains a mythological reference, when night is said to be daughter of Nǫrr (*Alvíssmál* 29,5), and that is almost certainly an echo of *Vafþrúðnismál* 25,3 (see above). It therefore seems that in this poem Þórr is primarily a spokesman for human beings rather than gods.

is the opposite, *uppreginn*; however, it is strange that this interesting reversal appears at the beginning of the contest, before the usual order has been established.

¹⁷ There are two exceptions, but he does not use the term attributed to the gods in either of them: in st. 23 he uses *marr*, supposedly the dwarfs’ word for ‘sea’, and in st. 31 he calls grain *sáð*, a term not attributed to any of the races in *Alvíss*’s reply.

A similar paucity of mythological references can also be seen in *Alvíss's* replies: of the seventy-eight names he gives, only a handful contain any mythological references, and hardly any of them are explicit. Implicit allusions must to a large extent remain a matter of personal intuition; those which may in my view refer to myths are:

1. *scyndi* 'the hurrying one', the giants' name for the moon (*Alvíssmál* 14,4), which probably alludes to the myth that the sun and moon are being pursued by wolves that will eventually swallow them.¹⁸

2. *Dvalins leica* 'the Delayed One's playfellow or toy', the dwarfs' name for the sun (*Alvíssmál* 16,3), looks like an ironic reference to a myth resembling the conclusion of *Alvíssmál* itself. This may suggest that at this early stage of the contest *Alvíss* is aware of the danger the sun poses to him, or at least to dwarfs in general, but if so, he evidently forgets about it as he becomes more absorbed in relating his knowledge.

3. *hiálm huliz* 'helmet of the hidden one' or 'helmet of invisibility', the name used for clouds by the inhabitants of *Hel* (*Alvíssmál* 18,6), might possibly contain the idea that *Ymir's* skull (the sky, see *Vafþrúðnismál* 21,4) is hidden by the clouds as a helmet hides a warrior's head; but it may be merely a literal visualisation of a common folktale motif (see e.g. *Sturla Þórðarson, Hákonarkviða* 3,3, where Christ hides *Hákon's* army in a *huliðshjálmr*;¹⁹ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 63 in *Heimskringla*, where it is a magically-induced fog;²⁰ and *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 10, where the witch *Gríma* makes her thrall *Kolbákr* invisible to those who are searching her house for him).²¹

4. *sílægja* 'always getting lower', the gods' name for the sea (*Alvíssmál* 24,2), could refer to the story of how *Pórr* caused the ebbing tides by trying to empty a drinking horn during his visit to *Útgardaloki* (see *Gylfaginning* ch. 47).²²

5. *eldi* 'firewood', the name given to wood by the giants (*Alvíssmál* 28,4) may imply the myth of *Yggdrasill* being burned at *Ragnarøk* (see above).

6. *draumniqrun* 'dream goddess', the dwarfs' name for night (*Alvíssmál* 30,6) seems to demand a mythological interpretation, but we have no

¹⁸ See *Gylfaginning* ch. 12 (Snorri Sturluson 1982, 14; Snorri Sturluson 1987, 14–15).

¹⁹ *Skj.*, II B 119; see also Priebe 2001 for 1997, 509.

²⁰ Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 312.

²¹ *Vestfirðinga sögur* 1943, 167.

²² Snorri Sturluson 1982, 43; Snorri Sturluson 1987, 43.

surviving source in which Nótt is regarded as a goddess. However, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 10 Snorri says that her third husband, Dellíng (‘dawn’?, the father of Dagr ‘day’) was one of the Æsir,²³ so it is possible that she could be regarded as a goddess because, like Jörð and Rindr, she was the mother of a god.²⁴ Alternatively, the idea may be that the dwarfs regard her as a goddess because she is the personification of darkness, on which they depend.

7. *hreinalög* ‘pure liquid’ is said to be the name given to ale by the giants (*Alvíssmál* 34,4), and in the same stanza, *Suttungs synir* ‘Suttungr’s sons’, presumably also giants, are said to call it *sumbl* ‘feast’ (*Alvíssmál* 34,6). As this is the last stanza of the wisdom contest, it seems probable that both of these, and particularly the second, refer to the mead of poetry that was stolen from Suttungr and his daughter Gunnlóð by Óðinn,²⁵ and thus indirectly to this poem itself.

Another surprise about the lists of names is how few of them are attributed to dwarfs, considering that the informant is a dwarf himself—only seven in all, of which four (and perhaps originally five)²⁶ are in line 6, as far as possible from the names attributed to human beings. This is similar to the pattern of names attributed to the inhabitants of Hel (a total of six, of which four are in line 6), and the statement in st. 2 that Alvíss looks as if he had spent the night with a corpse may suggest that the poet and his audience associated dwarfs with the dead—both, after all, are types of being who exist underground, and a number of surviving dwarf-names suggest links with the dead, or with (presumably dead) ancestors.²⁷ Not only does the verse structure tend to draw a contrast between men and gods on one side and giants and their allies on the other, but both dwarfs and the dead seem to be minor ‘others’ among the opponents of

²³ Snorri Sturluson 1982, 13; Snorri Sturluson 1987, 14.

²⁴ Cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 36 (Snorri Sturluson 1982, 30; Snorri Sturluson 1987, 31), although Nótt is not included as a goddess there.

²⁵ See e.g. *Hávamál* 104–10 (N–K 33–34) and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G58 (Snorri Sturluson 1998, I 4–5; trans. in Snorri Sturluson 1987, 62–64).

²⁶ In st. 16, the dwarfs’ name for the sun, *Dvalins leica*, is in line 3, while the name attributed to the *ása synir* (*alscír*) is in line 6; this reversal of the usual order may have taken place because either the poet or the scribe of the Codex Regius thought it inappropriate for names attributed to gods and to *ása synir* to appear in immediate proximity to each other (see above).

²⁷ For example, the list of dwarf-names in *Völuspá* 11–16 includes *Ái* ‘great grandfather’, *Nár* ‘corpse’, *Aurvangr/Aurvangi* ‘clay-cheek’, *Iari* ‘earthy’, and *Haugspori* ‘mound-treader’ (N–K, 3–4; *Eddukvæði*, I 294).

men and gods who typically appear in the second half of each stanza of names. Thus in the course of demonstrating his knowledge, *Alvíss* also demonstrates what an inappropriate husband he is for a goddess or a human woman, for whom residence under a stone would seem poetically to be equivalent to death.

The Ending

All the same, the first section of the poem has depicted *Alvíss* as a being who has the power to impose a marriage alliance, whether on the gods or on human beings, at least in the absence of *Þórr*. This may be because he is a creature of darkness who is powerful during the night, which he regards as a deity, the *draumniqrún* ‘dream goddess’ of st. 30,6 (the last name in the poem that is attributed to the dwarfs). But the last stanza of the poem reverses that power. *Þórr* comments with admiration—or more probably with mock admiration (*Alvíssmál* 35,1–3):

‘Í eino briósti ec sác aldregi
fleiri forna stafi;’

‘I have never seen more ancient knowledge in one chest;’

But it is pointless information; the dwarf has been tricked, largely by his own vanity, and *Þórr* is now able to end the contest with some magic of his own, in the only couplet of *galdralag* in the poem (*Alvíssmál* 35,4–7):

‘miclom tálom ec qveð tældan þic:
uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,
nú scínn sól í sali.’

‘I say you’ve been deceived by a great trick: you are “dayed up”, dwarf—now the sun shines in the hall.’

It remains possible that we should imagine that *Alvíss* is trying to force himself on a reluctant goddess, but that interpretation of the poem’s framework story is not unavoidable. It would explain many of the poem’s stranger features if we take it instead that *Þórr* has come to the rescue of a human family, and that the contest is thought of as taking place in a hall very like the one in which the poem was actually being performed.

APPENDIX: THE STRUCTURE OF *ALVÍSSMÁL*A. *Framework* (stt. 1–8)

Alternate speeches of one stanza each by two characters, who name themselves as Alvíss ('Know-All', st. 3) and Þórr (st. 6).

St. 1: A wants to hold his marriage at his own home.

St. 2: Þ asks who A is and says he looks like an ogre and is not suitable for a bride.

St. 3: A names himself, says he lives under a stone, and demands that the promise made to him be kept.

St. 4: Þ says he will break the promise; he has the most say in the match, and was not present when the promise was made.

St. 5: A asks who this vagabond is who thinks he has a right to decide the match.

St. 6: Þ names himself and repeats that he does not give his consent.

St. 7: A says he wants to have Þ's consent.

St. 8: Þ says A will not be refused if he can answer 'from every world' all that Þ wants to know.

B. *Wisdom Contest* (stt. 9–34)

Alternate speeches of one stanza each, in which Þórr calls A a dwarf and asks the names of things in every world; Alvíss replies with six names for each question:

Stt. 9–10: what is the earth called? A replies.

Stt. 11–12: what is the sky called? A replies.

Stt. 13–14: what is the moon called? A replies.

Stt. 15–16: what is the sun called? A replies.

Stt. 17–18: what are the clouds called? A replies.

Stt. 19–20: what is the wind called? A replies.

Stt. 21–22: what is calm called? A replies.

Stt. 23–24: what is the sea called? A replies.

Stt. 25–26: what is fire called? A replies.

Stt. 27–28: what is wood/woodland called? A replies.

Stt. 29–30: what is night called? A replies.

Stt. 31–32: what is grain called? A replies.

Stt. 33–34: what is ale called? A replies.

C. *Conclusion* (st. 35)

Þ says he has never seen more wisdom in a single chest, but A has been tricked: day has come and the sun shines in the hall (implying that the dwarf A will be turned to stone).

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THE TREATMENT OF IRISH ANCESTRY IN *LAXDÆLA SAGA* AND *NJÁLS SAGA*

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A NUMBER OF SCHOLARS HAVE ADDRESSED the question of the relationship between medieval Iceland and Ireland, mostly focusing on the extent of Irish influence on Icelandic writing, and reaching quite different conclusions.¹ Gísli Sigurðsson and Peter Robinson agree that there are numerous incidences of Gaelic influence on the family sagas, while Jónas Kristjánsson concludes that there was no significant Irish influence on Icelandic literature or poetry (Gísli Sigurðsson 1988, 86–101; Robinson 1992, 128–30; Jónas Kristjánsson 1998, 274–75). These contradictory conclusions reflect a paradox in the Icelandic attitude to Ireland and the Irish which probably predates the earliest written evidence we have for it, and which demonstrates that it has always been a highly subjective matter.

There is an academic consensus that the evidence of *Landnámabók* for the involvement of Irish families in the settlement of Iceland can be believed, and Gísli and Jónas suspect the presence of a larger hidden Celtic population of women and slaves (Gísli Sigurðsson 1988, 25–31; Jónas Kristjánsson 1998, 259, 264–68; cf. Hermann Pálsson 1996, 47–102; Sayers 1994, 129; *Land*, CXXXI–II, 240–41, 248, 352, 367, 392–93).² It must be in part from this original disparity between a handful of high-status Irish settlers, some claiming descent from Irish royalty, and a larger body of low-status Irish settlers that the later medieval Icelanders developed their inconsistent attitudes towards Ireland. For some families tracing their ancestry back to their Irish roots was their only claim to nobility, while

¹ In a modern context words such as ‘Irish’ carry different implications from their medieval equivalents. For convenience I follow scholarly convention and use ‘Irish’ and ‘Ireland’ where the sagas use *írskr* and *Írland*, noting, however, that these terms are now not directly synonymous with their Old Norse equivalents, and intending them only in the sense in which medieval Icelanders understood them. I have used the *Íslenzk fornrit* editions for quotations in Old Icelandic, and all translations are my own.

² Evidence for recurring contact between Iceland and Ireland during the early medieval period can be found in *Landnámabók* where Slyne Head in Ireland is used as a locator for Iceland (*Land*, 32–34; cf. Kelly 2010, 180).

for others Irish blood was associated with slaves. This is reflected in the *Íslendingasögur*, where the classic attempt to resolve this contradiction is the story of Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*, an Irish slave-woman who turns out to be of royal descent, and whose descendants are correspondingly noble. While it is interesting to note what some sagas say about the Irish ancestry of particular characters, it is potentially more interesting to examine what other sagas do not say about the same characters. Most noticeably *Laxdæla saga* can be contrasted with *Njáls saga*; the one emphasising Irish ancestry, and the other ignoring it.

This article will consider both the references to Irish royal ancestry in the *Íslendingasögur*, and also the places where one might expect a reference to this ancestry, but where the saga in question remains silent on the subject. I will focus on *Njáls saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, arguing that the authors of both use Irish ancestry as a positive, character-defining feature; they both identify it in the context of characters who are ‘good’, but the author of *Njáls saga* withholds it from more ambiguous characters.

References to Irish royalty as distinguished ancestors occur in several *Íslendingasögur*, though they all refer to the same two characters, Helgi inn magri and Óláfr Høskuldsson, and their families. Hermann Pálsson (1996, 94–95) suggests that Helgi’s nickname *inn magri* ‘the Lean’ may have originally been the Irish name Magor, perhaps adopted at baptism. Helgi and Óláfr are themselves related by marriage, and have in common also the specific nature of their relationship to Ireland, both having Irish mothers, and Irish kings as their maternal grandfathers. They are both described as the leading men of their districts. The opening chapters of *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Grettis saga* all refer to Helgi inn magri’s mother Rafarta, and his grandfather, the Irish king Kjarvalr (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 4; *Grettis saga*, 8–14; *Lax*, 3; cf. Hermann Pálsson 1996, 119–27 and 219; *Land*, 248–51). Helgi does not play a significant part in any of these sagas, and the reference to his father’s activities in Ireland at the beginning of *Grettis saga* is only tangential to the narrative. In *Laxdæla saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* the purpose of stressing Helgi’s importance, and his royal descent, must be to give status by association to the descendants of his father-in-law Ketill flatnefr, and particularly his brothers-in-law Bjørn and Helgi bjólan, and his sister-in-law Unnr (Auðr), who, like Helgi himself, are all important figures among the pioneering settlers of Iceland.³

³ Note that in the Hauksbók version (AM 544 4to) of *Eiríks saga rauða* (*Eyrbyggja saga*, 217–18) Karlsefni is given a longer ancestry than in the Skálholtsbók version (AM 557 4to; *Eiríks saga rauða* 1985, 420), which goes back to Friðgerðr, a daughter of Kjarvalr Írakonungr, on his great-grandmother’s side and Ragnarr

Similarly, when Óláfr is mentioned briefly in Chapter 78 of *Egils saga* his descent through Melkorka from King Mýrkjartan of Ireland is given (cf. *Land*, 143). The reason for including his royal ancestry here seems to be to justify Egill marrying his daughter Þorgerðr to Óláfr, and to emphasise the high status of Egill and his family in Iceland. The description that follows of Óláfr's strong character, exceptional good looks and great wealth all serve the same purpose in reflecting positively on Egill and Þorgerðr (*Egils saga*, 242). The account of this event in *Laxdæla saga* (written some decades later), however, goes into more detail, specifically addressing and resolving the issue of Óláfr's Irish ancestry, and even has Egill Skallagrímsson make a rather out-of-character statement recognising that Óláfr is of higher status on both sides than his own family (on the dating of these sagas see Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 114–16; on *Egils saga* as a potential source of inspiration for *Laxdæla saga* see Andersson 2006, 132). When the proposal of marriage between Þorgerðr and Óláfr is made Þorgerðr refuses at first, and Egill reprimands her for her snobbery (*Lax*, 63–64):

Þorgerðr svarar: 'Þat hefi ek þik heyrð mæla, at þú ynnir mér mest barna þinna; en nú þykki mér þú þat ósanna, ef þú vill gípta mik ambáttarsyni, þótt hann sé vænn ok mikill áburðarmaðr.' Egill segir: 'Eigi ertu um þetta jafnfréttin sem um annat; hefir þú eigi þat spurt, at hann er dóttursonr Mýrkjartans Írakonungs? Er hann miklu betr borinn í móðurkyn en fððurætt, ok væri oss þat þó fullboðit.'

Þorgerðr answered: 'This I have heard you say, that you delighted in me most of all your children; but now I think you disprove this, if you intend to marry me to the son of a slave-girl, though he may be handsome and a great show-off.' Egill said, 'You are not as well-informed about this as other things; have you not heard that he is the grandson through his mother of the king of the Irish, Mýrkjartan? He is much better born on his mother's side than his father's family, and yet that alone would be an ample offer for us.'

The social importance of Óláfr's descent from King Mýrkjartan is returned to when his dying father Hǫskuldr divides his property among his sons. Although Óláfr's half-brother Þorleikr refuses to allow Óláfr an equal share on account of his illegitimate birth, Hǫskuldr is able to make an irrefutable legal argument that Óláfr deserves at least *tólf aura* 'twelve ounces of silver' in recognition of his being *svá stórættuðum í móðurkyn* 'of such great descent from his mother's kin' (*Lax*, 72). Óláfr's mother Melkorka also benefits from her illustrious parentage when it becomes

loðbrók on his great-grandfather's side, but this seems to be an unoriginal borrowing from *Landnámabók* (239–41) motivated by Haukr's own descent from Karlsefni (both texts are included in *Hauksbók*, and only Haukr's version of either text makes the link) (*Eyrbyggja saga*, footnotes to 217–18).

known to her master Hǫskuldr. Until this crucial moment she has kept up a stubborn and proud pretence of being unable to speak, and despite her noble bearing and good looks has been treated with little respect and bossed around by Hǫskuldr's wife Jorunn (*Lax*, 27–28):

[Hǫskuldr] heyrði mannamál; hann gekk þangat til, sem lækr fell fyrir túnbrekkunni; sá hann þar tvá menn ok kenndi; var þar Óláfr, sonr hans, ok móðir hans; fær hann þá skilit, at hon var eigi mállaus, því at hon talaði þá mart við sveininn. Síðan gekk Hǫskuldr at þeim ok spyrr hana at nafni ok kvað henni ekki mundu stoða at dyljask lengr. Hon kvað svá vera skyldu; setjask þau niðr í túnbrekkuna. Síðan mælti hon: 'Ef þú vill nafn mitt vita, þá heiti ek Melkorka.' Hǫskuldr bað hana þá segja lengra ætt sína. Hon svarar: 'Mýrkjartan heitir faðir minn; hann er konungur á Írlandi. Ek var þaðan hertekin fimmtán vetra gomul.' Hǫskuldr kvað hana helzti lengi hafa þagat yfir svá góðri ætt . . . Eptir þat lét hann Melkorku í brott fara ok fekk henni þar bústað uppi í Laxárdal; þar heitir síðan á Melkorkustuðum . . . Setr Melkorka þar bú saman; fær Hǫskuldr þar til bús allt þat, er hafa þurfti, ok fór Óláfr, sonr þeira, með henni.

[Hǫskuldr] heard speech; he went to where a brook flowed in front of the hayfield; he saw there two people and recognised them; there were Óláfr, his son, and Óláfr's mother; he realised then that she was not dumb, as she was now talking a lot with the boy. Then Hǫskuldr went to them and asked her name and told her it would not avail her to dissemble any longer. She said it would be so; they sat down on the edge of the hayfield. Then she spoke: 'If you want to know my name, then I am called Melkorka.' Hǫskuldr asked her to tell him more of her ancestry. She answered: 'My father is called Mýrkjartan; he is a king in Ireland. I was abducted thence when fifteen years old.' Hǫskuldr said she had too long kept silent over such a noble ancestry . . . After that he allowed Melkorka to go away and gave her a farm further up Laxárdal; it has since been called Melkorkustaðir . . . Melkorka set up household there; Hǫskuldr got her everything she needed there, and their son Óláfr went with her.

Melkorka herself recognises that her status changes when her ancestry becomes known, and begins to behave with much greater assertiveness, even striking her mistress Jorunn on the nose. Although there is at this point no tangible proof for her claim, having begun speaking again she is evidently able to persuade Hǫskuldr of its truth (perhaps he wants to believe it for Óláfr's sake), and having accepted her claim, he sets her up on her own land as if she were an independent Icelandic woman of some means. She is subsequently able to marry another wealthy, though low-status, farmer from the district and attain equality with and status among the native Icelanders. Óláfr goes on to become the most celebrated of Hǫskuldr's sons, outshining his father and winning the favour of kings in Norway and Ireland (Andersson 2006, 135–37). A later descendant of the family, Lambi, is accused of being more like Þórbjörn skjárpr 'the

Weak' than Mýrkjartan Írakonungr when he behaves in a cowardly way (*Lax*, 193–94).

In *Njáls saga* the ancestry attributed to the chieftain Guðmundr inn ríki 'the Powerful' also, through Helgi inn magri, recognises the status inherent in descent from an Irish king. The extensive genealogy given for his family includes two English kings of East Anglia, Ósvaldr (Oswald) and his father-in-law Játmundr (Edmund), as well as the Irish king Kjarvalr (cf. *Land*, 48–49 and 312; Abrams 2005, 312–13). These three ancestors are all markers of status for Guðmundr; perhaps the English kings more than Kjarvalr since they are each listed as both king and saint, which in Ósvaldr's case is not a claim made elsewhere (though it could be the result of innocent confusion with the more famous saint and king of the same name). This status clearly still had significance at the time the saga was composed, for the genealogy concludes with the statement that

er frá honum komit allt it mesta mannval á Íslandi: Oddaverjar ok Sturlungar ok Hvammverjar ok Fljótamenn ok Ketill byskup ok margir inir mestu menn.

from him are descended all the most select people of Iceland: the people of Oddi and the Sturlungar, the people of Hvammur and of Fljót, Bishop Ketill and many of the greatest men. (*Njál*, 285–86)

King Brjánn's role in the saga confirms that the author, like the author of *Laxdæla saga*, saw Irish kings in a positive light. King Brjánn and his family are described in the most glowing terms in *Njáls saga* and Brjánn is even responsible in death for two minor miracles, making him superior in this respect to the ancestral Irish kings Kjarvalr and Mýrkjartan who are also mentioned in the saga (*Njál*, 439–53). This positioning may be deliberate, but most likely it is simply a reflection of the difference in focus between the genealogical sources used for ancestry and, hypothetically, a hagiographical *Brjáns saga* used for the Clontarf section (Jónas Kristjánsson 1998, 270; Ó Corráin 1998, 447–52).

However, there are numerous mentions of Helgi inn magri and Óláfr Høskuldsson in other sagas which make no reference to their Irish ancestry. Helgi is named in passing in *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Svarfdæla saga* and *Ljósvetninga saga*, but none of these sagas refers to his Irish heritage, and nor does *Íslendingabók*, which calls him *nórænn* 'Norwegian' (*Víga-Glúms saga*, 3, 15, 91; *Eyrbyggja saga*, 195; *Eyfirdinga sögur*, 158; *Ljósvetninga saga*, 117, 16; *Íslendingabók*, 6). Most of these references are found in genealogies which are only traced back as far as Helgi himself, and none offers an alternative ancestry for Helgi, so there is no question of any rewriting of the tradition. However, this does suggest that to some saga authors Irish ancestry was either unimportant or

considered a negative thing in the context of the settlement of Iceland, so the sagas that do refer to it must be read in this context rather than seen as representing attitudes common to the whole of medieval Icelandic literary culture.

This variation in the way Helgi inn magri is described in genealogies suggests that varying attitudes towards the Irish were prevalent in Icelandic society. This could reflect the personal interest of authors in the genealogy of Helgi inn magri, depending on how closely related to him they or their patrons were, or it could be the result of a change in attitudes over time. All of these sagas, except *Svarfdæla saga*, are thought to have been composed before 1250. By comparison, *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Grettis saga*, all of which mention Helgi inn magri's royal Irish background, are commonly dated to around the middle of the thirteenth century or later, perhaps indicating a growing romanticisation of the past (Vésteinn Ólason 2007, 114–16; for *Eiríks saga rauða* cf. Ólafur Halldórsson 2001, 40–43, Helgi Þorláksson 2001, 66, 75). However, there are references to Óláfr Høskuldsson which make no mention of his Irish mother in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Kormáks saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga*, a spread of late and early sagas (*Borgfirðinga sögur*, 56–58; *Vatnsdæla saga*, 247–50, 259–60; *Grettis saga*, 166; *Vestfirðinga sögur*, 121). These four sagas give no genealogy for Óláfr at all, so there is no contradiction in them of the story in *Laxdæla saga*, but it is perhaps surprising that *Grettis saga* does not mention Irish ancestry for Óláfr when it does for Helgi. If the variation in the reporting of Helgi inn magri's descent is due to composition date then the same does not seem to apply to Óláfr Høskuldsson.

Njáls saga is more interesting in this regard, and some of its omissions seem more deliberate. Although the saga does eventually refer to Helgi inn magri's Irish ancestry when it gives a genealogy for Guðmundr inn ríki, it avoids the opportunity of making this connection in the genealogy given for a much more important character, Flosi of Svínafell, in Chapter 95 (*Njál*, 237–38).⁴ Three lines of descent are provided for Flosi: his father's, and his maternal grandfather's on both sides, but although two of these trace the family back through six generations, the last ends abruptly after four generations with Helgi inn magri (see fig. 1).

⁴ Although expanding this genealogy might be an obvious addition for an enthusiastic copyist to make, the critical apparatus of the *Íslenzk fornrit* edition does not suggest that any of the manuscripts of *Njáls saga* gives any further ancestry for Flosi beyond Helgi inn magri; cf. *Möðruvallabók*, AM 132 fol. (1933); *Gráskinna*, GKS 2870 4to, p. 63r (handrit.is).

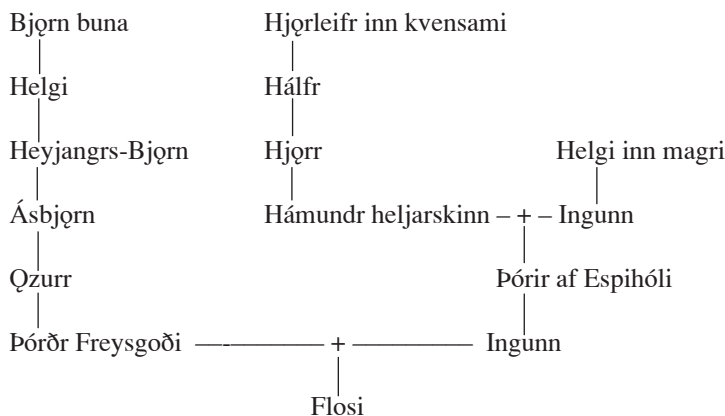


Fig. 1. Flosi's genealogy according to *Njáls saga*

Njáls saga is also evasive from the first mention of Óláfr Hǫskuldsson in Chapter 1.⁵ There he is listed among Hallgerðr's brothers with no suggestion that they are only half-siblings, although in other cases the author goes out of his way to identify siblings who have different mothers or fathers, whether it is important to the plot or not, including Óláfr's uncle Hrútr in the same chapter, Gunnarr's brother Ormr skógarnef in Chapter 19, Njáll's son Hǫskuldr in Chapter 25 and Flosi of Svinafell's brother Starkaðr in Chapter 95 (*Njál*, 6–7, 53, 71, 238). It is possible that the omission suggests embarrassment about Óláfr's Irish descent through his 'slave-girl' mother; Hǫskuldr Njálsson and Starkaðr by contrast both have mothers from respectable Icelandic families. However, *Laxdæla saga* and *Egils saga* had already resolved the problem of Óláfr's descent. Instead, perhaps, since the main cause of trouble in *Njáls saga* will come from Óláfr's family through his half-sister Hallgerðr, it may be that any positive association with Irish kings would interfere with the ambiguous characterisation of the family. Hallgerðr herself is not descended from Mýrkjartan, but considering that Óláfr Hǫskuldsson is portrayed in all three sagas as the successor to Hǫskuldr as head of the family, and the glorification in *Laxdæla saga* of his Irish connection, this connection may have come to be associated with the entire clan, whether they actually had

⁵ Hermann Pálsson (1996, 132–38) concludes that Melkorka's royal ancestry is probably an invention. If there was already doubt about the ancestral claims of the Laxárdalr family during the medieval period this could be one explanation for the fact that *Njáls saga*, and the other sagas that mention Óláfr, decline the opportunity to recognise his royal Irish ancestry.

Irish ancestry or not. This would present a problem for the author of *Njáls saga* if he wished to distance Hallgerðr from the positive associations of Irish ancestry; simpler to remove it from the family altogether, and perhaps score a point against the Laxdælir of the thirteenth century in doing so.

The most glaring evasion of Óláfr's Irish ancestry occurs in Chapter 70, which manages to mention both his trip to Ireland and a cloak owned by King Mýrkjartan without actually recognising the tradition that Mýrkjartan was Óláfr's grandfather (*Njál*, 173):

En at skilnaði mælti Óláfr: 'Ek vil gefa þér þrjá gripi: gullhring ok skikkju, er átt hefir Myrkjartan Írakonungr, ok hund, er mér var gefinn á Írlandi: hann er mikill ok eigi verri til fylgðar en rōskr maðr.'

And at their parting Óláfr spoke: 'I want to give you three gifts: a gold ring and a cloak which King Mýrkjartan of Ireland owned, and a dog which was given to me in Ireland: he is big and no worse as a companion than a strong man.'

Not only does Óláfr's speech avoid mentioning his relationship to King Mýrkjartan, though the king's association with the cloak is used to emphasise its value, it avoids even suggesting that Mýrkjartan gave him any of the three gifts personally, which would be the obvious conclusion given their family relationship and the account of Óláfr's time in Ireland given in *Laxdæla saga*. By comparison, in *Laxdæla saga* when on the occasion of his wedding Óláfr gives Egill the sword he was given by Mýrkjartan it is obvious from the name *Mýrkjartansnautr* 'Mýrkjartan's gift' that it symbolises his special relationship with Mýrkjartan. That Egill becomes *allléttbrúnn við gjöfina* 'extremely cheerful on account of the gift' when given the sword shows that he also understands the significance of the gift and sees value in its association with the Irish king (*Lax*, 65–66).

One might expect the fact that Njáll's own name is Irish in origin to warrant some kind of explanation, but his genealogy offers no clues as to where he may have got his name from (cf. Hermann Pálsson 1996, 197–98).⁶ The genealogy is, however, suspiciously short, going back only two generations. This may well be the result of innocent ignorance, as Njáll was not the descendant of a famous settler, and most of his own descendants were wiped out in the burning of Bergþórshvoll, so there would have been few people in the intervening centuries with much interest in remembering his genealogy in any great detail. It is an interesting

⁶ Robinson (1992, 131) suggests with regard to the Irish names Njáll and Kormákr in the sagas named for them that 'the authors simply were not aware that the names were Irish', but I am not convinced that we should assume ignorance if another explanation suggests itself.

possibility, however, that the previous generations of Njáll's family were more obviously Irish, and were written out of the story for that reason—and it is hard to imagine where Njáll got his name if not from an Irish ancestor. Non-royal Irish ancestry was probably not considered desirable, as the negative depiction of the Irish slave in the saga, Melkólfr, suggests; he is described as *óvinsæll* 'unpopular' and is characterised as lazy and untrustworthy (*Njál*, 120–21).⁷

The same two characters and their descendants appear in both *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*, but the way their ancestry is given is noticeably different in each. In *Laxdæla saga* descent from Irish kings is celebrated, while in *Njáls saga* it appears to be deliberately ignored, except in relation to the minor character Guðmundr inn ríki. Three possible explanations for this variation suggest themselves. First that the regard in which Irish ancestry was held in Iceland varied from region to region until at least the late medieval period. It is possible that in the Breiðafjörður area, where prominent people with links to Ireland are known to have settled, Irish ancestry continued to be remembered and celebrated, whereas in the Rangár district in southern Iceland, where *Njáls saga* is set, it was not considered important. However, the author of *Njáls saga* made the connection between Guðmundr and the Irish king Kjarvalr, suggesting that his reticence on the subject is specifically related to Flosi and Óláfr.

Alternatively, there may be a political explanation where the date of composition is the decisive factor. *Laxdæla saga* was probably written between 1240 and 1260, shortly before Norwegian rule was imposed on Iceland, but at a time when the Norwegian crown was making its presence increasingly felt. Theodore Andersson sees the author as a royalist who may even favour Norwegian interference in Iceland, and perhaps the interest *Laxdæla saga* takes in royal ancestry simply reflects a Norwegian-inspired interest in royalty, as well as increased exposure to continental writing (Andersson 2006, 2, 148). However, it is also possible that while making a tactful nod to the Norwegian throne the author is setting out an Icelandic claim to royal ancestry which is divorced from Norway; an alternative family tree to challenge the Norwegian assumption that Iceland belonged under its paternal wing (Elizabeth Rowe, personal communication). Kjartan's swimming competition against King Óláfr Tryggvason in which neither is able to overcome the other could possibly be read as symbolic of this, and the general flattery of Icelanders by the Norwegian

⁷ It is worth noting that Melkólfr is also the name of a slave in *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu* who acquits himself well in a battle against other slaves, but his likely Irish or Scottish background is not mentioned explicitly (*Ljósvetninga saga*, 188).

rulers may be intended to be less welcoming than placatory (*Lax*, 117–18).⁸ Meanwhile, in *Njáls saga*, written in about 1280, there is no cosying up to Norwegian rulers; perhaps it is too late for anything to be gained by doing so (Andersson, 2006, 2, 201).

This might explain why *Njáls saga* does not emphasise royal ancestry of any kind, but it does not satisfactorily explain why it seems even to ignore it. The solution may lie in a literary reading. Hrútr's famous comment on Hallgerðr having *þjófsaugu* 'thief's eyes' (*Njál*, 7) 'instantly transforms the proudest lineage of *Laxdæla saga* into a sinister brood', and thus makes them unworthy of the honour associated with having a royal Irish connection (Andersson 2006, 184). This seems a harsh rewriting of the Laxárdalr family history, but it is necessary if Gunnarr's downfall is to be blamed largely on his wife. She cannot be both an unparalleled villain and trouble-maker and also the daughter of a man of such distinction that he produces a son with an Irish princess. The other person who should have his royal Irish ancestry recognised but does not, Flosi, is also a dubious character, who rejects a fair settlement for personal reasons and decides on the despicable act of burning Njáll and his family in their house. Ultimately he is forgiven by the Pope and reinstated as a 'good man', but the saga says that he had to pay *mikit fé* 'a lot of money' for his absolution, while Njáll's avenger Kári seems to receive his for free (*Njál* 462; Jesch 1992, 64–82; Rowe, personal communication).

Lars Lönnroth, perhaps motivated by a desire to justify the theory, popular in 1976 when his book was published, that *Njáls saga* was written by someone connected to the Svínfelling family, argues that the ambiguous portrayal of Flosi is the author's attempt to rewrite what had been until then a far more negative tradition about Flosi (Lönnroth 1976, 173–87). However, to bring up this episode in the Svínfelling family history at all seems more likely to be the work of someone opposed to them rather

⁸ Weber (1981, 502–03) argues that the 'noble heathen' motif is more relevant here than the freedom motif. They need not be mutually exclusive; Kjartan can be a noble heathen who ultimately accepts Christianity from King Óláfr Tryggvason without necessarily recognising the king's secular authority. The key phrase is one Weber identifies: *engis manns nauðungarmaðr vil ek vera* 'I will be under the control of no man' (119). The king plays only a passive role in Kjartan's conversion, with Kjartan making the decision himself, and though the saga does say Kjartan became a follower of the king it is not dwelt upon, but only noted that *þat er sögn flestra manna* 'this is the report of most men' (123), as if leaving a little doubt for the reader to make up their own mind about Kjartan's, and perhaps Iceland's, relationship with Óláfr Tryggvason and Norway.

than supporting them; however it is portrayed, the Burning could hardly be a story the Svínfellingar wished their allies and supporters to have in mind when they negotiated with them. Unless his reputation was still so negative that it was actively harming Svínfellingar interests and needed ‘improving’, then Flosi can simply be read as a weak villain, who caves in under pressure from a woman and commits the worst crime of the period, in which case distinguished Irish ancestry would be incompatible with his character. In this reading the redemption his character undergoes in the final chapters is either a literary necessity to explain why Kári uncharacteristically makes peace with him, or a tactful sop to avoid upsetting the powerful Svínfelling family of the thirteenth century too much.

A literary explanation is attractive. Like Hallgerðr, Flosi must be denied his family’s royal connection for his character to be compatible with acting in the way the plot requires him to. By contrast, in *Laxdæla saga* the descendants of the Irish king are unflinchingly heroic, and the role of that line of ancestry in making them so is emphasised in the text. If logic can be applied to medieval literature then three statements demonstrated in this article lead to the following conclusion. First, the evidence of *Laxdæla saga* and *Egils saga* shows that the family of Laxárdalr were widely known to claim Irish ancestry. Second, the author of *Njáls saga* recognises royal Irish ancestry when it applies to a positively portrayed character, Guðmundr, where it is a marker of status alongside other ancestors who are both saints and kings. Third, he does not accord the families of either Hallgerðr or Flosi their Irish connections, though he could hardly have been ignorant of either. Therefore, the author of *Njáls saga*, like the authors of *Laxdæla saga* and *Egils saga*, considered a royal Irish family connection to be a positive attribute for a character, and deliberately withheld it from two characters with ambiguous or negative roles in the saga.

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ÖLVIR IN ICELAND AND IN THE *AUSTRFARARVÍSUR*

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Introduction

THE NAME ÖLVIR (ÖLVER) has been the subject of a good deal of inquiry. There is disagreement as to the origin and meaning of the name. Some scholars for instance have considered whether it had religious significance in pagan times. It has been observed that in the *konungasögur* the name is used especially of devout heathens (Näsström 2006, 108–10). In Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* three men called Qlvir are mentioned in connection with *álfablót* (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 136–39). This threefold repetition of the name is one of the bases for the suggestion that in pagan times Ölvir signified the master of the *blót* (Näsström 2006, 108–10; de Vries 1932–33, 180). Further, Icelandic place-names such as Ölvishaugur and Ölver—names of grave mounds, hillocks and skerries—have prompted the question whether Ölvir was the name of a *vættir* ‘supernatural being’ (Helgi Þorláksson 1978, 157). This study attempts to answer these questions by examining medieval literature, Icelandic place names and folktales. It is hoped that the ensuing analysis will shed new light not only on *álfablót* and the *Austrfararvísur* but also on the meaning of the name Ölvir in Icelandic place names, as well as its possible significance in pagan times.

The name Ölvir

The proper name Ölvir seems to have been rare in medieval Iceland and apparently the name disappeared from the language relatively quickly, at least in comparison to its continuing occurrence in Norway (Lind 1905, 1244). Among the first settlers of Iceland and their descendants named in *Landnámabók* we find three Qlvirs: Qlvir Eysteinnsson, who was reportedly the first settler to claim land to the east of Grímsá in Mýrdalssandur and lived at Hqðði (Hjörleifshöfði) (*Landnámabók* 1968, 333); Qlvir, son of the settler Hásteinn, who lived at Stjornusteinar in Flói (371) and Qlvir muðr, son of Vilbaldr, who settled all of Tungulönd between Skaptá and Hólmsá (326). Three settlers have ancestors bearing the name Qlvir who are also mentioned in *Landnámabók*: Qlvir

barnakarl Einarsson, the grandfather of Álfdrís who married Ólafr feilan son of Auðr en djúpúðga (145); Qlvir the son of Mottull Finnakonungur or Finnason whose daughter Jóreidr married Hrosskell who finally settled at Hallkellsstaðir in Hvítársíða (83) and third, Qlvir enn hvíti Qlvisson or Ósvaldsson, whose son Þorsteinn enn hvíti settled finally at Hofstaðir in Vopnafjörður (290–91).

The name Qlvir makes occasional appearances in *Íslendingasögur*. These include *Njáls saga*, *Ljósvetninga saga*, *Reykðæla saga*, *Flóamanna saga*, *Vápnfirðinga saga* and *Egils saga* where mostly incidental characters are so named. The most extensive occurrence of the name features in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, where it is the name of two Norwegians: the first Qlvir hnúfa, one of Haraldr hárfagri's skalds and a supporter of Skallagrímr Kveldúlfsson against the king. The other is Qlvir, a retainer of Þórir hersir, who sits with Egill Skallagrímsson at the feast of *skyr*- and beer-drinking at Atleyjar-Bárðr's house (*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* 1933, 107–10). Finally, in Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur*, which are preserved in *Ólaf's saga helga* (*Heimskringla*, II 137–38), there are three farmers who share the name Qlvir. Sighvatr was King Óláfr's court skald and messenger.

Nöfn Íslendinga, the dictionary of Icelandic personal names, gives this analysis of the name Ölvir and its variants (Kvaran 2011, 653, my translation):

[other] Medieval Scandinavian forms are Alvir, Aulir, Olver, Ölver, and, in a Swedish runic inscription, aluiR. The origin of the name is uncertain. The first element is perhaps the word *alu* which is some kind of magic word used in runic inscriptions, or *al* 'all'. The suffix *-vir* is derived from an older form, *-vér*, which probably means 'warrior'. The latter element is related to the noun *víg* 'battle' and the adjective *vígur*.

Hjalmar Falk (1924, 10) alludes however to the possibility that the first element *öl-* could simply mean the beverage *öl* 'beer, ale'. According to Simek (1993, 11), this is now the preferred interpretation.

Ölvir place names in Iceland

Considering how uncommon the man's name Ölvir was in the medieval period, it is surprising that place names with Ölvir elements are relatively widespread in Iceland. There are at least forty Ölvir place names in Iceland. These are found in Borgarfjörður, on Snæfellsnes, in and around Breiðafjörður, in Ísafjarðardjúp, in Skagafjörður, in Eyjafjörður, on Langanes, at Hérað in the east, in Suðurland, Grafningur, and Þingvallasveit if Ölfusvatn/Þingvallavatn is included. In view of both the scarcity of the name Ölvir in the settlement period and its early disappearance, it seems

plausible that the distribution and number of Ölvir place names indicates that as an onomastic element it is quite old (by Icelandic standards) and that, in general, it is not associated with specific people who bore the name, although some of these place names probably are connected to individuals. There are a number of Ölvir place names attached to geographical features arising from the surrounding landscape, such as mountains, mounds, hills, hillocks, slopes and crags. In some cases the name Ölvir is linked to lakes. It is worth noting that the Ölvir place names include both macro-toponyms like names of mountains and large lakes, and micro-toponyms such as the names of hillocks and crags.

It is notable how often the proper name Ölvir occurs on its own as a place name, as opposed to forming part of a compound. In almost all instances this is possibly a case of abbreviation, whereby, for example, Ölvershóll becomes simply Ölver. But this is scarcely the case with the crag Ölvir in the mountain Ölver, or Ölvishaugur, which also bears the name Ölvishaus. The crag, which is on the top of a cliff in the mountain, looks like a man's head (*Narfastaðir, örnefnaskrá*), the head of a creature or a *vættir*—perhaps an image of Ölvir himself? Note the interchangeability of the forms Ölvir and Ölver in the same place name, which is quite common in Ölvir place names. Additionally, the forms Ölves- and Ölfus- are noted in some compounded place names.

At least three modern folk legends are recorded associated with Ölvir place names in Iceland. These legends tend to be somewhat gruesome. One is associated with the aforementioned place name Ölvir or Ölvishaus in the mountain Ölver in Borgarfjörður; another legend is attached to the place name Ölver or Ölvishaugur in Stigahlíð in Ísafjarðardjúp; a third to the place name Ölvishellir under Ölvishamrar on the estate Úlfstaðir at Vellir in Suður-Múlasýsla. The legend of Ölvir in the mountain Ölver was written down in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Jón Árnason 1961, I 449), while the legend of Ölver in Stigahlíð was recorded in the middle of the eighteenth century (Jón Ólafsson 1753, 159).

Two of these legends have close similarities. In each a *kraftaskáld* (a poet who has magical powers; a magician) is asked by his fellow travellers to raise Ölvir from his mound (*haugur*).¹ The skald does as requested. And when Ölvir rises from the mound the travellers are filled with terror as they see the *draugur* 'revenant'. They implore the skald to conjure Ölvir back into his mound, which he does. In the first of these two legends, though, it seems that the skald was not entirely successful, as there can

¹ *Haugur* can refer to a grave mound, dung heap, sacrificial mound and more (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1874, 241). See further discussion on page 118.

still be seen a crag called Ölvir in the mountain Ölver in Borgarfjörður, which resembles the head of a man.

Regarding the second legend it is noteworthy that there was a custom among the fishermen of Bolungarvík of throwing fish out of the boat when passing Ölvishaugur (Ölveshaugur) in Stigahlíð. This was called ‘giving Ölver his share’ and was thought to improve one’s prospects of success in fishing (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 1986, V 335). The third legend relates to Ölvershellir ‘Ölver’s cave’ below Ölvershamrar ‘Ölver’s cliffs’, which is said to have been inhabited for a long time by an outlaw. The legend relates that a farmer from the area who went missing was later discovered hanged in the cave’s mouth (Sigfús Sigfússon 1934, VI 80).

The legends of the *kraftaskáld* share an element of fear. Ölvir resides beneath the earth but is conjured from his mound. When Ölvir appears it is as if the devil himself has been set loose; those present beseech the *kraftaskáld* to return Ölvir to his subterranean home. The Ölvir place names and Ölvir legends in Iceland are so few and far between that no consensus is observed as to the meaning of the name. Helgi Þorláksson, who has studied some of the Ölvir place names in Iceland, suggested that the name could be that of a *vættr* (1978, 157). His suggestion fits well with the legends above, which seem, moreover, to emphasise the malignancy of the said *vættr*. This considered, it seems worth investigating whether medieval sources can possibly shed some further light on the nature and identity of Ölvir.

The significance of the name Ölvir

Various aspects of the usage of the name Ölvir in medieval literature have caught the attention of Britt-Mari Näsström, who observed that in *konungasögur* the name Ölvir is borne by particularly stubborn and devout *blótsmenn*. Näsström also points to Sighvatr’s *Austrfararvísur*, which have indeed been central to scholarly discussion of the name Ölvir and its association with pagan *blót* (2006, 108–10).

In the *Austrfararvísur* it is said that the Christian Sighvatr had been turned away from three farms by three different hosts all called Ölvir. In all three cases heathen religious ceremonies were clearly involved. Näsström’s investigation of the use of the name Ölvir in the *konungasögur* and *Íslendingasögur*, however, led her to conclude that other instances of the name’s usage did not support the suggestion that it meant ‘master of the *blót*’ in earlier times (2006, 108–10). Jan de Vries also discussed the name Ölvir as it appears in the *Austrfararvísur* and attempted to account for the threefold repetition of the name in the skald’s encounters

on one and the same evening. He concluded that the repetition was in all likelihood nothing more than playfulness (*ein Scherz*) on Sighvatr's part, perhaps some kind of wordplay (de Vries 1932–33, 171), but that it was possible that the name Ölvir signified some sort of a cult leader in *dísablót* (180).

Hjalmar Falk's discussion of *heiti* for Óðinn in the medieval literary corpus, both poetry and prose, is relevant to our understanding of the name Ölvir (Falk 1924, 10). Falk lists 169 Óðinn-aliases (*heiti*) and offers an account of each of them. He includes Ölvir as one of these under the heading *Forn-Ölvir*, referring vaguely to his source as *ramser* 'rhymes'. Falk remarks that *Forn-Ölvir* includes the adjective *forn* 'ancient' in the sense 'belonging to heathendom' (cf. *forni*). This element, he argues, must have been added in the period of transition between heathenism and Christianity, denoting Óðinn as one who practised magic (Falk 1924, 10, see also Faulkes 1979, 480). Falk also quotes an Icelandic invocation documented in the seventeenth century in which the prefix *forn-* does not appear: *Ölver, Óðenn, Ille / allt þitt vilit ville* 'Olver, Odin, Evil One / May all your will confuse or bewilder' (Lindqvist 1921, 64).

Let us now look at the stanzas of Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* which he is said to have composed about his nocturnal wanderings during a journey to *Gautland* (Västergötland) in the year 1019. As earlier mentioned, the poem is preserved in *Ólafs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* (1941–51, II 136–39). The relevant stanzas are cited here without the intervening prose links; the translation is that of R. D. Fulk, omitting explanations of the kennings (Fulk 2012b, 589–94):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>66. Réðk til Hofa at hœfa.
Hurð vas aptr, en spurðumk,
inn settak nef nenninn
niðrlútt, fyrir útan.
Orð gatk fæst af fyrðum,
flögð baðk, en þau soggðu,
hnekkðumk heiðnir rekkar,
heilagt, við þau deila.</p> | <p>I resolved to aim for Hof; the door
was barred, but I made enquiries
from outside; resolute, I stuck my
down-bent nose in. I got very
little response from the people,
but they said [it was] holy; the
heathen men drove me off; I bade
the ogresses bandy words with them.</p> |
| <p>67. 'Gakkattu inn,' kvað ekkja,
'armi drengr, en lengra.
Hræðumk ek við Óðins,
erum heiðnir vér, reiði.'
Rýgr kvazk inni eiga
óþekk, sús mér hnekkði,
alfablót, sem ulfi
ótvín, í bæ sínum.</p> | <p>'Do not come any farther in,
wretched fellow', said the woman;
'I fear the wrath of Óðinn; we are
heathen.' The disagreeable
female, who drove me away like
a wolf without hesitation, said
they were holding a sacrifice to
the elves inside her farmhouse.</p> |

68. Nú hafa hnekkt, þeirs hnakka, Now three namesakes have driven [me]
 heinflets, við mér settu, away, they who turned their backs on me;
 þeygi bella þollar, not at all do the firs of the
 þrír samnafnar, tíri. whetstone-platform display
 Þó séumk hitt, at hlæðir praiseworthiness. However, I fear this
 hafskíðs myni síðan above all, that every loader of the
 út hverr, es Qlvir heitir, ocean-ski who is named Qlvir will
 alls mest, reka gesti. henceforth chase strangers away.
69. Fórk at finna böru, I went afterwards to find a breaker of
 fríðs vættak mér, síðan the gleam of the wave, one whom
 brjót, þanns bragnar létu, warriors counted by far the most
 blíks, vildastan miklu. excellent; for myself I expected
 Grefs leit við mér gætir something fine. The minder of the hoe
 gerstr. Þá es illr enn versti, looked at me annoyed; then the worst
 lítt reiðik þó lýða is bad [indeed], if this is the best;
 löst, ef sjá es enn bazti. yet I broadcast people's faults little.
70. Missta ek fyr austan I missed [i.e. felt the want of] Ásta's
 Eiðaskóg á leiðu farm on the way east of Eidskogen
 Qstu bús, es æstak when I asked the
 ókristinn hal vistar. unchristian man for lodging.
 Ríks fannka son Saxa. I did not meet the son of powerful Saxi;
 Saðr vas engr fyrir þaðra, no truth was present in that place;
 út vask eitt kveld heitinn, I was ordered out
 inni, fjórum sinnum. four times in one evening.

Stanza 66 tells of Sighvatr's arrival at the farm Hof with his companions to ask for a night's lodging. They are turned away because the heathen inhabitants consider the night holy, whereas Sighvatr is a Christian. In the next stanza everything turns out in much the same way. They are again refused lodging because the heathen hosts are holding an *álfablót*, and the housewife is afraid of invoking Óðinn's wrath. Stanza 68 relates that three namesakes have now turned away Sighvatr and his companions and that the skald fears that from now on everyone by the name of Qlvir will deny them entry. Óðinn is mentioned in stanza 67 as the reason why Sighvatr is turned away. The author of *Óláfs saga helga* comments between stanzas 67 and 68 that *Annat kveld kom hann til þriggja bóanda, ok nefndisk hverr þeirra Qlvir, ok ráku hann allir út* 'On the second evening he came to three farmers, and each was called Qlvir, and they all showed him the door' (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 137). Probably two hundred years passed between Sighvatr's composition of the verses and the writing down of the saga. In stanza 68 it is nowhere stated that the events described took place on a different evening to those referred to in the preceding two stanzas. The intervening text appears simply to be an attempt by the author of

Óláfs saga helga to explain the third stanza, and specifically the threefold repetition of the name Ölvir.

If we ignore the author's commentary and focus on stanza 68, it simply states that three namesakes have now turned away the skald and that he fears that everyone by the name of Ölvir will do likewise from now on. Three rejections by three namesakes sounds decidedly odd, and no less odd is the skald's conclusion that they will continue to be turned away by men named Ölvir. The third stanza clearly describes the continuation of the sequence of events from the first and second stanzas. In the second stanza it becomes apparent that Óðinn is the reason the travellers are turned away. There are probably *álfablót* underway across the region and in that case Óðinn's presence is only to be expected at every farmstead. Someone named Ölvir refuses lodging to the group of travellers three times in three stanzas. In stanza 69 Sighvatr's prediction comes to pass, which is that they are still without lodging even though they had expected the warmest welcome at the fourth farm. In stanza 70 it is stated that the travellers have been refused lodging four times in the same evening.

The strange threefold repetition of the name Ölvir in relation to a heathen *blót* only makes sense if one considers that Ölvir is an Óðinn-alias. It is not so surprising that Óðinn is ubiquitous in Gautland: Gautr is an Óðinn-alias and Óðinn is also called *Gautatýr* 'god of the Gautlanders' in *Hákonarmál* (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 193; Fulk 2012a, 174), as well as *Gauta spjalli* 'confidant of Gautlanders' in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Sonatorrek* (*Egils saga* 1933, 254).

All this considered, it is worth examining Óðinn's connection with *álfablót*, a pagan festivity that is thought to be linked to ancestor worship, death and fertility (Steinsland 2005, 345). *Ynglinga saga* says of Óðinn that *stundum vakði hann upp dauða men ór jörðu eða settisk undir hanga* 'sometimes he raised dead men from the earth or sat under the hanged' (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 18). Óðinn may have been, fittingly, an intermediary between the living and the dead at the *álfablót*. There are many aspects to Óðinn's role as the god of the dead. In particular this holds true for the *einherjar* as well as the hanged, under whose gallows Óðinn would sit obtaining their secrets. Among his aliases was *draugadrottinn* 'lord of revenants'. Óðinn travelled with ease between the world of the living and the dead, as represented in *Baldrs draumar* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 446). In the so-called Wild Hunt he even survives the coming of Christianity in popular folklore as the leader of the army of the dead (Simek 1993, 372).

Further, Näsström (2006, 108) observes that the name Ölvir is used in *konungasögur* to denote an obstinate heathen and die-hard practitioner of

blót. She offers the example of the colourful Qlvir of Eggja who organised *blót* in opposition to Ólafr helgi (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II 178). In this particular case the use of the name Qlvir, which was both a personal name and an Óðinn-alias, provides those in the know with a deeper understanding of what is being described in the saga.

In Sighvatr's *Austrfararvísur* we do not enter the farmsteads that host the *álfablót*. In *Egils saga* on the other hand we are allowed inside to behold a different kind of pagan festivity. We accompany Egill and his travelling companion Qlvir, steward of Þórir hersir's farm, first to the meal of *áfir* and *skyr* at Atley, and later the same evening to the ale-drinking at the *dísablót* with King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr at the feast of Atleyjar-Bárðr. Qlvir drinks immoderately and Egill even more. This excessive drinking ends with an eruption of vomit from Qlvir, who sinks down in a drunken stupor while Egill runs the host Atleyjar-Bárðr through with his sword (*Egils saga* 1933, 107–11). The grotesqueness of this scene would have been magnified for the reader/listener who understands that it is making fun of Óðinn himself. Here we may cite Óðinn in *Hávamál*: *Qlir ek varð, / varð ofrölví* 'I got drunk; exceedingly drunk' (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 324) and obviously Óðinn spewing the mead of poetry (Heimir Pálsson 2006, 92).

Identifying clear connections between Óðinn and *dísablót* is not easy. *Dísir* were said to be dead women (Simek 1993, 61), but whether Óðinn had any role in their *blót* or in some communication between the living and the *dísir* is unknown. It might be more fruitful to look specifically at the role of Egill's companion, Qlvir, at the *dísablót* in *Egils saga*. As de Vries suggests (1932–33, 175), the character Qlvir seems to be invented solely for the *dísablót* scene. Qlvir is of low status; he is a hired hand, albeit a steward, his father's name is not mentioned, and he is certainly of low rank in relation to King Eiríkr. Still, the king places Qlvir across from himself in the seat of honour. If Qlvir is understood as some kind of surrogate of Óðinn, it can be argued that the saga elevates him beyond his station in order to make his downfall (in his character as Óðinn) more grotesque.

It is appropriate to consider what the occurrences of the Óðinn-alias Qlvir tell us about the use of the alias in general. It seems that there are some such cases in Old Norse literature: the *álfablót* in Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur*; the *dísablót* in *Egils saga*; and the use of the name Qlvir of devout, obstinate heathens in the *konungasögur*, who continued to enact *blót* in opposition to the king's interdict. At least some of Óðinn's aliases have meanings that allude to his specialised functions: the Óðinn-alias

Farmatýr ‘god of cargoes’, which was apparently connected to sailing and trade; Hangatýr ‘god of the hanged’, which was linked to sacrificial hangings dedicated to Óðinn and his own hanging of himself; Bølverkr ‘evil-doer’, which is presumably related to the lines in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, st. 34: *Einn veldr Óðinn / öllu bølvi* ‘Odin alone is the cause of all harm or evil’ (*Eddukvæði* 2014, II 278); and the alias Viðrir, which denotes Óðinn as weather god, as he claims in *Hávamál* st. 154: *vind ek kyrrri / vági á / ok svæfik allan sæ* ‘I still the wind in the bay and calm the whole sea’ (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 353). In the same way Ölvir may have been connected to Óðinn’s role at *blót* and feasts associated with *blót*. Keeping in mind Falk’s remarks cited above, the prefix ÖL- in the Óðinn-alias Ölvir could be related to the ale-drinking at the *blót* feast. The name Ölvir could thus have been understood in pagan times as ‘Ale-warrior’ (see Kvaran above) or even ‘Ale-man’. In the case of the place names in Iceland which incorporate the name Ölvir, the usage points to the name being frequently associated with elevated areas such as mounds, hills, cliffs and hillocks. Such landscape features might indicate sites that are linked with *blót*, though this needs further examination.

If we examine Icelandic Ölvir place names with the hypothesis that Ölvir was an Óðinn-alias, the legends of Ölvir at Ísafjarðardjúp and Ölvir/Ölvishaus in the mountain Ölver in Borgarfjörður become more comprehensible. The fear inspired by the mound-dweller would be natural if it was Óðinn whom people had in mind. As is well known, in early Christian popular belief the heathen gods were looked upon as evil spirits, and Óðinn was even regarded as the Lord of Darkness himself (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 68; see also Lassen 2011, 142). The custom in Ísafjarðardjúp of fishermen giving Ölvir his share of the catch could simply be the remnant of a ritual sacrifice to Óðinn. The hanged man in Ölvershellir recalls the sacrifice of Óðinn and the sacrificial offerings dedicated to him (2011, 95). An example of such an offering is referred to in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* (1959, 96):

Ek sé hanga	I see hanging
á hávum gálga	on the high gallows
son þinn, kona,	your son, woman,
seldan Óðni.	given to Óðinn.

Ölvishamrar above Ölvershellir, Ölvishaugur, Ölvisholt, the mountain Ölver (Ölvershaugur) and the hills bearing the name-element Ölvir may have been so named because religious rites were performed at these locations. The association of mounds with ritual is suggested in chapter 29, ‘Blót’, of the older Gulapíng law (Eithun et al. 1994, 52):

En ef maaðr verðr at þvíkunnr oc sannrad han læðr haug, eða gerer hus oc kallar horgh. eða ræsir stong oc kallar skáldztong huern hlut er han gerer þæira þa hæfir han gort huærium pæning fear sins.

And if a man is proven to have and admits to having raised a mound, or builds a house and calls it a *hørg*, or raises a pole and calls it a *skáldstøng*, however he goes about this, he has then forfeited his property.

In this context the two mounds Ölver at Ölversholt in the region Holt and Ölver at Ölvesholt in Hraungerðishreppur are especially noteworthy, not to mention the place name Ölvishaugur. Mention should also be made of the farm name Ölvisgerði in Eyjafjörður. From the place name files of Árnastofnun in Iceland it emerges that the farm was formerly known as Bölverksgærði or Bölkot (Ystagerðis *Örnefnaskrá*), information that is confirmed by Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín's land register (Árni Magnússon and Páll Vídalín 1943, 233). Bölverk, like Ölvir, is an Óðinn-alias, and in this context the two appear to have been interchangeable.

Certainly the three folkloric legends about Ölvir, the *kraftaskáld* and Ölvishellir, seem to indicate a link between the popular beliefs of Icelanders and the country's pagan customs. This connection is worth exploring further though such an investigation lies outside of the scope of the present study.

Why was the Óðinn-alias Ölvir, and Óðinn-aliases in general, used instead of the name Óðinn? Such usage is commonplace in literary sources, particularly in poetry where it may serve the requirements of alliteration or other rules of prosody, or may be used to allude to Óðinn's attributes; in other cases it is possibly arbitrary. We may also ask why 'Óðinn' is never an element in place names in Iceland while the Óðinn-alias Ölvir, and possibly other aliases besides, are widespread. Here it is worth considering Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's observation (1962, 273; my translation):

It is well known that many cultures made use of euphemisms for the names of gods. Names gave power, which trumped all else. Óðinn's name invoked fear and power, and men feared his very name no less than the Hebrew name Jahve.

As in the case of other aliases the use of the Óðinn-alias Ölver in Icelandic place names, instead of the actual name Óðinn, may reflect a development towards emphasising the sacrality of Óðinn's proper name in the late heathen era, as Iceland was settled in the late ninth and the early tenth centuries.

Finally, we can mention two interesting, but little observed, Ölvir place names in the Old Norse literary corpus. The first is Ölvishaugr in Trondheim. The place name appears in Einar Skúlason's *Geisli* from the

1150s. The poem is a eulogy of King Óláfr helgi, his life and martyrdom. The following verse from the poem concerns the battle at Stiklastaðir and King Óláfr's martyrdom there (Chase 2007, 18):

Réð um tólf, sás trúði,
tírbráðr, á guð, láði
(þjóð muna þegna* fæða)
þríá vetr (konung betra),
áðr fullhugaðr felli
fólkvaldr í dyn skjalda
(hann speni oss) fyr innan
Qlvishaug (frá þølvi).

The fame-eager one, who believed in God, ruled the land for three winters beyond twelve—the people will not raise a better king of thanes—, before the very wise army ruler [= Óláfr] fell in the din of shields [BATTLE] on the inner side of Alstahaugen;² may he guide us away from evil.

Qlvishaugr, which appears in the last line of the verse, is some 20km to the west of Stiklastaðir. We can therefore truly say that Stiklastaðir is on the inner side of Qlvishaugr, in relation to the Trondheim Fjord. It is not unlikely that the poet holds Qlvishaugr up as a heathen contrast to the saintly king who guides 'us' from evil on the other/inner side of Qlvishaugr. The mound Qlvishaugr is located at a farmstead in Levanger, Trondheim, by the same name: Qlvishaugr/Alstadhaug (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997, 69). The farm is known from the earliest struggles between Christians and pagans in Norway. *Hákonar saga góða* mentions the farm as the home of a certain Blótólfr, one of the four pagan chieftains in the inner Trondheim area, who forced Hákon at a *blot* to eat sacrificial horse liver (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 172). A church was built in the late eleven hundreds at the farm Qlvishaugr and close by the mound, an indication of cult continuity.

Martin Chase (2007, 19) mentions the staunch heathen Qlvir í Eggju in an attempt to explain the meaning of Qlvishaugr in this stanza. This Qlvir was executed by king Óláfr helgi in 1021 (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, II LXXXIX). However, the mention of Qlvishaugr as the seat of the pagan chief Blótólfr in *Hákonar saga góða* suggests that Qlvishaugr was known in the latter part of the tenth century, which excludes Qlvir í Eggju from any claim to the name. The name of the mound, Qlvishaugr, the fact that Qlvishaugr farm was the seat of a prominent pagan chieftain,

² Alstadhaug is a community and the name of a church in Nordland, some 400km north of Stiklastaðir (1997, 69).

and the placing of a church at Qlvishaugr all support the suggestion that Qlvishaugr, now Alstadhaug, was indeed dedicated to Óðinn and thus a likely place of worship.

Conclusion

Óðinn had many aliases, as poetry deriving from the heathen era bears witness. Falk listed 169 Óðinn-aliases and made reference to still more. The use of Óðinn-aliases in medieval texts in poetry and prose has been widely discussed, but few scholars have considered Óðinn-aliases in Icelandic place names. A notable exception is Svavar Sigmundsson, who thought it plausible that the Óðinn-alias Grímr occurred in place names such as Grímsá and Grímshil, which are commonly found along territorial boundaries in Iceland (Svavar Sigmundsson 2002, 193–203), the purpose of which was presumably to invoke protection of the boundary.

This article has analysed the Óðinn-alias Ölvir (Ölver) in literary sources and place names, noting that the use of the name Ölvir (Ölver) as an Óðinn-alias seems to have been overlooked by scholars. It is possible that its appearance in Hjalmar Falk's list of Óðinn-aliases in the collocation Forn-Ölvir may have contributed to this lack of awareness. Understanding Qlvir as an Óðinn-alias allows a new interpretation of the section of Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* in which the name Qlvir appears. In this connection we may also note the probable use of the Óðinn-alias Qlvir in the *konungasögur* and in *Egils saga*.

The use of the name Qlvir in the examples from the medieval Scandinavian literary corpus are closely linked to sacrificial rites (*blót*). In the *konungasögur* the name Qlvir is associated with the enactors of *blót*, in the *Austrfararvísur* with the *álfablót* and in *Egils saga* with the *dísablót*. This points to the alias being connected with Óðinn's role in the performance of *blót* and associated feasts, especially in relation to ale-drinking. In the *Austrfararvísur*, *álfablót* is described by a contemporary witness, Sighvatr Þórðarson. The description is admittedly limited given that Sighvatr is not granted entry to the ceremony, but it is apparent that Óðinn has an important role in the proceedings.

The predominant scholarly view is that Óðinn was only to a limited extent, perhaps not at all, venerated in Iceland. The principal reason for this conclusion is precisely that the name Óðinn does not occur in a single Icelandic place name. In the words of Gabriel Turville-Petre, 'In Iceland there are neither place-names nor personal names associated with Óðinn' (1972, 8; see also Lassen 2011, 19 and Schier 1981, 409–10). This study

has shown, however, that the Óðinn-alias Ölvir (Ölver) is relatively widespread in Icelandic place names, whereas the personal name Ölvir seems to have been rare (although any of the Icelandic Ölvir place names could of course be connected to a person of that name). The widespread Ölvir place names and the nature of the legends associated with Ölvir place names point to knowledge of Óðinn in Iceland beyond the literary sphere and the probability that he was venerated there.

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STEALING HIS THUNDER. AN INVESTIGATION OF OLD NORSE IMAGES OF ÞÓRR

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Introduction

FOR MANY YEARS, AN IMAGE of the Old Norse god Þórr hung in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm that might still appear archetypal to a modern eye. Mårten Eskil Winge's thunder god dominates *Tors strid med jättarna*, poised in mid-strike in the back of his chariot, his hammer raised above him as it often is said to be in medieval and Viking-Age poetry. Jagged lightning tears the air and wreathes the hammer. Red-eyed goats pull his chariot and trample beneath their hooves a throng of brawny *jotnar*, Þórr's traditional enemies.

Though many of these features can be found in early medieval texts, Winge's painting does not appear to derive from any one source. Rather it is an epitome of nineteenth-century understandings of the deity and of pre-Christian religions in the north more broadly—two constructions that have been partly shaped to a Romano-Greek template, as the rendering of Winge's *jotnar* reflects, their pronounced musculature more reminiscent of a Roman statue of a deity than of any surviving Norse figurine from the early Scandinavian Middle Ages or before.¹

In the past, Lotte Motz (1996, 40–41, 48, 55–57) and Hilda Ellis Davidson (1965, 3, 5) have both questioned the validity, at least in Iceland, of the still-dominant conception at the heart of this image of Þórr as a thunder god, and in this article I explore this issue further. The association of thunder and lightning with Þórr in a great deal of recent popular culture and scholarship extends to scholars who use the identification of Þórr as a thunder god as the basis for etymological, philological and/or archaeological enquiry (for a brief overview of scholars taking such positions, see Taggart 2015, 59–60). This is problematic if modern notions of the deity diverge significantly from Viking-Age and early medieval representations.

¹ The term 'religion' is employed throughout this article, following the arguments of Lindberg 2009 and Nordberg 2012 and because it encompasses the many phenomena within Old Norse-Icelandic cultural practices under discussion.

My investigation also considers how early representations of Þórr may have differed from one another and debates the possible causes of the variety that is encountered.

I concentrate here only on a few key images and texts, though these are drawn from across the spectrum of surviving sources on Old Norse tradition, from Eddic and skaldic poetry to Snorri Sturluson's prose *Edda* and the writings of contemporary or near-contemporary historians and ethnographers. Whilst the reliability of these texts as sources on Old Norse mythology and religion has already been discussed thoroughly elsewhere (e.g. McKinnell 2005, 37–49), reflections upon this topic will be made below as they become relevant to the arguments of this article.

Explicit statements of a connection between Þórr and thunder and lightning will be sought from these texts to insulate this analysis from confirmation bias. Given the popularity of this association in modern culture, it would be easy to construe evidence that is more indirect—or that requires reference to other sources for its interpretation, as is the case with much of the pertinent material culture—in ways that confirm pre-existing assumptions. If thunder was an important attribute of Þórr for the medieval and Viking-Age societies that produced and transmitted poetry and prose about him, it is natural to expect this to be unambiguous in their texts.

Wigiponar and his wagon

One piece of evidence looms over this discussion more than any other. The name *Þórr* has a root in Proto-Germanic **þunra-*, which appears to have referred directly to 'thunder' as cognates like the German *Donner* and Dutch *donder* still do (for additional cognates and etymological discussion, see de Vries 1977, s.v. 'Þórr'). Patently very old, as is shown by a seventh-century Bavarian fibula inscribed with *wigiponar* (perhaps 'battle-' or 'dedicating-Þórr'), that the name was coined at all indicates that there was a connection between Þórr and thunder at one stage in the evolution of the deity.² Yet the variations on the name *Þórr* in our sources do not necessarily imply that the association continued to have relevance in later centuries in Scandinavia and Iceland.

The meanings of words change over time, so that etymology is not an unassailable guide to denotations and connotations. Meaning is determined by the pragmatics of the cultural and syntactical environments of usage (cf.

² Readings of both the fibula (Nordendorf I) and the first element of *wigiponar* are controversial, but McKinnell and Simek (2004, 48–49) provide a useful starting point for inquiry.

Barr 1961, 34–35), and this is especially true of proper nouns proprialised from appellatives. Even where proper nouns remain homophonic with an appellative, the appellative's signified does not necessarily have descriptive value for the parallel proper noun (see Kiviniemi 1975). In everyday usage, the name *Þórr* could refer to the god without connoting thunder, in the same way that someone in England talking about a Karen Smith need not imagine that person pounding at ploughshares.

The use of *Þórr* (or some reworking of that name) is not, therefore, an unequivocal validation of an association between this deity and thunder in the Viking Age, long after the name was first coined. This is particularly the case in Iceland, where no cognate of *þórr* seems to have survived in the sense of 'thunder' at all; words like *þruma* and *reið* are preferred. In Sweden, by contrast, an archaic word for thunder is *tordön*; in Denmark and Norway, *torden* is used. These last two terms are formed from cognates of *þórr* (Norw. *tor*, Swed. *tor*, Dan. *tor*) and ON *dynr* 'noise' in those languages (Hellquist 1922, s.v. 'tordön'). As Elof Hellquist proposes of the Swedish variant, these may not be derived from a connection with the god, but rather simply from the sense of 'thunder'. Hellquist contends that a construction implicating *Þórr* the god should involve a genitive form of the name, such as **torsdön* (1922, s.v. 'tordön'). A Swedish dialectal form Hellquist offers as comparison, *torshåla* 'Þórr's cave' (i.e. the wellspring of thunderclouds), does demonstrate that the god later, at least, had some folkloric currency in eastern Scandinavia as a cause of thunder (1922, s.v. 'tordön').

Of the various compounds of the name *Þórr*, the most pertinent here is *Qkubórr*. This name is never found in Eddic or skaldic poetry, regardless of provenance; it only appears within the *Edda* of the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (repeatedly in *Gylfaginning* and in one chapter of *Skáldskaparmál*) where it is linked with ownership of a wagon: *Þórr á hafra tvá . . . ok reið þá er hann ekr, en hafrarnir draga reiðna. Því er hann kallaðr Qkubórr* 'Þórr has two bucks . . . and a wagon which he drives, and the goats pull the wagon. So he is called Qkubórr' (*Gylf.* ch. 21. Cf. *Gylf.* chs 44, 46, 53; *Skáldsk.* ch. 1). Snorri presumably therefore envisions the name as 'driving-Þórr', from *aka* 'to drive [a vehicle]', and many scholars agree with this derivation, though *oku-* might equally be derived from the name of a Finnish thunder god Ukko (Simek 1993, s.v. 'Qku-Thor'; Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. 'Öku-Þórr'; Finnur Magnússon 1828, 671; cf. Peter Jackson 2005, 491).

Both derivations are etymologically possible, and both are arguably related to thunder. The notion of *Þórr* creating thunder and lightning

through the movement of his wagon is in line with the aetiological ideas retained in many Old Norse myths and more specifically with the mythological vision of the Norwegian poem *Haustlong* (see below). The link with Ukko has support in similarities between the deities, such as their possession of hammers, that may once have encouraged an identification, though as many features differ as find a counterpart (cf. Bertell 2003, 80–81). *Ukko* itself does not mean ‘thunder’ but rather ‘old man’, which distances *Qkubórr* from connotations of ‘thunder’, though Finnish does take its word for thunder from *Ukkonen*, a diminutive form of the name (de Vries 1970, vol. 2, § 419; Salo 1990, 106, 159).

Nevertheless, it is unclear why the name *Qkubórr* appears in isolation in Iceland, surfacing only in Snorri’s *Edda*, if it is inspired by a deity from so far east. This may imply that *Qkubórr* was coined in Iceland, though it could merely be an accident of survival that no trace of it endures in Scandinavian sources. Without additional evidence, why and where it was devised must remain a mystery. Neither the Finnish interpretation nor thunder is mentioned in the only source in which *Qkubórr* does survive. For Snorri, only the wagon is germane—even though he probably knew of Þórr’s thunder journey in *Haustlong* (see n. 7). Given the stated aim of the *Edda* of distilling and explaining the Old Norse myths and legends that are often alluded to in skaldic poetry (*Skáldsk.* ch. 1), it seems that if Snorri had conflicting knowledge he would have cited it here. As he does not, it must be assumed that *Qkubórr* was metonymic solely of Þórr, not of thunder, for Snorri’s contemporaries.

The need for an *Edda*, a handbook clarifying allusions to Old Norse mythology, illustrates that the cultural landscape traversed by Snorri had changed drastically from that of earlier generations of storytellers. Snorri’s presentation of Þórr’s wagon does not necessarily mean that previous poets did not comprehend a further layer to that image, tying the deity to thunder and lightning. An association between thunder and wagons was evidently strong in various Nordic regions, given the names for thunder used in Iceland and Sweden. In Iceland, *reið* can signify both ‘thunder’ and ‘chariot’ (on the etymology of this word and its cognates, see de Vries 1977, s.v. ‘reið’). Similarly, the modern Swedish *åska* ‘thunder’ is compounded from OSw *ækia* (ON *ekja* ‘driving’) and *ås* (ON *áss*), the Old Norse title for members of Þórr’s faction of deities. It therefore seems to intimate a god driving a chariot as the cause of thunder. *Åska*, moreover, is probably very old, being evidenced in Old Swedish as *āsikkia* (Hellquist 1922, s.v. ‘åska’). Although *åska* could refer to any *áss* (or a deity categorised with this group in eastern Scandinavia but not in Old Icelandic

literature) and *reið* makes no allusion to supernatural origins for thunder at all, both terms are customarily attached to Þórr on the understanding that he is the thunder god of this pantheon and a deity who drives a chariot in many myths (e.g. *Alvíssmál* st. 3:4; *Þórsdr.* sts 15:5–6, 20:6; *Hymiskviða* sts 20:2, 31:2; *Húsdr.* st. 5:3. Cf. de Vries 1970, II § 441; Hellquist 1922, s.v. ‘*áska*’; Motz 1996, 65; Turville-Petre 1964, 99). The possibility that these terms were specifically related in early Icelandic and Scandinavian minds to the passing of Þórr’s wagon cannot be dismissed.

The similarity between the sound of a wagon passing and thunder could, however, have been enough to engender *reið* as an appellative for thunder, especially when the sky itself could be referred to as a *vagnbryggja* ‘wagon-bridge’ (Nikulás Bergsson 2007 st. 3:6), and, regarding *áska*, wagons and chariots seem to have been an integral aspect of cult worship and burial practice in the north, regardless of the deity invoked (Fuglesang 2007, 207–11; Nordvig 2013, 22–23). Many deities other than Þórr possess a wagon or chariot in Germanic literature too. Freyr, for instance, is transported in one in several works (Wyatt and Cook 1993, 7; *Gylf.* ch. 49), while Ing (=Yngvi), possibly another name for Freyr, drags a *wæn* ‘chariot’ after him in *The Old English Rune Poem* (Halsall 1981 ll. 67–69).³ Other accounts depict Freyja sitting in a *reið* ‘chariot’ pulled by two cats (*Gylf.* ch. 24) and Baldr in a *biga* ‘chariot’ (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I 154 (III, 2.12)), while the use of wagons is attested in the worship of the obscure god Lýtir (Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, I 579–80) and, much earlier, Nerthus (Tacitus 1999 ch. 40).⁴ Further examples could be cited, stretching all the way back to the sun chariot from Trundholm (de Vries 1970, § 80).

Simply because the sound of thunder was connected with wagons and Þórr has a wagon, it does not follow that the sound of thunder must (or must only) have been connected with Þórr. The extant poetic evidence of divine chariots, dominated by that of Þórr, may be skewed because the movements of deities like Freyr, who might otherwise be described with a chariot, are less often reported. Any powerful supernatural agent seems to have been thought capable of producing such noise in its travels—compare the thunderous hooves of Sleipnir or Freyr’s horse, for example (*Gylf.* ch. 49; *Skírnismál* st. 14)—and the connection may have been especially powerful

³ On the relationship between Freyr and Yngvi, see North 1997, 26–43.

⁴ This study uses both the edition and translation of *Gesta Danorum* in Saxo Grammaticus 2015. Unless marked to the contrary, other translations from Latin are my own.

with wagons due to the consonance between thunder and the sound of wheels to which *áska* and *reið* attest. Moreover, overlapping aetiologies are common in Old Norse myth, as the winds' many divergent origins testify.⁵

Despite the multitude of texts that touch on Þórr's chariot, a direct link with the creation of thunder and lightning is made only in one place, in the ninth-century *Haustlǫng* by the Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini. Seven of that poem's twenty surviving stanzas tell the tale of Þórr's conflict with an enemy named Hrungrnir, with some considering in particular detail the environmental impact of the god's journey through the heavens to do battle: *dunði . . . / mána vegr und hónum* 'the way of the moon [sky] rang beneath him' (*Haustl.* st. 14); *Knöttu ǫll, en . . . / endilög . . . / grund vas grápi hrundin, / ginnunga vé brinna* 'all the hawks' temples [sky] did burn, and the ground was destroyed with hail' (*Haustl.* st. 15); *brann upphiminn* 'heaven above burned' (*Haustl.* st. 16). Although Motz makes an imaginative case for this as an image of the aurora borealis on the basis that it is non-lethal (though it is difficult to untangle whether, at this point, she is discussing *Haustlǫng*, Snorri's prose rendering of the narrative or both; 1996, 56), the co-occurrence of the fire with a great rumbling in these stanzas makes it most logical to understand this as nothing other than thunder and lightning. Yet thunder and lightning is not privileged by Þjóðólfr. In the quotations above, these phenomena appear alongside hail, and the poet identifies further natural calamities resulting from Þórr's movement: *gekk Svǫlnis ekkja / sundr* 'Svǫlnir's widow [earth] became rent asunder' (*Haustl.* st. 15); *berg . . . / hristusk björg ok brustu* 'mountains were shaken and rocks burst' (*Haustl.* st. 16). Thunder and lightning are incidental here, as are the hail, the bursting rocks and the earthquake-like imagery of the earth splitting apart; it is the combination of these images that is fundamental, summoning up a sense of tumult and natural chaos that expresses the innate power of the deity on his way to a fight (see further Taggart forthcoming). Whilst this poem certainly strengthens the impression that a connection did exist between Þórr and thunder, at least in ninth-century Norway, it simultaneously undermines the centrality of this association to the god's characterisation even in that time and place.

⁵ Picking only a few examples, Óðinn has a measure of control over the wind in *Hyndluljóð* st. 3; Heimdallr is known as *Vind(h)lér*, perhaps meaning 'wind-sea' or 'protector against the wind' (de Vries 1977, s.v. 'Vindhler'); and one *jǫtunn* creates the wind according to *Vafþrúðnismál* st. 37. Plainly the wind was important to contemporary life, especially on an island like Iceland, and control over the wind a mainstay in portraits of supernatural beings (see Perkins 2001, 1–10). For further references concerning Njǫrðr, Óðinn and Freyr, see Perkins 2001, 16–18, and, regarding *jǫtnar*, Motz 1996, 58.

Pórsdrápa st. 15 is typical of the ambiguous semantics of Þórr's chariot in other poetic contexts. Composed by the Icelandic Eilífr Goðrúnarson in the late tenth century, the poem refers to Þórr as *hofstjóri hreggs váfreidar* 'steerer of the hull of the swinging-carriage of the storm', explicitly linking the deity's skyward chariot to storms. Only the lack of attestation of *hregg* (the 'storm' component in this circumlocution) being used in relation to thunder and lightning presents a problem for this discussion. In Old Icelandic poetry and prose, *hregg* is a very inclusive term for storms and could entail strong winds and rain, even incorporating snow and hail, yet neither it nor its compounds is ever associated with thunder or lightning (Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. 'hregg'; *DONP*, s.v. 'hregg'. Cf. Motz 1996, 56–57). The only other use of *hregg* to describe Þórr's actions appears in a *lausavísa* by Steinunn Refsdóttir (in one manuscript Steinunn Dálksdóttir), which pictures Þórr wrecking the ship of the Christian missionary Þangbrandr.⁶ Nothing there ties the word to thunder. Instead, the poet's sketching of a tempest that *hristi búss ok beysti / barðs ok laust við jorðu* 'shook and beat the tree of the ship and struck it against the earth' (Steinunn forthcoming st. 1:3–4 [*Skj.* B I 127 st. 1:3–4]) calls to mind the strength of winds and sea—and by proxy Þórr—rather than any association with thunder. Weather was significant enough in Þórr's general characterisation for *hregg* to be used without connoting the close attendance of thunder (for a selection of texts tying Þórr to other weather phenomena, see Taggart 2015, n. 250; Perkins 2001, 18–26), and hence even meteorological chariot imagery, like that of *Pórsdrápa*, can be coherent without referring to thunder and lightning.

Connections across the North

The following section will scrutinise four further texts for explicit connections between Þórr and thunder and lightning: Snorri's *Edda*, a *lausavísa* by the Icelandic poet Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, and works by the historians Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus. In Icelandic narrative, overt references to Þórr triggering thunder and lightning are infrequent. Even in Snorri's *Edda*, thunder appears in such a context only once outside of excerpts from *Haustlǫng*, and then it is in a prose version of the same story. In that passage Snorri states that, before Hrungnir could see Þórr speeding angrily

⁶ The quotation here from Steinunn Refsdóttir's *lausavísa* is taken from the forthcoming fifth volume of *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* with the kind permission of R. D. Fulk and Tarrin Wills and may differ from the form of that poem that is ultimately published.

towards him, he *sá . . . eldingar ok heyrði þrumur stórar* ‘saw lightning and heard great thunder’ (*Skáldsk.* ch. 17). Motz disputes this translation on lexical grounds, observing that *elding* can refer to other forms of fire than lightning and *þruma* can be any kind of din including the groaning of the rocks that burst in *Haustlǫng* (1996, 56), but the appearance of these terms together and the primacy of lightning as a meaning for *elding* suggest that Snorri is referring to thunder and lightning here.

Although this is the clearest instance of thunder and lightning being produced in connection with Þórr in an Icelandic source, it is also the only one in Snorri’s *Edda*, making it suspicious that *Haustlǫng* is either referred to or, more usually, quoted to substantiate Snorri’s narration of the tale in most manuscripts of the *Edda*.⁷ It is plausible that Snorri is only following *Haustlǫng*’s example in including thunder and lightning, although there may have been other now lost Icelandic versions of the story not quoted in the *Edda* that promoted this motif. The poem (or at least the possibly incomplete version quoted in the *Edda*) paints a dramatic picture of a sky thundering and aflame with the tracks of Þórr’s wagon, but only briefly describes the actual battle, and this emphasis on the journey perhaps encouraged Snorri to incorporate it, complete with a reference to thunder and lightning, in his version. Snorri’s treatment of the motif is, however, far more perfunctory—nothing more than an embellishment of the story, without any impact on its outcome—and any strength of association between thunder and Þórr that may have been created through *Haustlǫng*’s precedent has not been major enough to bleed into Snorri’s other portrayals of the character. Not even the tale of Þórr’s encounter with a being called Útgarda-Loki, which involves a lot of aetiological reconfiguration of the natural world—the creation of tides and reshaping of a mountain range—hints that Þórr’s actions may also cause thunder (*Gylf.* chs 45–47).

This last point is crucial. Already in Snorri’s time, a few Icelanders, along with other Scandinavians, were following a wider European trend that equated Þórr with the Roman god Jove (often referred to as Jupiter), usually in learned or pseudo-learned works such as translations from Latin or in saints’ lives, and sometimes connecting Þórr with thunder by

⁷ *Haustlǫng* is quoted following Snorri’s prose account in three manuscripts of the *Edda* (the Codex Regius, the Utrecht manuscript and the Codex Wormianus); another, the Uppsala manuscript, follows its prose version of the story with the statement: *Eptir þessi sögu hefir ort Þjóðólfr enn hvínverski í Haustlǫng* ‘Þjóðólfr ór Hvini has composed in imitation of this story in *Haustlǫng*’ (Snorri Sturluson 2012, ch. 35).

proxy (for example, *Trójumanna saga* 1963, 3, 5; *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga* 1981, 125–26).⁸ Yet this correlation does not appear to impinge on Snorri's thought, not even in his Prologue, the most self-consciously scholastic part of the *Edda*.⁹ The *Edda*'s compiler offers several summaries of Þórr's characteristics in *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, and these enumerate his associations apparently exhaustively, taking in the names of his family members (to the degree of step- and foster-family), his possessions, his roles in the mythic landscape and his past deeds (Prologue ch. 9; *Gylf.* ch. 21; *Skáldsk.* ch. 4); the equivalent introductions in *Gylfaginning* to Freyr and Óðinn (chs 24, 20) link them with fertility and prosperity (Freyr) and with the responsibilities of a psychopomp (Óðinn). Consequently, and especially given the *Edda*'s objective of glossing mythological allusions in Old Norse poetry, the omission of thunder imagery is striking and seems likely to reflect the sources and opinions current in contemporary Iceland outside scholarly circles, as well as Snorri's own perspective on the deity.

In its depiction of Þórr, *Haustlǫng* seems to have been unique among the poems to which Snorri had access; only a *lausavísa* from the eleventh century by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson hints that it may have had parallels in the corpus of Old Icelandic poetry. In large part a pastiche of Eilífr's *Þórsdrápa*, from which it draws some of its imagery, tone and elaborate style, the *lausavísa* appears to deviate from its source by rendering a *sía* 'molten substance' (*Þórsdr.* st. 18:4) thrown by Þórr at his enemy in *Þórsdrápa* as *hvapteldingar* 'jaw-lightnings' [i.e. insults] (Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 2009 st. 5:3).¹⁰

⁸ On the unreliability of this sort of *interpretatio norræna* as a guide to pre-Christian religion, see Lassen 2011, 95–109.

⁹ The version of the Prologue to Snorri's *Edda* in Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.) appends a myth not found in older manuscripts that identifies Þórr with Jove. Like the other, quite long passages of Biblical and classical material found in Codex Wormianus's Prologue, this is almost certainly a late addition that was not integral to the Prologue as originally envisioned (on this and the Latin learning of the Prologue more generally, see Faulkes 1983).

¹⁰ A list of the vocabulary common to these poems is included with the *lausavísa* in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 2009. The term *sía* is largely employed in the depiction of glowing objects, especially molten metals or ashes, which fits its use in *Þórsdrápa* and Þjóðólfr's *lausavísa*, wherein items are pulled from forges. The translation offered here reflects its broad semantic range, which can cover sparks and particles of light alongside embers and forge-hot iron (e.g. *Gylf.* chs 5, 8; *Skáldsk.* ch. 18; *Þórsdr.* sts 16, 18; for further references, see Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. 'sía').

The molten substance is a central pin in Eilífr's designs, yet never once is it hinted in *Pórsdrápa* that the *sía* might have any connection with lightning (Taggart 2015, 139–42). Þjóðólfr's heavy debt to *Pórsdrápa* clearly does not exclude the possibility that he knew other conventions regarding this fight, and other versions are extant. Saxo Grammaticus's presentation of it, which incorporates lightning as a weapon, will be discussed below, while Snorri quotes from another rendition (*Skáldsk.* ch. 18; see *Skáldsk.*, I 171, note on 25/27). At the same time, close reading of Þjóðólfr's use of kennings allows other interpretations:

Varp ór þrætu þorpi
 Þórr smiðbelgja stórra
 hvapteldingum hǫldnum
 hafra kjǫts at jǫtni.
 Hljóðgreipum tók húða
 hrökkviskafls af afli
 glaðr við galdra smiðju
 Geirrøðr síu þeiri.

(Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 2009, st. 5)

The Þórr of the great forge-bellows [i.e. blacksmith] hurled the held-up jaw-lightnings [i.e. insults] from his quarrel-village [i.e. mouth] at the *jǫtunn* of goats' meat [i.e. tanner]. The glad Geirrøðr of the coiling scraper of hides [i.e. tanner] took with sound-grabbers [i.e. ears] that molten substance of the smithy of spells [i.e. mouth>insults] with power.

The insults are identified as a metaphorical *sía* by their description toward the end of the *lausavísa* as *síu smiðju galdra* 'sía of the smithy of spells' [mouth>insults]. The *elding* in *hvapteldingar* may actually be a duplication of this image, rather than a meteorological reference: *elding* can also signify 'smelting metals' and even 'fuel', which is more in accordance than the sense of 'lightning' with the focus on a smith as the stanza's protagonist. Nonetheless, the term *elding* is, from literary evidence, much more usual in Old Norse as 'lightning' (for references, see Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. 'elding'; *DONP*, s.v. 'elding').

A plausible alternative proposition is that the *hvapteldingar* is simply an emulation of weapon kennings. As a kenning like *blóðs elding* 'lightning of blood' [i.e. spears or swords] reflects, the prevailing use of *elding* within kennings is as 'lightning', frequently as the base-word in constructions for swords or spears (see Meissner 1921, § 76 b–c, for examples). Understanding an analogy between weapons and the smith's insults here also tallies with the overriding conceit in this stanza that Þjóðólfr is comparing a disagreement between a smith and a tanner to a mythological battle

between a god and a *jotunn*, and with the mock-heroic elevation of these protagonists that is implicit in this comparison. Indeed, nothing argues directly against this interpretation other than the image of weaponised lightning in Saxo Grammaticus's version of this story, though it is framed quite differently (see below), and perhaps the inclination to take this reference to lightning in such proximity to Þórr as evidence of an association, when other potential witnesses have been largely unreliable so far.

On the other hand, Þjóðólfr, a poet travelling in Norwegian cultural circles and presumably with knowledge of *Haustlǫng*, cannot have been entirely unaware of a connection between Þórr and lightning, no matter the weight given to this link in Iceland. Probably *elding* should be perceived here as the product of a dextrous poetic mind taking advantage of polysemy to conjoin the triple images of smith, weaponry and lightning thrower. A specific precedent for this is supplied later in the stanza by a pun on *afl*, where the word can be read in both the meanings of 'strength' and 'hearth' (Þjóðólfr Arnórsson 2009, st. 5:6), and Þjóðólfr's skill in combining the model of *Þórsdrápa* with his subject matter shows how comfortably he works with multiple layers of meaning.

Þjóðólfr's kenning raises questions that are difficult to follow with categorical answers. If a translation of *elding* as 'lightning' is accepted, a disparity that is not readily explained materialises between this stanza and extant work by other Icelanders, at least those not performing *interpretatio norræna*. This may reflect the haphazard survival of Old Norse poetry—Þjóðólfr's stanza could hint at a lost iceberg of poetry connecting Þórr with lightning—or the *elding* may have come to the poet through other means, possibly during his time outside Iceland.

The contention that other poetry did link Þórr with lightning is made more credible by comparison with the version of the same tale in Saxo Grammaticus's thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum* 'Deeds of the Danes', a multi-layered adaptation of Scandinavian and Icelandic myth, legend and history. Þórr appears in various incarnations in this text, yet only in the story Saxo shares with Þjóðólfr is the name *Thor* employed in connection with thunder or lightning. In this version, Thorkillus, a Þórr reflex, ventures into the subterranean home of a being called Geruthus (Geirrþøðr in Old Norse) and encounters the debris of that creature's battle with the god (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I 608–09 (VIII, 14.15)):

Procedentes perfractam scopuli partem nec procul in editiore quodam suggestu senem pertuso corpore discisse rupis aduersum residere conspiciunt. Preterea foeminas tres corporeis oneratas strumis ac ueluti dorsi firmitate defectas iunctos occupasse discubitus. Cupientes cognoscere socios Thorkillus,

qui probe rerum causas nouerat, docet Thor diuum gigantea quondam insolentia lacessitum per obluctantis Geruthi precordia torridam egisse chalybem eademque ulterius lapsa conuulsi montis latera pertudisse. Foeminas uero ui fulminum tactas infracti corporis damno eiusdem numinis attentati poenas pependisse firmabat.

Advancing, they saw a shattered section of cliff and not far away on a higher platform an old man with a perforated body sitting opposite the area of broken rock. They saw also three women, their bodies laden with tumours and, so it seemed, with no strength in their backbones, occupying adjacent couches. Since his comrades were curious to know, Thorkil, who was well aware of the reasons behind things, taught them that once the god Thor, harassed by the giants' insolence, had driven a burning ingot through the vitals of Geirrøth, who was struggling against him, and when this fell farther it had bored through and smashed the sides of the mountain; he confirmed that the women had been struck by the force of Thor's thunderbolts and had paid the penalty for attacking his divinity by having their bodies broken.

Fulmen specifies a lightning strike, implying that the intention here is to describe lightning itself rather than, say, thunderstones, which are ordinarily designated by *brontea* or *ceraunia* in Latin (Lewis and Short 1879, s.v. 'fulmen').¹¹ This passage is almost unmatched in pre-medieval and medieval myths in depicting Þórr using this weapon without in the same breath mentioning Jove. In most respects, however, Saxo's text agrees with the others in this narrative tradition.

Besides Saxo's and Þjóðólfr's interpretations, this story is found in *Þórðrápa*, *Skáldskaparmál* (most manuscripts of which quote *Þórðrápa* after Snorri's prose account) and a less celebrated variant called *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns*. Including Saxo's adaptation, in four of these five versions the Geirrøðr character is pierced by a hot object: in Saxo, *torridam chalybem* 'burning iron or steel'; in *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 18), *Þórðrápa* (st. 18:4) and (figuratively) Þjóðólfr's stanza, a glowing substance that is picked from a forge. Moreover, several objects are thrown in *Þorsteins þátr bæjarmagns* that seem to retain echoes of these sizzling implements. The first, a glowing seal's head that *sindraði af svá sem ór afli* 'sparked out as if from the forge', is thrown at Geirrøðr as part of a game (Guðni Jónsson 1954, 332–33). The others are a three-cornered *hallr* 'stone' and a *stálbroddr* 'steel spike' that produce fires and *gneistar* 'sparks'; hurled at Geirrøðr, these hit him in the eyes, killing him (Guðni Jónsson 1954,

¹¹ Classical authorities distinguished three parts to a thunderstorm—the sound, the brightness (*fulgur*) and the power (*fulmen*)—and Saxo may be following this tradition (Thulin 1906, 372–76).

326, 339; on the properties of these items, see Taggart 2015, 146–52). Saxo's shattered cliff corresponds to the hot objects crashing through the boundaries of rooms in *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 18) and *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* (Guðni Jónsson 1954, 333).

It is only in the fates of the women that Saxo's text significantly differs. In the other texts in which the women appear they have their backs broken, as in *Gesta Danorum*, though in both *Skáldskaparmál* and *Þórdrápa* the females are apparently crushed under Þórr's chair (*Skáldsk.* ch. 18; *Þórdr.* st. 15).¹² In Saxo's account, with *fulmen* being identified as the weapon, the couches and broken backs sit like inert relics of that other variant, showing only that Saxo knew of its existence.

Therefore, two possibilities exist, neither with a better claim to correctness. The first is that Saxo knew two (or more) versions of this story, one in which lightning is used alongside another in which it is not, and endeavoured to marry them together. The metaphorical lightning attack in Þjóðólfr's iteration of the story makes this more plausible, though there are several differences between these texts: the figurative *eldingar* are directed at the Geirrøðr figure in Þjóðólfr's *lausavísa*, and no females are remarked upon at all; and Saxo does not understand the *chalybs* 'iron' itself as an embodiment of lightning, in the way that Þjóðólfr transmutes his *sía*. Such differences are not so great, however, that they could not result from these authors' creative adaptation of their sources or from developments in the oral tradition behind these texts.

So much of Saxo's and especially Þjóðólfr's tellings is consistent with *Skáldskaparmál*, *Þórdrápa* and even *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, from the piercing of the rock and Geirrøðr's body (the ears in Þjóðólfr's piece) to the presence of a red-hot forge-drawn object, that it is just as probable that Saxo and Þjóðólfr (or closely related sources) received a single very consistent tradition and both added lightning for differing reasons. In Saxo's case, this seems most likely to be the paradigm of the Roman god Jove: the forms of legends and myths in the *Gesta Danorum* can clash radically with the iterations of those same tales surviving from Iceland, often in ways that are derived from the historian's Latin education (see Johannesson 1978, 113–17). In this instance, the stress in Latin literature on Jove's capacity to fling *fulmen* could explain the presence of thunderbolts (cf. Johannesson 1978, 165, where a similar conclusion is reached though based on the proposition that Þórr was a thunder god). The frequent

¹² This also seems to be the implication in a stanza of Eddic poetry about the incident that survives only in one manuscript of *Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri Sturluson 2012, st. 63).

assimilation of Jove and Þórr in medieval scholarship adds grist to this contention, even though Saxo himself, in Book VI, rejects this mode of *interpretatio romana*, reasoning that, if Þórr is Jove and Óðinn Mercury, then Óðinn should be Þórr's son, which directly contradicts the Old Norse pantheon as Saxo knew it (2015, I 380 (VI, 5.4)). However, Saxo's feelings on the subject may have changed over the perhaps twenty or thirty years it took to finish his text,¹³ and accepting that the deities represent different traditions does not, of course, preclude Saxo (or his sources) transferring attributes from one to another, whether for artistic or explicative purposes or as a subconscious result of the influence of *interpretatio romana*.

None of the other passages in *Gesta Danorum* potentially associating Þórr with thunder and lightning mentions the god by name, instead relying on the *interpretatio romana* that Saxo himself found distasteful. Of these, Book XIII's Jove is the more likely Þórr-counterfeit (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, II 922–23 (XIII, 5.5)):

Cuius operam ualenter editam consimili probitatis genere emulatus Magnus inter cetera trophæorum suorum insignia inusitati ponderis malleos, quos Iouiales uocabant, apud insularum quandam prisca uirorum religione cultos, in patriam deportandos curauit. Cupiens enim antiquitas tonitruorum causas usitata rerum similitudine comprehendere, malleos, quibus coeli fragores cieri credebat, ingenti ere complexa fuerat, aptissime tante sonoritatis uim fabrilium specie imitandam existimans. Magnus uero, Christiane discipline studio paganam perosus, et phanum cultu et Iouem insignibus spoliare sanctitatis loco habuit.

Now Magnus, too, emulated his vigorous pursuits with similar deeds of worth; among other distinctive trophies he had his followers bring back to his native country some unusually heavy implements known as Thor's hammers, which were venerated by men of the primitive religion on one of the islands. Ancient folk, in their desire to understand the causes of thunder, using an analogy from everyday life had wrought from a mass of bronze hammers of the sort they believed were used to instigate those crashes in the heavens, since they supposed the best way of copying the violence of such loud noises was with a kind of blacksmith's tool. But Magnus, in his enthusiasm for Christian teaching, hated the heathen religion, and held it an act of piety to rob the shrine of its objects of worship and Thor of his emblems.

The details of this temple are unlike any other in the records of northern religions. In spite of Saxo's attitude to *interpretatio romana*, which convinces Lasse Christian Arboe Sonne that no god but Jove is being invoked here (2013, 171), the title *Jove* remains ambiguous—so ambiguous that

¹³ For discussion of the timetable of the *Gesta Danorum*'s production, see Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I xxxiii–xxxv.

Peter Fisher has not quibbled over rendering the Latin's *Jove* as *Thor* in the translation above. Indeed, Arboe Sonne's perspective cannot be accepted, regardless of Saxo's own view on the subject. No Roman divinity was being worshipped in twelfth-century Scandinavia, and the hammer is not an attribute of Jove's. If the story is more than a hodgepodge of popular and scholarly yarns about Nordic traditions and reflects any kind of reality at all (which is not certain), it must be a northern deity that is referred to.

Of the *Æsir*, Þórr is the most natural fit, being most closely associated with the hammer, though no other text represents his weapon being used in this way. This idiosyncrasy may be explained by the focus in this episode on ritual—Saxo may have recorded details unsuited to mythic narratives or even to the sagas—and while no hammers of the size described by Saxo have been found in any Nordic country, as Maths Bertell points out, few idols or other accoutrements have been found in general (2003, 77). Saxo prefers to equip Þórr with a club instead of a hammer (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I 152–53 (III, 2.10)), and does usually identify the deity directly as *Thor* (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I 90–91 (II, 2.6); 152–53 (III, 2.10); 378–81 (VI, 5.2–5.4); 454–55 (VII, 2.3); 608–09 (VIII, 14.15)), but even if Saxo himself did not recognise a correspondence between this Jove and Þórr, the connection may already have been made in his sources.

As likely a supposition is that *Jove* is a deity from another northern tradition, such as the Sámi Tiermes or Finnish Ukko, transplanted to Sweden by foreign authors. *Historia Norwegie*, for example, records Sámi putting a drum-like implement to ritual use during or not long after the time of Saxo's life (2003, 62; on Sámi drumming, see further Ellis Davidson 1965, 9, and Zachrisson 1991). Alternatively, the episode may disclose a confusion of northern customs and imagery by an external observer or the same syncretism hinted at in *Lokasenna* st. 24, in which Óðinn is accused of beating an instrument like a *völva*.¹⁴ If the distinctiveness of the hammers as a diagnostic feature in Book XIII of *Gesta Danorum* argues for identifying Þórr with Jove, and thereby thunder, multiple caveats must be attached to that claim, not least the scene's consonance with Sámi ritual.

Despite its creator's initial assurance that his work is *fidelem uetustatis notitiam pollicetur* 'guaranteed to give a faithful understanding of the past' (Saxo Grammaticus 2015, I 6–7 (*praefatio*, 1.3)), conclusions based on the *Gesta Danorum* are slippery and unavoidably provisional. The same is arguably even more true of inferences from Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Written in the eleventh century,

¹⁴ Citations of Eddic poetry are taken from Neckel and Kuhn 1983.

Adam's treatise on the history and geography of the northern Hamburg-Bremen archdiocese documents a temple at Gamla Uppsala in Sweden in which an idol of Þórr has been seated on a throne, flanked by deities called Wodan (presumably Óðinn) and Fricco, which may be another name for Freyr (Simek 1993, s.v. 'Fricco'; Bertell 2003, 71). Adam presents Þórr (and the other deities) in unusually functional terms (Adam of Bremen 1917, IV 26):

'Thor', inquiunt, 'praesidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat . . .' Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.

Þórr, they say, presides over the air, which controls thunders and lightnings, the winds and rains, fair weathers and crops . . . Þórr, moreover, with his sceptre appears to look like Jove.

Adam corroborates the accounts in *Haustlong* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* by directly connecting Þórr with thunder and lightning (*tonitrus et fulmina*) in a non-Icelandic setting, and further capabilities besides are cited in the spheres of weather and fertility. These statements are worth considering, alongside the comparison Adam makes with the Roman god Jove.

Adam's material on Gamla Uppsala is controversial, however, and with good reason.¹⁵ He exhilarates and shocks his audience with the grisly and dubious details of bloody sacrifices of men, dogs and horses, hanged in a grove adjoining the temple, over whom degrading incantations are sung (Adam of Bremen 1917, IV 27). Opinions vary on his description of the temple structure, from the view that it is plausible if influenced, to varying degrees, by European churches, Roman temples and Latin rhetorical paradigms (e.g. Gräslund 2000; Hultgård 1997; Sundqvist 2015, 118–27, 208), to denunciations of it as entirely a literary construction (e.g. Arboe Sonne 2013, 152; Fuglesang 2004, 20; Janson 2000). Nonetheless, over *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* as a whole, Adam appears to pursue veracity, at least where it does not conflict with his mission of glorifying the Christian religion and especially the archdiocese of Hamburg-Bremen—under those conditions, Adam can deviate severely from factuality (Gelting 2010, 119–22; Fuglesang 2004, 18–20).

In its broad strokes, his account of the idols of Wodan, Fricco and Þórr is tenable (see Sundqvist 2015, 121–22, on the import of these three gods around Uppsala), yet the details must be dealt with more cautiously. Adam was working at a great figurative and literal distance from Gamla Uppsala.

¹⁵ Arguments over the text's accuracy have been rehearsed many times over the past century; for a useful and up-to-date, though sceptical, accounting of the debate, see Arboe Sonne 2013, 139–71.

Two of his sources, Sveinn Ástríðarson and Adalward the Younger, could have visited the area (Arboe Sonne 2013, 155; Sundqvist 2015, 121), and Adam refers to the testimony of an unnamed Christian on the specific matter of the sacrifices in the grove. Any of these individuals could have carried a report of the beliefs held about Þórr at Gamla Uppsala; the Christian may even have been Adalward (cf. Sundqvist 2015, 121). However, Adam is often conscientious about naming his informants, yet when it comes to Þórr's function, in this key moment for my argument, he does not note where he received his information but rather passes over the identity of his sources suspiciously quickly.

In the light of such vagueness, the roots of Adam's conception of a god of thunder and lightning can be sought elsewhere, especially as the historian himself aligns his Þórr with the classical precedent of Jove at the end of his description of the Old Norse god. Jove is habitually associated in Roman culture (and later European thought inspired by this) with thunder, lightning and rain, the functions named for Þórr by Adam. He was venerated with the names *Jupiter Tonans* 'thundering Jupiter' (Richardson 1992, s.v. 'Iuppiter Tonans, Aedes'), *Jupiter Fulgur Fulmen* 'lightning Jupiter' (*CIL* XII 1807) and *Jupiter Pluvia[lis]* 'Jupiter sender of rain' (*CIL* XI 324) in his temples and appears with thunderbolts in iconography, as on a Roman well-head known as El Puteal de la Moncloa (National Archaeological Museum of Spain, 2691). Arboe Sonne points to a number of more precise correspondences between Adam's Þórr and the presentation of Jupiter in Virgil's *Aeneid* (2013, 163–69), a classical model used frequently in Adam's text (cf. Adam of Bremen 1917, lxii–lxiv) and one in which the Roman god controls thunder, lightning and other aspects of the weather (Virgil 1973, VIII 426–28; IX 668–71. On Þórr's governance of crops, cf. also Virgil 1984, III 61; Arboe Sonne 2013, 165).

These correlations are underlined by the conspicuous position of a sceptre in Adam's account. The image could genuinely reflect the situation at Gamla Uppsala—in Scandinavia, as early as the Vendel period, graves may have contained sceptres as status markers (their identification is controversial: see Line 2007, 394 and the references there), and, in later years, sceptres were bound up in élite, often very Christian symbolism (e.g. Sjöberg 1983; Line 2007, 384, 387). However, a sceptre would be an unlikely marker of status for any Old Norse god and in particular for Þórr, for whom the hammer was emblematic in this region of Sweden, at least in the late pre-Christian period (see further Sundqvist 2015, 122). Adam or one of his sources may just have miscategorised a hammer as a sceptre, whether to accord Þórr a more regal bearing or to make the image

more intelligible to a medieval audience with a grounding in classical culture. It is more likely, however, that this accoutrement was inspired by the representation of Jove, who is often equipped with a sceptre in his likenesses (for examples, see Láng 2008, 568–70), and Adam himself raises the possibility of *interpretatio romana* by using the sceptre to make a direct comparison between the two gods.

As a straightforward, anthropological testimony to Þórr's functions, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* is atypical. Indeed, the true reason for the disparity between Adam's account, along with Saxo's passage on the Scandinavian followers of Jove, and most other texts might be this generic singularity: Adam may be recounting particulars that were extraneous to a mythological story but of central import in other areas of the devotion to Þórr (cf. Bertell 2003, 71). Thunder may simply feature more in Þórr's cult worship than in mythological representations of the deity. There is no explicit support for this supposition in the limited range of extant texts describing Þórr's worship, such as the *Íslendingasögur*, though this may stem from the unfavourability of post-conversion Scandinavia and Iceland as an environment for transmitting the facts of pre-Christian devotion. Nevertheless, given the presence of a sceptre and the series of parallels with Jove, especially the Virgilian Jove, historians of religion should treat Adam's Þórr with agnosticism. It may be that this depiction of the god, including, but not limited to, his authority over thunder and lightning, is more rooted in the classical models of pre-Christian religion in which Adam was educated than in northern tradition. Even if we could accept it as an accurate view of early medieval Swedish worship, it should be noted that thunder and lightning do not define Þórr in Adam's *Gesta* any more than they do in *Haustlong*. Adam gives thunder and lightning equal weight with other phenomena, under the overall domain of the *aere* 'air'.

Conclusion

The instances cited above are the best potential connections between Þórr and thunder and lightning that I could find, and yet only one, *Haustlong*, cannot be contested on any level. Nonetheless, so much of this article is skewed toward the often-debatable attestations that do exist to the extent that it may seem, circumstantially, as if a strong link must have existed between the god and the meteorological phenomena under examination, even in Iceland. This extrapolation would ignore the many diverse texts, mythological situations, names and beliefs in which, if a correspondence did exist, it might reasonably be expected to appear, but where it is absent. Looking only at the possessions, accoutrements and associations

mentioned in relation to Þórr in *Skáldskaparmál*, Meginjarðar ‘girdle of might’, his gloves Járngreipr ‘iron grips’, Gríðarvölr ‘Gríðr’s [i.e., ‘eager/violent one’s’] staff’, his territory Þrúðvangr ‘strength-fields’, and his goats Tanngrísnir and Tanngnjóstr ‘teethbarer’ and ‘teeth gnasher’ are more easily connected with strength than thunder and lightning, and this is true also of the names of his family members and close acquaintances in mythology (on the significance of strength in Þórr’s characterisation, see Schjødtt 2009, 20; Taggart 2015, 65–69; Taggart forthcoming). Some of the various etymologies of *Mjöllnir*, the name of Þórr’s hammer, connect it with lightning, though derivation from Old Norse *mala/mola* ‘to grind’ is among the most convincing of these and better suits the weapon’s mythological presentation as a lethal crushing weapon (cf. de Vries 1977, s.v. ‘Mjöllnir’; Simek 1993, s.v. ‘Mjöllnir’; Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson 1874, s.v. ‘Mjöllnir’). To the best of my knowledge, *Mjöllnir* never explicitly or implicitly represents thunder or lightning in any surviving myth (Taggart 2015, 139–77, 180–83, 189–93).

The many *fornaldarsögur* and *Íslendingasögur* that refer to Þórr do so without making any connection with thunder or lightning at all, despite often referring to his control over other elements of weather. And in the *Poetic Edda*, arguably modern scholarship’s foremost source for Old Norse mythology, Þórr causes rumbling though it is never attached to thunder or lightning (see further Taggart forthcoming); rather, the only two definite appearances of these elements in Eddic poetry are as pageantry around the entrance of *valkyrjur* (sing. *valkyrja*), a group of female psychopomps most often linked with Óðinn (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana* I, st. 15:3–4; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II, prose after st. 18). *Hyndluljóð* and *Hárbarðsljóð* both itemise Þórr’s accomplishments and associations to varying degrees but thunder and lightning are not attached to the god there, nor are they in *Grímnismál* or *Vafþrúðnismál*, though those poems are encyclopaedias of cosmology.

This overwhelming absence from the majority of Old Norse-Icelandic literature concerning Þórr should be acknowledged. Thunder and lightning has no relevance to the deity’s characterisation for a vast proportion of the individual texts examined for this article. In these literary traditions more generally, it seems evident that by the later Viking Age thunder was neither universally nor consistently connected with Þórr in Scandinavia and Iceland, though at one stage the link was presumably strong from the indication of the name Þórr itself.

The attestations that do exist depict the god’s mastery over thunder and lightning in very different ways and for different purposes, from

Adam's divine administration and the inadvertent meteorological chaos of *Haustlǫng*'s wagon ride to the weaponised lightning of Saxo. In two of those cases, *Haustlǫng* and *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, thunder and lightning are only two of the diverse ways in which the deity's impact on the world is envisioned; in neither case is it a privileged association above all others.

Also clear from the above investigations is a geographical split in conceptualisations of Þórr; this is encapsulated in the difference between the spectacle surrounding the god's journey in *Haustlǫng* and Snorri's far more superficial treatment of thunder when dealing with the same material. Thunder is much more to the fore in Scandinavian evidence than in Icelandic, even allowing for influence from representations of Jove, and the link outside of Iceland may have been more robust than we can tell from our scanty sources. This remains conceivable for Iceland too, although it is less probable given that Snorri did not seem aware of it in the early thirteenth century.

The most logical and natural explanation for this geographical diversity lies in the contrast in climate between these two regions, as has been suggested before by Ellis Davidson (1965, 5) and Motz (1996, 57). Thunderstorms occur only once or twice per year in southern and south-western Iceland on average and are even rarer in the north (Markús Á. Einarsson 1984, 685–86). By contrast, in the admittedly extensive region outside Iceland in which stories were being composed about Þórr, thunder and lightning can occur on as many as sixteen days every year (Johannessen 1970, 49). Modern meteorological conditions are an unreliable guide to the climates of the past—according to Þórður Arason, a current researcher at the Icelandic Meteorological Office, 'it is not possible to say much about long term variations in the frequency of thunderstorms', as extrapolations cannot be made from the short sixty-year period over which thunderstorms have so far been observed in the country (email to the author, 10 October 2014). Nevertheless, this remains the best explanation for the situation at hand and finds corroboration in the absence of medieval folklore concerning thunderstones on the island (Blinkenberg 1911, 3–4, 93–94).¹⁶

¹⁶ As I am grateful to Alaric Hall for pointing out, motifs like wolves and trees survive in Icelandic literature despite their similar absence from the environment (pers. comm.). A larger study of these motifs might provide a useful comparison to the investigation of this article, but until one is made it might be presumed that the disparity here demonstrates the greater centrality of wolves, in particular, to the stories being transmitted and to a dearth of equivalent actors in the Icelandic landscape that could take their place as literary antagonists (as well as to the non-

Here and in the diverging representations of Þórr's interactions with thunder that do exist, the characterisation of Þórr seems to be responding not only to the demands of cultural necessity but also to the insistent voices of the landscape and of literary convenience.

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REVIEWS

FROM OLD ENGLISH TO OLD NORSE. A STUDY OF OLD ENGLISH TEXTS TRANSLATED INTO OLD NORSE WITH AN EDITION OF THE ENGLISH AND NORSE VERSIONS OF ÆLFRIC'S *DE FALSIS DIIS*. By JOHN FRANKIS. *Medium Ævum Monographs XXXIII*. The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature. Oxford, 2016. viii + 192 pages. ISBN 978-0-907570-41-7 (hardback), 978-0-907570-27-1 (paperback), 978-0-907570-56-1 (e-book).

Around the year 1000, the outstanding West Saxon Benedictine scholar and priest Ælfric, at that time a monk at Cerne Abbas in Dorset, composed the tract *De falsis diis* 'On false gods'. This work has the style of a homily or lesson; it opens with a statement of the monotheistic, Trinitarian, Christian creed and then explains the origins of polytheism in both pantheistic and euhemeristic terms, making reference to Old Testament history and classical mythology. The larger part of the treatise is taken up with *exempla*, both Old Testament and Christian, of the exposure and overthrow of false gods and their idols. An Old Norse epitome and translation of this text appears in the early fourteenth-century compilation Hauksbók under the heading *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst*, and a discussion of the relationship between these two versions lies at the heart of John Frankis's monograph, alongside an edition with modern English translations of the parallel texts.

Whether individually or as a pair, both of these texts have been somewhat neglected. Remarkably, no full edition of Ælfric's composition was published until 1968, when it was included in J. C. Pope's *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection* (Early English Text Society, Original Series 260). It falls outside Ælfric's major cycles of homilies—two series of *Catholic Homilies* and the *Lives of Saints*—and is found, in most cases far from complete, in seven eleventh- and twelfth-century manuscripts. A matter of real interest and significance from the perspective of Old Norse studies is the fact that Ælfric included explicit identifications of the classical deities Jove, Mercury and Venus with *Þór*, *Oðon* and *Fricg*, names he identifies as *Denisc*, without referring to their Old English counterparts, which he must have known. A variant of the text, represented by two of the manuscripts, includes a couple of interpolated sentences exposing the theology of Scandinavian heathenism for a double error: not only its euhemerism but also understanding Þor to be the son of Oðon, whereas Jove is the son of Saturn. That passage also appears in an excerpt and condensation of Ælfric's homily made by Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester and Archbishop of York, some time within the first quarter of the eleventh century. There is, however, no trace of it in the Hauksbók version. Pope, in his introduction to Ælfric's text, emphasised rather more than Frankis does the thoroughly bookish character of Ælfric's critique of paganism, an emphasis which is not only to be endorsed but should also be recognised as identifying a continuing aspect of the interest in and use of the text through to its medieval Norse derivative.

As Frankis notes, studies of the Old Norse version have tended to assume, with little or no direct consideration of possible alternatives, that a copy of Ælfric's

text reached Iceland where someone was able to read and translate it. Frankis argues cogently that a stronger case can be made for the translator having been Norwegian, and for the translation having been undertaken in England rather than somewhere in Scandinavia. Overlapping the periods in which Old English was demonstrably still quite widely read, understood and copied, and the known history of Old Norse prose literacy, the second half of the twelfth century is identified as the most likely time frame for this event. Most importantly, the translation of *De falsis diis* is not an isolate. Also in Hauksbók is a translated extract from Ælfric's homily known as *De auguriis* 'On auguries', usually treated as one of the *Lives of Saints*. There is also an Old English *Prose Phoenix*, not an Ælfrician work but one found in Ælfric manuscripts, an Old Norse translation of which appears in two different, late medieval Icelandic manuscripts. Frankis argues that all these translations were undertaken by the same individual, with a common purpose.

The evidence and arguments are presented in this study with exemplary thoroughness and clarity. The editions of the parallel texts are not fully normalised—most noticeably, vowel-length is unmarked—and the translations are close rather than free. If one thing may be noted that might have been better, it is that the decision to include only the three-quarters of Ælfric's *De falsis diis* that served as a source for the actual text in Hauksbók looks a little parsimonious. The reader is thus left dependent upon access to Pope's edition to see the remainder of the text, and there is no other modern translation available for those less able to read Old English. After all, a vital element of the whole historical case that Frankis makes is that at least some of the final quarter of *De falsis diis* had indeed been translated, and that the story of the overthrow of the idol of Seraphis in Alexandria in that section was drawn upon for an analogous episode in *The Legendary Saga of St Óláfr*. This criticism does not, however, detract in any way from the quality and value of the scholarship this handy monograph represents. It is without question an essential resource for any serious library concerned with Old Norse literature and its sources, and particularly for those with an interest in the continuing relationship between Scandinavia and England after the Norman Conquest and in the post-Viking, Christian Middle Ages.

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A VIKING WAY OF LIFE. COMBS AND COMMUNITIES IN EARLY MEDIEVAL BRITAIN. By STEVEN P. ASHBY. *Amberley*. Stroud, 2014. 186 pp. Black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 978-1-4456-0152-6.

Ashby's *A Viking Way of Life* seeks to open a window onto daily life in the Viking Age through the medium of the comb. Combs were an integral part of daily life, facilitating grooming rituals and, as Ashby argues, having symbolic significance. Ashby's approach is to examine the life of the comb from antler to production to deposition in graves. By doing so, he highlights how the need to gather raw

materials shaped elements of society, shows the process by which combs were made and considers how the comb-makers may have plied their trade. He further considers how combs were used in burial rites that extended their value beyond haircare.

The first chapter is an introduction laying out the theoretical basis for the study and justifying the choice of combs as the medium for it, on the basis that combs intersect with many areas of daily life. The geographical focus for this study is the British Isles, but evidence has been gathered from Scandinavia to expand the material available for interpretation and to highlight how techniques are shaped by the local environment. As a result, the book is of interest to a general audience and can inform discussions about the wider 'Viking world'.

The second chapter contains a fascinating discussion of the technicalities of sourcing antler to make combs. Gathering antler requires a detailed knowledge of deer habits, and there are certain times of year when the gathering may be most easily undertaken. These constraints are shown to shape approaches to gathering antler, and thus shape the form that society must take if it is to use this resource most effectively. The chapter addresses the questions of who would have gathered antler and how they would have done it. The discussion about different types of antler (red deer, elk and reindeer) highlights the need for the gatherers to understand the habits of different creatures and proposes that antler-gathering required specialist knowledge that would have varied according to location and the type of deer being harvested. This knowledge, together with the knowledge of when antler is most readily available and most easily accessible, determines who can gather antler most efficiently, and creates a social role for gatherers rather than assuming opportunistic collection.

Chapter 3 examines the production of combs and considers the lifestyle of comb-makers. It is a short chapter that shows the complex construction technique used in making composite combs. It demonstrates that the techniques used are governed not just by the materials employed but also by the social context of the construction. Ashby also considers the identity and status of comb-makers, questioning whether they formed their own communities or were integrated with other trades. These questions remain open, largely because of a lack of sources.

Chapter 4 begins to discuss how rituals of grooming fit into society, examining why people might need combs. Ashby considers personal grooming as a performative act that sees its performance in the final form that the hair takes, and in the perception by others of that form. While grooming might not take place in public, its effects are a very public and personal form of display with a specific intent behind them. In support of his statements about the significance of grooming, Ashby discusses the written evidence. Here his analysis falters, as he relies for evidence on translations, rather than working with the original Old Norse texts. Moreover, these are older translations such as Lee Hollander's translation of *Heimskringla* (1964) and William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's translation of *Heimskringla* (1894). It seems strange that Hollander's translation alone did not suffice for the analysis, and that Ashby had to resort to a translation as old as Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon's when more recent translations are readily available. It would have been useful here to see a discussion of the evidence and of the potential problems

with the source material, making the analysis more rigorous. Nevertheless, the discussion is interesting and provides the basis for further research into the significance of hair and grooming as performed social activities.

Chapter 6 considers briefly the final resting places of combs. It discusses specific examples of burials from England, Scotland and the Northern Isles that include combs. The discussion is factual and there is little interpretation, largely because, as Ashby states, the reasoning behind the placing of combs in burials is not clear. In discussing Viking-Age combs as grave goods, he acknowledges that the mortuary rituals are many and varied, and that broader patterns are not clear, except in limited cases, such as the use of freshly made combs in the Scottish examples. The analysis moves on from deposition in graves to discuss briefly how combs have an afterlife that becomes manifest when they are excavated and taken for analysis. While this afterlife is not an element of their Viking-Age existence and use, it is a material consideration in analysing that existence.

A Viking Way of Life contains much useful technical detail about comb production that can inform the analysis of hairdressing and haircare in written texts and other contexts. Ashby seems less sure of his ground in discussing literary references involving hair and combs; the readings are superficial, although that does not significantly detract from the points being made in the book. However, a more literary analysis could have expanded upon and enhanced the utility of the study, demonstrating the significance of haircare and grooming more completely. Nevertheless, Ashby raises many thoughtful points that bear consideration when examining the use and role of combs and other artefacts in daily life in the Viking Age. Even where the analysis veers towards the speculative, the book provides food for thought.

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THE BEGINNING OF SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENT IN ENGLAND. THE VIKING 'GREAT ARMY' AND EARLY SETTLERS, c.865–900. By SHANE McLEOD. *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* 29. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2014. 325 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-54556-1.

This book is a very useful re-evaluation of the issues surrounding Scandinavian settlement in England in the ninth century. As the author himself notes, this period has often been given rather short shrift in wider discussions of Scandinavian contact and settlement in England, in favour of the better documented and sourced later settlement period. McLeod, therefore, deliberately sets his focus on the *micel here* (the Great Army of CE 865). The book, based on his PhD thesis, is an interesting, multi-disciplinary exploration of the subject, bringing together data from historical sources and traditional archaeological studies, as well as the newer archaeological methodologies of genetic and isotope analysis.

The book is divided into six chapters, which cover source criticism; migration theory and its applicability to the Scandinavian migrations of the ninth century; the origins of the settlers; the Scandinavian use of client kings; political and economic

innovation and acculturation; and Scandinavian adaptability and adoption of Christianity. The first chapter is a clear reminder of the book's previous life as a PhD thesis. It is an exhaustive and thickly detailed summary of sources, which is impressive, but feels more like an annotated appendix than a true chapter. While there is no doubting the usefulness of such an overview, it sits separate from the main thesis of the book.

The meat of McLeod's thesis really begins in Chapter 2, in which he lays out the theoretical framework of migration theory. As a modern theoretical construct, not all tenets of migration theory apply to medieval Scandinavian movement and McLeod carefully works through these, testing them against his evidence. He argues for disregarding some tenets on the basis of mismatches and lack of evidence; the others he engages with in a meaningful and fruitful manner. For the Scandinavian case, McLeod argues for the use of 'scouts' and the establishment of 'chain migration'; continuous migratory flow over a period; migration being undertaken by a particular people, usually young and male (but not exclusively so); the likelihood of previous migratory activity by those migrating to England; and the phenomenon of return migration. Based on this discussion, he argues that Scandinavian migration to England was an ongoing, if undocumented, process through previous centuries, with the arrival of the Great Army of 865 representing a spike in a relatively regular flow. He uses data from re-evaluated burials, pointing out that several burials, previously thought to be male owing to the type of burial equipment found, were revealed to be female when osteologically examined. Consequently, McLeod suggests that the number of female migrants was greater than previously supposed and also greater than the number indicated by the theoretical model.

In Chapter 3, McLeod considers the likely origins of the members of the Great Army and the early settlers in whom he is interested. He rightly highlights the propensity of contemporary and near-contemporary sources to ascribe a 'Danish' identity to all Scandinavians and the problems arising out of this ascription for anyone attempting to uncover the origins of migrants. Following the tenet of migration theory that migrants usually have prior experience of migration, McLeod focuses on possible ninth-century migration from Ireland and Frisia. On the basis of textual and archaeological evidence, he argues successfully for strong connections between the Great Army and Scandinavian settlements in Ireland and Frisia. He then proceeds to discuss migration from the Scandinavian homelands, and concludes that evidence for direct immigration in this early phase is 'underwhelming'.

It is here that there appears to be a fundamental confusion between a migrant's previous settlement and their place of origin, and in differentiating a migrant from someone simply passing through. While in the previous chapter McLeod demonstrates a nuanced understanding of migration theory, here he disregards some of its complexities in favour of his preferred explanation. He treats Ireland and Frisia as lands of origin for migrants to England over Scandinavia on the basis of archaeological evidence and influences identified in texts. Dealing with the archaeology first, it has been acknowledged that the

archaeological signature for migration is rarely visible as distinct from other forms of diffusion of people and material culture (see David W. Anthony, 'Migration in Archeology: The Baby and the Bathwater', *American Anthropologist*, New Series 92:4 (Dec. 1990), 895–914). Cultural influences and material culture could have travelled through contact between Scandinavia and secondary settlements just as easily as being taken up by migrants born in these settlements and brought forward. Furthermore, in focusing on Frisia as the origin of influence on minting activity and coinage, McLeod ignores early ninth-century Scandinavian coinage from Hedeby and possibly Ribe. As a consequence, the conclusion that early migrants in the ninth century came primarily from Scandinavian settlements outside Scandinavia remains an interesting, but not conclusively proven, hypothesis.

The rest of the book, however, takes this hypothesis as proven and builds on it, which is thought-provoking in the insights it generates and intriguing in the possibilities for future research, but also frustrating in disregarding the alternative possibilities, especially those rooted in the Scandinavian background. In the next chapter (Chapter 4), McLeod discusses the use of client kings by the leaders of the Great Army during their campaign and early settlement period. He makes a compelling case for the strategic and economic advantages gained by the Great Army through the use of client kings. He suggests that this was one among many political and economic innovations introduced to England because of the migrants' previous experience of the practice on the Continent. The possibility that migrants came directly from Scandinavia—who may also have had knowledge of such practices through (non-Frisian) contact with the Carolingian Empire—is left untested.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the acculturative process, secular and religious respectively. It is to his credit that McLeod discusses acculturation as a two-way process, rather than simply regarding it as the acceptance of the host culture by the migrants. Using rather ephemeral material, and naturally constrained by it, he nevertheless provides a nuanced analysis of Scandinavian innovation in the use of written treaties, the establishment of buffer zones and the minting of coins. Once again, however, the thrust of the argument hinges on the pre-migratory experiences of the settlers in Ireland and Frisia, and does not consider conditions in Scandinavia. Similarly, in considering the migrants' adoption of Christian practices, McLeod attributes the flexibility and adaptability of the Scandinavians in England to their prior contact with Christianity in Ireland and Frisia. Despite dealing with Christian contact with Scandinavia through trade and missions such as those of Anskar, he assumes knowledge of Christianity to have come from the purported lands of origin to the exclusion of Scandinavia. In fact, given the primarily archaeological, burial-based analysis, it is evidently difficult to recover the origin of Christian influences. However, this aspect of the Great Army's activities during the campaign period and early settlement clearly warrants further exploration, and McLeod's analysis is a good starting point.

In this book, McLeod does a truly commendable job of pulling a vast and diverse array of evidence from different disciplines into the service of his thesis.

Some of his questions and propositions could, and indeed should, prompt a re-evaluation of our understanding, not just of Scandinavian settlement in the ninth century, but also of later waves of settlement. This is by no means the definitive analysis of the topic, but it is indeed a good place to start for any student or scholar of the period.

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THE VIKINGS AND THEIR AGE. By ANGUS A. SOMERVILLE and R. ANDREW McDONALD. *Companions to Medieval Studies* 1. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, 2013. 160 pp. Black-and-white illustrations. ISBN 978-1-4426-0522-0 (paperback), 978-1-4426-0762-0 (hardback).

The Vikings and their Age is a general introduction to the Vikings written explicitly for use as a course book for undergraduate historians. It is a concise companion to the more voluminous *The Viking Age: A Reader* (2010), in which Angus A. Somerville and R. Andrew McDonald present in English translation a broad selection of texts emanating from or relating to the Viking Age. Although it samples from the broader range of disciplines that intersect in modern Viking studies, the book's focus is emphatically on these written sources. It is basic enough to be accessible to students with no prior knowledge of Viking studies, and, for students who are new to historical research methods more generally, rehearses the basic tenets of source criticism.

Chapter 1, 'Overview', covers the usual preliminaries relating to the modern academic use of the term 'Viking', historical periodisation and the developments that probably set the conditions for the Viking Age. Through their focus on the written sources, Somerville and McDonald emphasise the Vikings' interactions with their contemporaries in Europe, through whose written records the encounters are known to us. This introduction goes further than the usual wide-access book in showing how interpretation of these sources is unavoidably speculative: in placing the Vikings in the 'Courtroom of History', the authors show readers how the same evidence, variously interpreted, has been used to support contrary historical arguments.

Chapter 2, 'Society and Religion in the Viking Age', presents concise overviews of the written evidence for topics such as slavery; the lives of women, families and children; the law; and early religion and belief. Chapter 3, 'Viking Biographies', centres on the lives and careers of eight Viking-Age 'personalities', namely, to use the Anglicised forms adopted by the authors, the warrior-poet Egil Skallagrimsson; the kings Harald Bluetooth, Olaf Trygvason and Harald Hardradi; the explorers Eirik the Red and Leif Eiriksson; the Viking-Age women Unn the Deep-Minded and Gudrid Thorbjarnardughter [*sic*]; and the chieftain Svein Asleifarson. These character portraits are drawn from translated texts anthologised in the *Reader*, and thus enable students to examine the fraught relationships between primary sources and scholarly reconstructions.

Chapter 4, 'How Do We Know about the Vikings?', again brings into focus the range of written sources from which we take our information, surveying both the contemporary records of those with whom the Vikings came into contact, and the retrospective literature written by Icelanders in subsequent centuries. The authors describe the 'rigorous standards of source criticism' (p. 128) required to determine a source's reliability. This chapter might have been introduced earlier, since it does much to reveal how fragmentary these sources are. A rather brief survey of the contemporary sources, which includes Ohthere, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Alcuin and Adam of Bremen (pp. 85–105), gives way to an extended overview of the later medieval Icelandic sources (pp. 105–28). The authors provide a quick introduction to the main saga genres, Icelandic historical writings and poetry, with basic guides to Eddic and skaldic metres. This will be useful to students traversing the extensive secondary literature on Old Norse and Viking studies, even if some of the genres it covers, notably the Contemporary Sagas, have little at all to do with the Viking Age. Conversely, the authors limit their coverage of Viking-Age runic inscriptions to a brief spotlight on the Jelling stone (pp. 50–52, 86–88), and the evidence of some contemporary European and Byzantine sources is addressed sparingly, although they are included in the *Reader*.

Chapter 5 is a case-study excerpt from Ermentar of Noirmoutier's account of the Viking raid on the monastery of Saint Philibert in 860 (pp. 129–34). This useful chapter allows the student to read and analyse a primary source, having been primed to think about the historicity, perspective and representativeness of such sources in foregoing chapters. Following an 'Afterword', which considers the Vikings' impact on a wider Europe, the authors helpfully provide a back matter of resources to help readers understand the book's contents. This includes 'Questions for Reflection', a 'Chronology' and 'Glossary'. Unfortunately, this back matter lacks a selection of further readings, obliging readers to rely on a three-page 'references' section amounting to a list of works cited (up to 2009) that is neither comprehensive, nor quite equal to the book's broad remit. Readers who encounter this book on a beginners' course on the Vikings will have to rely on their teachers to provide an updated reading list; the inclusion of a basic bibliography would have been a concession to readers who come by the book independently, as well as university teachers who are not specialists in Viking studies but who nevertheless want to incorporate them into a course dealing more broadly with medieval European history.

The Vikings and their Age, and its companion *Reader*, will be useful to those planning introductory courses on the Vikings. For the student, it conveys basic information on a good range of topics, concisely presented, and with an apparatus that eases its accessibility to absolute newcomers. Its attention to source criticism makes it a suitable introduction to historical methodologies for new historians, or to literature students who seek to arrive at a better understanding of the period as a whole. The book's focus is emphatically on the textual sources and, while it does sample other disciplines, some of its chapters call out for a more systematically inclusive and interdisciplinary approach. The lengthy excursus on Eddic poetry,

for example, might have given a stronger sense of its relevance to the Viking Age had it engaged with the appearance of its motifs on Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture. The book has been designed with the curricular requirements of an undergraduate history programme in mind, a milieu in which the interdisciplinarity that characterises modern Viking studies is sometimes ill at ease. As a guide to the written sources, however, this disciplinary restraint allows the authors to exhibit both the possibilities and the limitations of the written evidence, in ways that will undoubtedly be valuable to students and their teachers. Its pedagogical awareness makes *The Vikings and their Age* a useful primer for beginners, and a good foundation for further study.

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THE POETIC EDDA. STORIES OF THE NORSE GODS AND HEROES. Translated by JACKSON CRAWFORD. *Hackett*. Indianapolis, 2015. 366 pp. ISBN 978-1-62466-356-7.

The publication of Jackson Crawford's *The Poetic Edda* comes at an interesting time, relatively soon after the appearance of Andy Orchard's translation of the same material (*The Elder Edda. A Book of Viking Lore*. London, 2011) and hot on the heels of the latest edition of Carolyne Larrington's translation (*The Poetic Edda*. Oxford, 2014). From this fact alone, one assumes that Crawford's *Edda* must aim to offer something that these translations, as well as previous ones, do not. Commentary and explication are at a premium in the book itself, which avoids any reference to secondary sources apart from a brief but helpful list of suggestions for further reading. However, Crawford explains the intentions underlying his translation in a post on his blog (<https://tattuinarerdoelasaga.wordpress.com/2015/12/14/why-a-new-edda-translation/>): his *Edda* translation is 'for a reader who is primarily focused on *myths* rather than *poetry*', not made to 'suit the needs of detailed textual scholars'.

This statement opens up some interesting avenues for thought about the purpose, use and reception of Eddic poetry. It also places the present reviewer in a somewhat curious position: should one be checking the accuracy of this translation, or forgetting one's background knowledge of the source material and attempting to read Crawford's *Edda* with fresh eyes? It is tempting to stick to the more familiar, former option, and yet the above statement of purpose implicitly asks us to judge this book by how well it meets its stated goals: Crawford reformulates the question of translation from one of *accuracy* to one of *accessibility*.

Crawford's *Edda* is easy to pick up and read. Commentary is minimal but useful, and the verse itself is presented in a visually clear style. A published poet in his own right, Crawford renders his translation in a modest, cautiously elegant free verse with a rigorous consistency that gives the material a fluency impossible in a translation reflecting the original Old Norse syntax. Crawford's sense of rhythm is perhaps his strongest suit here, contributing significantly to

the readability of the verse. The diction is simple and clear; Crawford is rigorous in avoiding the archaic and abstruse. These qualities combine to produce verse that reads easily, and yet seems almost diametrically opposed to the Old Norse Eddic style, which favours obliquity and opaque diction, as well as an economy of language that does not contribute to clarity. Crawford's verse does, however, have a conservative sparseness that often comes close to echoing the terseness of Old Norse Eddic metres.

However, style is not the primary focus of Crawford's *Edda*; the style employed aims at transparency, seeking to shift the focus of the reader away from itself and toward the matter at hand. This matter, we are told, is mythology. Crawford joins a scholarly tradition that arguably reaches back to Snorri Sturluson (and, indeed, the compiler(s) of the Codex Regius) in conceptualising and treating Eddic poetry primarily as a repository of mythological knowledge, 'rather than *poetry*'. To that end, Crawford's *Edda* includes a preamble written by the translator for each poem and a general introduction, including a brief overview of the Eddic cosmological system and one on the social context of early medieval Scandinavia. Discussion of the context of Eddic scholarship is excluded from Crawford's contextual information, presumably to make the book as a whole more accessible or approachable for the casual reader. The strength of this approach is that it manages to avoid discussions which may weigh heavily on the minds of Eddic scholars but have little relevance for non-specialists; its weakness is that it fails to reflect the variety of points of view from which Eddic poetry has historically been approached, and continues to be approached. As such, though the information is useful, one feels it could have benefitted from adopting a more suggestive and less prescriptive tone, challenging the casual reader to consider the complexity of the topic at hand rather than presenting the information as a list of facts.

In terms of faithfulness to the source material, Crawford has taken various liberties in simplifying and streamlining the text. In almost all cases it should be sufficiently clear to specialists that these changes have been made for purposes of clarity and accessibility, though one might question many individual choices. However, except in a few cases in the introduction, in which specific systematic changes in orthography and spelling are brought to the reader's attention, none of these editorial decisions will be visible to the casual reader. Some specialists may not be fully satisfied with the transliteration of orthography (and a few will grind their teeth at the use of *valhalla* for *valhöll*), but by and large these are concerns that would indeed be of doubtful relevance to Crawford's stated audience. However, the tricky business of translating idioms sometimes comes up short in Crawford's *Edda*. Both immediately noticeable and arguably symptomatic of this tendency is the translation of *volva* as 'witch', a choice with which many Old Norse scholars would reasonably disagree. One wonders why this term, loaded as it is with cultural associations which do not straightforwardly apply to *volur*, was chosen in favour of any of the more standard options; surely a brief explanation of the Old Norse term would have been of considerable interest and usefulness for Crawford's readership.

Ultimately, it lies somewhat beyond the scope of this review to say conclusively how useful this *Poetic Edda* is as a resource for non-specialists. It does, however,

raise interesting questions for specialists. Popular interest in medieval Scandinavian topics has surged in recent years, but who are these interested readers? What brings them to Eddic mythology, and what do they hope to get out of it? What do we as scholars have a responsibility to try to transmit to the public? How can we say everything we mean to say and still remain accessible to non-specialists? What is the difference, exactly, between the concerns of the specialist and those of the non-specialist? Is there an *essence* of Eddic mythology that we as scholars can translate? Crawford's *Edda* represents a particular moment in this discussion; though it raises more questions for Old Norse scholarship than it answers, it presents an interesting argument, one we would all, specialist and non-specialist alike, do well to consider.

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THE POETICS OF COMMEMORATION. SKALDIC VERSE AND SOCIAL MEMORY, c.890–1070. By ERIN MICHELLE GOERES. *Oxford University Press*. Oxford, 2015. 208 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-874574-7.

This monograph, adapted from an Oxford DPhil thesis, takes its cue from recent developments in the theory of cultural memory and its application to the Old Norse/Icelandic literary corpus, as outlined in the Introduction. On the whole, however, Goeres eschews theorising. Such leading exponents as Mary Carruthers, Sigmund Freud, Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs are briefly cited, as is almost ritual in studies of cultural memory these days, but by contrast such an authority on mourning as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross is not discussed, nor do we hear about Elizabeth Loftus, Endel Tulving and other leading empiricists in the field of memory.

Instead, Goeres's monograph focuses almost entirely upon the skaldic corpus itself in a series of what the author calls 'case studies'. After a brief Introduction, the book divides into five main chapters. These are 1. Remembering Ancestors: *Ynglingatal* and the Early Scandinavian Kings; 2. The Afterlife of Kings: Eiríkr blóðøx, Hákon inn góði, and Óláfr Tryggvason; 3. Changing Patrons: The Poets of Haraldr gráfeldr and Hákon inn góði; 4. Elegy, Hagiography, and Advice to Princes: The Commemoration of Óláfr inn helgi; and 5. Divided Loyalties: Arnórr jarlaskáld and the Jarls of Orkney. These are followed by a Conclusion and a detailed Bibliography and Index.

The analysis is in an essayistic mode of literary appreciation. Goeres succeeds in her general aim, which is apparently to point to the complexities of her chosen verses in respect of ideology, genre and style. She seeks to show the poets positioning themselves in a variety of ways for a variety of motives, some more altruistic than others. She favours a reflexive model where, for example, 'the poet . . . demonstrates that only the ordered structure of poetic language can control the chaos that follows the loss of a king' (p. 16). Of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's

Ynglingatal she remarks, ‘the poet demonstrates in this early text a keen interest in scrutinizing both the ways in which societies remember the dead and the poet’s own role in that process’ (p. 20). But the existence of this reflexivity is more a presupposition than something Goeres conclusively establishes. In the case of *Ynglingatal* it is difficult—perhaps futile—to attempt to define what might be tragic, ironic, grotesque, satiric or comic in Þjóðólfr’s handling of his material, especially when these literary terms are non-native and unlikely to be strictly pertinent. Overall, the selection of cases is somewhat too small to test any hypotheses, even though the Conclusion does provide a brief further indication of the diversity of the corpus. Given that the treatment of each of the main cases contains repetitions and peripherally relevant points (the latter particularly associated with the quotations that get each chapter off to a markedly tangential start), room should have been created for the discussion of instances where the poet’s allegiances are interestingly equivocal, as with Sigvatr’s tribute to Erlingr Skjálgrsson.

Among Goeres’s most acute observations are those on the use of individual words, such as *blanda* ‘commingle’ (p. 39), and on semantic clusters, such as *lýsa* and *gleppja* in the legal senses of ‘proclaim’ (p. 76) and ‘confuse’ (p. 80) respectively; so too *óðal* ‘ancestral land’ (p. 137). She analyses in fine detail the self-construction of Hallfreðr Óttarsson, ‘buffeted’ by conflicting rumours concerning the fate of Óláfr Tryggvason (pp. 78–79). Perhaps the best piece of sustained argument comes late in the book (pp. 166–68), where she takes up a stanza attributed to Arnórr jarlaskáld and justifiably contests the view of Diana Whaley in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (II (2009), ed. Kari Ellen Gade, 234–35) and previous editors that it belongs at the beginning of the *Porfinnsdrápa* rather than at the conclusion and refers to the earl rather than to the poet himself.

The author is familiar with a good deal of pre-existing scholarship—even if her characterisation of Finnur Jónsson’s contribution to the editing of skaldic poetry is on the vague side (p. 85)—and the range of opinion is fairly reflected in her exposition. At the same time, there is a tendency to use the exploration of opinion on both sides of a textual or interpretive question so as to lead to a verdict that attempts to have things both ways. Sometimes scholarly opinion is accepted too readily and uncritically: thus, Jessica Rainford’s reported observation that Sigvatr uses ‘mythological kennings’ for ‘sword’ in his *Erfidrápa* st. 27, when in fact the basis of the first kenning is a simple *heiti* for ‘battle’, not involving any mythological figures, and that of the second kenning is the ‘beasts of battle’ type-scene, likewise not dependent on mythology (p. 129). Elsewhere Goeres needed to think further and more deeply about the text. When, for example, she states that Sigvatr’s line *herland skal svá verja* ‘so should one defend the people’s land’ ‘casts the king’s actions in the pre-Christian tradition of the “land-guardian”’ (p. 125), this is to ignore a key difference between Óláfr Haraldsson and his ‘pre-Christian’ counterparts: Sigvatr represents Óláfr as defending his land by punishing thieves (i.e., taking action against internal enemies on a legal and moral basis) rather than fighting external enemies on a military basis.

Numerous citations from the original texts are included, along with Goeres's own translations. These translations are generally serviceable and only seldom contain definite errors, such as the rendering of *þó at* as 'because' instead of 'although' (p. 62), which alters the logic of the original text. The characterisation of Elli from *Gylfaginning*: *engi hefir sá orðit, ok engi mun verða ef svá gamall er at elli biðr, at eigi komi ellin öllum til falls*, should read on these lines: 'there has never been anyone, and there will be no one who is so old as to experience *elli* (senescence, decrepitude) that *elli* will not bring them all down', rather than the illogical 'there has never been, nor will there be, anyone so old that when they experience old age, old age will not bring them all to a fall' (p. 104). A case of imprecision rather than outright error is 'the accounts become unremarkable', translating *verða frásagnir ómerkiligar* (p. 5), when the idea is more pertinently that stories preserved solely in oral tradition cease to point to (*marka*) the truth. A little tendentious, to my mind, is the translation 'which men have used for their amusement', rendering an original *er menn hafa haft til skemmtanar sér* (p. 31), which Goeres uses as a logical step in positing absurdity amongst the effects to be found in *Ynglingatal*: 'The absurdity of these kingly deaths is a deliberate demand for active audience involvement in the production of meaning and, thus, the transmission of memory' (p. 34). The difficulty here, aside from the possible implication that the poet himself decided what types of deaths to associate with these kings, is that 'amusement' does not represent a conceptual match for *skemmtun*, a term that has its true basis in the capacity of a story to 'shorten', i.e., while away, the time. A story can do that without being 'amusing' or 'diverting' in our sense. The adjective *fulleggr*, literally 'fully edged', might better be understood as either 'doubly edged, with a double edge' or 'with an edge free of notches', rather than merely 'sharp-edged' (p. 103). As a matter of conversion from verse word order to prose word order the repeated phrase *hans skáld* 'his skald' should of course be *skáld hans* (pp. 106, 127 and elsewhere). In a quotation from Finnur Jónsson we need to see *Sigvatr* gaining the position of highest honour, not the 'highest honorary (*sic*) position', at court (p. 85, n. 1). A rare moment of insecurity with literary terminology is the confusion between 'simile' and 'comparison' (pp. 61–62).

The scattering of errors in the texts themselves includes *ridderaskap* for *riddarskap* (p. 56), *Vallhallar* for *Valhallar* (p. 66), the redundant comma after *sultar* (p. 81), *hlui* for *hluti* (p. 87), *bjrósti* for *brjósti* (p. 132) and *helium* for *heilum* (p. 144). A rare concord error is 'suggest' for 'suggests' (p. 133). The book is handsomely produced. The only feature of layout that detracts from the book's appearance is the presentation of skaldic verse in so-called 'long-line' form, i.e., lined by couplets (*vísuorð*) rather than the editorially traditional single lines. It would be best to avoid an unfamiliar format when in all conscience skaldic poetry is difficult enough to follow already. If economies of space are a consideration the format used in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* is a suitable one and is likely to become standard.

EGIL, THE VIKING POET. NEW APPROACHES TO EGIL'S SAGA. Edited by LAURENCE DE LOOZE, JÓN KARL HELGASON, RUSSELL POOLE and TORFI H. TULINIUS. *Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Series*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto, 2015. 242 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-4969-9.

As the two-part title indicates, this welcome new collection serves as a critical companion to one of the most read and appreciated of the sagas, whilst also maintaining a particular focus on what de Looze terms the 'enigmatic, ambiguous self' of the saga's main protagonist (p. 58). The collection is clearly intended to be accessible for students as well as specialists: names are anglicised, and the English translations precede the Old Norse quotations, whilst the essays themselves serve to synthesise each contributor's expertise on a particular aspect of the saga as well as (in most cases) presenting new research. The introduction to the volume presents a summary of key events useful to those readers reacquainting themselves with the narrative, before turning to reflect on a theme that recurs throughout the collection: namely, the exceptionalism of the individual saga hero as judged against the culture that produced him. What follows is a series of essays that represent, in the words of Russell Poole's helpful summary, a 'wide range of further possible lines of enquiry' into the saga (p. 15), and that will certainly broaden the perspective of any reader.

The first two essays serve to outline the structure of the saga whilst also shedding light on a particular feature of its composition. In the first of these paired essays Torfi H. Tulinius returns to address a question touched on in several previous studies, namely the degree of conscious planning involved in the construction of the saga. Here he adds to the evidence of deliberate structural patterning across the entire narrative, particularly through recurring details in the portrayal of various figures named Ketill as well as other events that 'appear to echo one another deliberately' (p. 30). Although the argument made for parallels between the patterning of the second part of the saga and the structure of *Hofuðlausn* is rather fragile, the balance of evidence for the author's keen 'sense of form' is convincing. In the essay that follows Guðrún Nordal makes a compelling case for the need to pay attention to contemporary treatises on skaldic poetics in order to appreciate the sophisticated use of poetry in the saga. Her analysis focuses on four scenes in *Egils saga*, each of which provides an important insight into the author's appreciation of Egill's individual poetic style and the role that verse plays in structuring the narrative, including the way that the repetition of two particular *dróttkvætt* variants serves to link together scenes of particular import. The question of authorship hovers in the background, but Guðrún is content to note that 'manuscripts associated with the Sturlungs . . . bear witness to a particular fondness for the poet Egil' (p. 50).

In the following section on 'Identity', Laurence de Looze applies the theories of Paul Ricoeur (on the relation of narrative to the construction of the self) and Jean-Pierre Vernaunt (on the individual in the heroic culture of the Classical world) to the extraordinary character of Egill. Though the application of twentieth-century theory to medieval texts is always open to criticism (a point

that de Looze anticipates), the observations on the rhetoric of self—including the importance of keeping one's word and the role of poetry in self-articulation—are fascinating, and the application of Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity to *Egils saga* seems to me a very productive way into thinking about the 'discordant concordance' of Egill's complex character. Margaret Clunies Ross focuses on a more specific aspect of self-fashioning in her contribution, considering the poet's descriptions of his physical appearance and paying particular attention to the ransomed head in *Arinbjarnarkviða* and to the unusual portrayal of physical frailty in the poetry associated with Egill's declining years. The latter portion of the essay pays more attention to poetic composition (and the importance of animalism, drunkenness and craftsmanship to its realisation in the saga) than to descriptions of the physical self, though Clunies Ross observes that descriptions of poetic creation often overlap with acts of somatic description in the saga, particularly based on the 'organs of perception and vocal expression' (p. 87).

Ármann Jakobsson's close study of character depiction and relationships in a single chapter of *Egils saga* opens the series of essays dealing with 'Emotions and Affiliations'. The murders committed by the young Egill and the volatile relationship between father and son that emerges in chapter 40 represent a sequence of extreme emotional tension, and thus a useful jumping-off point for a psychological reading of this family drama. In a collection focused on the main protagonist, the attention paid to Skallagrímr and to the empathy Þórólfr displays in deciding to become his 'brother's keeper' is a welcome one, and reveals much about Egill's character in the process. Alison Finlay follows up this study of Egill's youth with an essay on his old age, explaining the anticlimactic account of the decline of the hero by considering the role that Egill's poetry and traditional elegiac conceptions of old age may have played in shaping the contours of this section of the narrative. Productive comparisons between *Sonatorrek* and the archetypal loss of a son in mythology, as well as its expression in *Beowulf*, suggest that the construction of Egill's decline is less exceptional than it has often appeared to critics, as the final chapters of the saga 'develop the poem's elegiac theme in a different register' (p. 126). Oren Falk's chapter continues the theme of loss but centres on a resounding absence surrounding the saga hero: namely, articulation of the marginal experience of the widower. His reading relies on the premise that 'what the skalds and saga writers do not discuss may tell us as much about Norse civilization as what they do' (p. 131), and his careful attention to two episodes of widowers behaving badly shows how productive this negative evidence can be. The recurring motif of widowers' troubled remarriages throughout the saga provides further evidence for deliberate patterning of the narrative, as well as for the recognition of the widower's particular experience. The final essay in this section, by Timothy Tangherlini, adopts the structural approach of social network analysis to analyse the interconnection between characters in the saga. Genealogical ties, affiliations and networks of friendship or enmity have a profound influence on

the interaction of individual characters, but such influences are often hidden in plain sight owing to the complexity of the social world described. Several of the patterns identified through this distant-reading approach (such as the role of foster relationships in reducing the social gulf between the main groups of antagonists) are very interesting, though the diagrams have a lot of work to do to illustrate these trends. Whilst the application of SNA can be open to accusations of reducing complex literary relationships to types, Tangherlini's careful analysis clearly demonstrates the 'potential interpretative gains' of this approach (p. 166) when allied with close reading of the saga.

The final three essays are grouped loosely around the theme of 'reception', opening with Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir's foray into the textual history of the saga, ignored in many discussions of structure. This study serves as a useful introduction to the manuscript witnesses of *Egils saga*, as well as bringing into focus the early reception contexts of the *rímur* and a seventeenth-century recasting of the prose narrative derogatorily named *Vitlausia Eglá*, or the 'Silly Saga of Egill'. The passages of this little-known version edited and translated here are intriguing, and help to illuminate changing Icelandic literary sensibilities and the composite nature of the final section of the narrative. Jón Karl Helgason addresses a more immediate and visceral aspect of reception, namely the 'transgressive poetics' of the saga and the effect of powerful imagery on the audience, reading this affecting narrative through the lens of Freud's theory of the uncanny (particularly as manifested through recurrence of situations), Kristeva's concept of the abject and Bataille's *L'Érotisme*. A short essay does not leave much room to do justice to three important theoretical models (particularly to the destabilising power of the abject), but the essay sensibly maintains the focus on audience effect and opens up this 'complex tissue of powerful impressions' (p. 214) for readers to explore more fully (if they dare!). The final contribution to the section on reception is not a fully-fledged essay, but rather a description of the annotated 'Online Bibliography of *Egill's Saga*' project at the University of Iceland, introducing a selected bibliography in print. This is a unique way to present further reading and to open up an already wide-ranging collection, continuing the admirable attention to user-friendliness on display throughout.

Unusually for a diverse collection of this kind, the quality, focus and tone are largely maintained across the twelve essays: this may be helped by the textual rather than thematic focus, but it is also clearly the result of assiduous editing. Whilst the rationale behind the grouping of essays might be questioned (the essays on 'reception' are a rather heterogeneous bunch), overall the collection gives the impression of having been carefully planned to provide a wide-ranging and accessible account of current thinking on the saga from an impressive array of leading saga scholars. I've no doubt that it will become essential reading for those with an interest in the Sagas of Icelanders and in Viking and Old Norse Studies more generally, and it provides an exemplary model for future text-focused collections to follow.

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EYRBYGGJA SAGA. EFNI OG HÖFUNDAREINKENNI. By ELÍN BÁRA MAGNÚSDÓTTIR. *Studia Islandica* 65. *Bókmennta- og listfræðastofnun Háskóla Íslands*. Reykjavík, 2015. 400 pp. ISBN 978-9935-23-099-7.

In this study of a major Saga of Early Icelanders, dealing with the political career of Snorri goði and the regional dynamics of Snæfellsnes and Borgarfjörður in western Iceland, Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir offers a careful, consistent and subtle examination of this important text. In particular, as the author states, this is the first book-length attempt to deal with Peter Hallberg's (1979) argument that it could have been written by Sturla Þórðarson, author of *Íslendinga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* and a redaction of *Landnámabók*.

Interest in the author and politician Sturla Þórðarson has been on the rise in the last few years, with the publication of Úlfar Bragason's *Ætt og saga* (2010), the 2013 *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of *Hákonar saga* and *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman* (2017, edited by Jón Viðar Sigurðsson and Sverrir Jakobsson). It will surely be furthered by the upcoming *Íslenzk fornrit* edition of *Sturlunga saga* (edited by Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir), of which *Íslendinga saga* is a significant part, and the much anticipated translation of the same saga compilation by Alison Finlay. In the light of this Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir's attempt to establish Sturla as the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* is timely.

After setting out this goal in the introduction, Elín Bára seeks to examine whether *Eyrbyggja saga*'s sources present a consistent image of the subject matter. Another goal of the book is to understand the unique image of Snorri goði as a non-traditional saga hero; the book traces the societal change described in the saga from rule by small *goðar* to larger district chieftaincies, and how Snorri embodies this change. The book then discusses *Eyrbyggja saga*'s unique composition, focusing on its episodic structure, its protagonist Snorri goði, the date of composition and finally Sturla Þórðarson's possible authorship. Unfortunately the second chapter's discussion of previous scholarship rarely engages with material written after the 1990s, and most of the material from the early 2000s is relegated to footnotes. Notable examples of this are Heather O'Donoghue's (2005) analysis of *Eyrbyggja saga* in light of its use of skaldic poetry and Torfi H. Tulinius's work on the saga (e.g. 2007). The suggestion, here and throughout the book, that Snorri goði represents a *ný personagerð* 'new type of protagonist' (p. 384, English summary), is likely to be controversial. Snorri goði is indeed an unconventional saga hero, but he is not unprecedented in the larger saga corpus. The most notable precedent is *Færeyinga saga*'s Þrándr, most recently discussed by Andreas Schmidt (2016). There are similarities in the development of Snorri and Þrándr as characters in their respective sagas, as well as in their dealings with the rivals pitted against them. Putting aside its problematic transmission, *Færeyinga saga* is commonly dated to c.1200, preceding *Eyrbyggja saga* by around seven decades, according to Elín Bára Magnúsdóttir's preferred dating.

Chapter 3 deals with the saga's opening chapters, including an analysis of Snorri's beginnings, his uneventful yet financially successful voyage to Norway and how he tricks his stepfather out of the chieftaincy. There follows a fascinating analysis of the *Máhlíðingamál*, in which the unfortunate Þórarinn svarti is forced

to prove his masculinity in the face of the oppression of his neighbours. This societal disorder requires a new kind of chieftain, one embodied by Snorri goði. A contrast to this social unrest is the powerful district chieftaincy represented by Þórólfr Mostrarskegg. Once Þórólfr dies, this type of executive power is lost, and must be regained by his descendant, Snorri goði, whose eventual establishment of a church symbolises the return to powerful district leadership. It is unfortunate that this chapter does not grapple with the role in the saga of the story of Haraldr hárfagri's unification of Norway. What kind of leadership model does Haraldr offer? What is the author trying to tell his audience by including this segment in the saga? *Ljósvetninga saga* and *Brennu-Njáls saga*, for example, show us that it is possible to conceive of a saga without a *landnáma* segment. Could it be a commentary on the dangers of 'overdoing it', at the very beginning of a saga concerned with the concentration of district power?

The next chapter deals with two episodes, *Vigfússpáttir* and the *berserkjapáttir*, the story of the Swedish berserks. The first story, according to Elín Bára, shows Snorri's main rival Arnkell's superior power of litigation, while the second reveals Snorri's ability to rid society of problematic elements, and is meant to compensate for his non-heroic journey abroad. Elín Bára compares the *berserkjapáttir* with the version of the same story contained in the part of *Heiðarvígja saga* written down from memory by the copyist Jón Grunnvíkingur Ólafsson after much of that saga was lost in the Copenhagen fire. She discusses the origins of this story and argues that Snorri goði's role is made more prominent in the *Eyrbyggja saga* version. Finally, in a stylistic comparison between the dialogues in *Eyrbyggja saga*'s *berserkjapáttir* and those in Sturla Þórðarson's *Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, Elín Bára introduces us to a resource she will use throughout the book, the 'Íslenskt textasafn', whose website enables one to compare a vast corpus of Icelandic texts using specific key words, and to pinpoint specific genres or periods of interest. (It should be noted that the URL provided in the book is defunct, and the website can now be found at <http://corpus.arnastofnun.is/>.) There are certain issues with Elín Bára's representation of her results, however. In the case of the word *fylgdamður*, for example, she points out correctly that *Grettis saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Íslendinga saga* (conflated with the rest of *Sturlunga saga* in the results, so each 'hit' needs to be contextualised) feature the word most frequently. What she does not point out, however, is that *Finnboga saga*, for example, uses the word five times over its ninety pages in *Íslensk fornrit*, compared with seven instances in the 180 pages of *Eyrbyggja saga*. Thus the word actually has a greater statistical importance in the former text than the latter. Furthermore, choosing a scene derived from a saga no longer extant seems precarious. Placing the *Heiðarvígja saga* text, in an eighteenth-century copy, next to *Eyrbyggja saga* gives the impression of more textual variation between the two than might actually have existed.

In chapter 5 Elín Bára deals with the dynamics of the power struggle between Arnkell and Snorri. She follows Helgi Þorláksson's argument that the representation of Snorri goði and his kind of leadership are based on Snorri Sturluson, taking it further to argue, using thematic and linguistic evidence, for a direct literary connection between the two representations. She then discusses Arnkell's death,

which is without significant consequences for his killers (at least until the Glæsir episode). While Arnkell represents the traditional kind of heroism and is more skilled than Snorri in litigation, Snorri has built a wider power-base and gained more allies in the district, and therefore comes out on top. *Hrafnsmál* and the district's changed dynamics following Arnkell's death are then discussed.

Chapter 6 concludes the literary analysis by discussing Snorri's new kind of district leadership in the closing chapters of the saga. The *Fróðárundur*, the paranormal happenings that constitute one of the most discussed segments of *Eyrbyggja saga*, are given relatively little space, Elín Bára mostly reacting to Klaus Bödl's (2005) analysis of the functions of Snorri and Arnkell in the saga. She discusses the thematic and linguistic similarities between the presentation of the raiding of Óspakr in *Eyrbyggja saga* and that of Órækja Snorrason in *Íslendinga saga*. The chapter ends with a well-argued discussion of the function of the saga's three closing chapters. The killing by Þórólfr bægifótr's spirit of one of the Þorbrandssynir in the form of a possessed bull named Glæsir, is explained as a farewell of sorts to bygone ancient times, represented by Þórólfr; the mysterious reappearance in an unknown land of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, a former adversary of Snorri goði, harks back to the old type of traditional heroism that has been replaced by Snorri's kind of leadership.

In the context of these closing episodes it would have been interesting to see Elín Bára interact more with earlier interpretations, such as—in light of the comparison made between Snorri goði and Snorri Sturluson—Torfi Tulinius's (2009) discussion of the saga's problematic father-son relations. After all, Snorri Sturluson's father passed away when he was four, and he himself had a strained relationship with his illegitimate son Órækja. In another example, Elín Bára presents, without contesting, John D. Martin's argument that Þórólfr's killing of Þóroddr in the form of Glæsir should not be seen as a form of revenge. As Ármann Jakobsson (2005) has shown, the Nasty Old Men of the saga are indeed destructive of their children. Þórólfr bægifótr should also be allowed the inner contradiction between making trouble for his son and wishing to avenge him, like Þórarinn, Þorsteinn stangarhögg's father, or Njáll Þorgeirsson, who encouraged their children's deaths and yet wished that they be avenged. Martin's argument that Þóroddr was not the obvious choice for vengeance for the killing of Arnkell is easily contested bearing in mind the targeting of *Valla-Ljóts saga*'s Bǫðvarr or *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*'s Eyvindr as examples of vengeance being taken on a relative of a killer rather than the killer himself.

Chapters 7 and 8 attempt to justify, and then employ, the methodology used by Peter Hallberg (1962), of counting word usage in order to establish authorship. Elín Bára explains the distinction between high-frequency word count and rare-word count, which is the method she employs. While high-frequency words are exposed to changes by copyists, rare words are less likely to be altered. This discussion is awkwardly placed towards the end of the book, after the method has already been employed throughout it, and it would perhaps have fit better in the introductory chapter. In addition, a discussion of the nature of medieval authorship, especially in light of the problematic transmission of the saga corpus, would have

been helpful in making clear what exactly Elín Bára means by the word *höfundur* 'author'. Chapter 8 presents a linguistic comparison between the different Sagas of Early Icelanders, *Sturlunga saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, with a focus on rare words describing conflict. In terms of word count and word usage, she finds a connection between *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Íslendinga saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. Some significant similarities are also found with *Grettis saga* and *Gull-Þóris saga* (*Þorskfirðinga saga*), as well as several *samtíðarsögur* other than *Íslendinga saga*. The author's explanation of these apparent anomalies is that these texts could also have been written by Sturla Þórðarson. This explanation requires further study to back it up, especially in the case of *Grettis saga*, which has indeed been attributed to Sturla, but usually with reference to an older, no longer extant version. One question that arises is why *Heimskringla*, of which Sturla is almost certainly not the author, and which is included in the 'Íslenskt textasafn' corpus, was not used to show negative evidence. Such a comparison could have helped the analysis, especially as *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* stands alone as the only king's saga examined.

The concluding Chapter 9 is skilfully presented and contextualises many of the book's elements. Elín Bára collects the circumstantial evidence (such as Snorri goði being the forefather of the Sturlungar, the location of the saga, and the use of Guðný Böðvarsdóttir as a source), the thematic connections, and similarities in the vocabulary to establish the high likelihood of Sturla Þórðarson's authorship. 'Á þessu stigi málsins,' Elín Bára concludes, 'ætti að vera óhætt að segja að þau nánu tengsl eru á milli Sturlu og Eyrbyggju bendi eindregið til þess að hann sé höfundur sögunnar' (p. 360). Or, as the English summary has it: 'At this point, it is safe to conclude that this study strongly indicates that Sturla could indeed have authored the saga' (p. 394). The English summary is useful, although it would perhaps be more helpful if it followed the same structure as the book itself; its different structure reflects, in a way, the book's interlaced structure. The index, which includes the names of people and texts, could also have included topics discussed in the book, to help orient the reader.

The publication of Elín Bára's book should be seen as an important step in *Eyrbyggja saga* scholarship, and we will certainly feel reverberations from this work in the years to come. Particularly helpful is the light her study sheds on the power dynamics reflected in the saga. The methodological steps she takes towards examining authorship fit well with recent trends, which include a revival of Peter Hallberg's application of quantitative stylistics in analysing authorship. Elín Bára's book is sure to ignite discussion in saga scholarship, and we can only hope to see more book-length literary and stylistic analyses of sagas in the future.

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'WHY IS YOUR AXE BLOODY?' A READING OF *NJÁLS SAGA*. By WILLIAM IAN MILLER. *Oxford University Press*. Oxford, 2014. xxiv + 334 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-870484-3.

Njáls saga is generally agreed to be the greatest, as it is the largest, of the Sagas of Icelanders, a judgement with which—on the evidence of this book—William Ian Miller enthusiastically concurs. His study of the saga more than earns its place on the shelf not only because, as Miller remarks, books wholly devoted to the saga are few, but also because of the distinctiveness of its focus on 'the politics and law, the sociology and psychology, of the actions and of the characters' (p. xii) rather than on more narrowly literary concerns. Arising out of a course on Bloodfeuds that Miller has taught to law students over some years, it addresses students and non-specialists among others, the analysis prefaced by a résumé of the saga's action and an analysis of 'social background' that usefully explicates the essentials of the Icelandic legal system. Names are anglicised and citations are in translation, Miller preferring the venerable translation of Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (1960) over Robert Cook's more literal version from 2002; his approval of its 'liveliness' (p. xxiii) presages Miller's own colloquial and vivid style. But he does not accept the translation uncritically, pausing occasionally to note an inaccuracy or an untranslatable nuance in the Icelandic text. Engagingly,

Miller has learnt from his students and his footnotes regularly acknowledge student papers whose ideas have enriched his analysis.

The structuring of the book as a 'reading' in the most literal sense, progressing sequentially through the saga narrative, is also potentially helpful to non-specialist readers, but is less doggedly plot-centred than may at first appear; Miller uses plot as a series of pegs on which to hang a series of thematically based discussions. So, Chapter 2, 'Marriage Formation and Dissolution' is an analysis of chapters 2–34, but 'has something of the look of a casebook on family law' (p. 24), and is in fact divided into a series of case studies: Hrut and Unn, Hallgerd and Thorvald, Hallgerd and Glum (the last including the sinister words of Hallgerd to her foster-father Thjostolf after his unwanted killing of her husband, that are adapted to give the book its title: 'Your axe is bloody; what have you done?' (p. 47)). Here Miller's lawyer's eye discerns what he considers must have been the social practice of 'plundering marriage' (p. 36), the marriage of a girl, sometimes so young as to be pre-pubescent, to an older man for the sake of property that she will acquire on divorce or at his death, and which will fund her future marriages without depleting her family's finances.

In Chapters 5 and 6 Miller, like other critics before him, uses the sequence of killings set in motion by Bergthora and Hallgerd as a textbook model of feud, explicating the concept of the 'balanced-exchange model' set out in his earlier book, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), and showing that 'the model contains within it, or cannot keep out of it, a principle of escalation' (p. 76), articulating the paradox that feud both balances one act of aggression against another and at the same time constantly raises its own stakes. In chapters dealing with the run-up to the dispatch of Gunnar by his enemies, the picture is broadened to flesh out the economic and political ramifications of feud. In Chapter 8 Miller takes on directly the widely established critical view that the law as evidenced in *Njáls saga* is anachronistically at odds with its representation in *Grágás*. Miller considers that the inconsistencies between the saga and *Grágás*, comprehensively assembled in 1883 by Karl Lehmann, are in some cases 'nitpicks', and that 'Lehmann failed to see . . . that law in action is often more complex than a mere matter of following *Grágás*' (p. 127). Like most of Miller's critiques of earlier scholarship the bulk of the detailed argument is confined to a footnote, but the reassuring congruence he finds between *Grágás* and the saga's practice is evidenced by constant references to the law code throughout the book. Another footnote highlights the further issue of internal inconsistencies within *Grágás* itself, which is another matter—but again, apparently less serious than earlier commentators have suggested.

Appropriately enough, the importance of Christianity and its influence in the saga is tackled in Chapter 14, dealing with the Conversion. Miller's resistance to accepting any transcendent quality in the saga's attitude to the newly arrived faith is in line with a sceptical tendency throughout the book: Njal's 'prescience', for instance, is frequently referred to within inverted commas and shown to be better described as guesswork or advice, or at most to have limitations; in another instance, Njal's almost-martyrdom in the Burning is presented as his political

appropriation of the tropes of the new religion. The Conversion itself Miller sees as a legal triumph: 'Nothing shows off the Icelandic legal genius better . . . This is a story less about their law becoming Christianized than of Christianity being "led into their law", the metaphor they use to describe the legal process by which an illegitimate child was formally made a member of his paternal family' (pp. 184–85). Miller interprets bleakly the change of tone in the latter part of the saga generally attributed to the coming of Christianity: 'Christianity brought along with it some unintended costs that were not always a change for the better. If you want a quick conclusion, it can be somewhat unfairly boiled down to this: things went from bad, but bearable, before Christianity, to worse and barely bearable after' (p. 189). Miller toys, rather half-heartedly, with the notion that the author deliberately manipulated his material to achieve the beginning of the Conversion episode in Chapter 100, a possibly significant round number: 'Some fiddling seems to have been going on by someone' (p. 178), though he cannot suggest any possible gain other than 'vague symbolism'. The attraction of this idea recedes when it is borne in mind that, though the manuscripts may be consistent in dividing the material in this way (Miller cites only two, and does not specify which they are), chapters are not visibly numbered, so that any symbolism would be apparent only to a reader who was assiduously keeping count.

Alongside the finely textured and scholarly analysis of the saga's social world, Miller's main literary tool is character analysis. The characters in the saga live and breathe for him. Overall the effect is exhilarating, rather like arriving in Saga Iceland by time machine and being briefed on whatever feasts or battles were taking place by a well-informed local: one fully aware of the history, affiliations and aspirations of every player, alive to the social pressures of the particular time and historical moment, and all too eager to share his own allegiances and prejudices. Miller is a partisan: he has very little time for Gunnar, and a sneaking sympathy for Hallgerd (in both cases, perhaps, reacting against received opinion). One of his irritated tirades against Gunnar, at the point where he disregards Njal's warnings against stirring up envy by appearing at the Althing, gives the general flavour: 'Gunnar seems to be painting too favorable a picture of himself here. He does not have to boast; he is Gunnar of Hlidarend, the best athlete and the best-looking guy, back in Iceland after having his act confirmed by royalty abroad. He thinks that if his heart is in the right place, that that is enough. He is remarkably obtuse in this respect. He shows up so well-dressed at the Althing that everyone gawks at him. If it is not in his nature to strut around, what did he think he was doing?' (p. 148). Miller comes close to asserting that Gunnar had it coming.

This is entertaining stuff, but it shows up one of the weaknesses in Miller's approach. Refreshing as his disavowal of conventional literary criticism can be, the determined realism of his character analysis often misses a dimension. He concedes that the 'influence of chivalric romance . . . colors Gunnar's portrait in some respects' (p. 148), but does not take this as a cue that his characterisation should be read in any other way than through a naturalism that verges on the anachronistic. In the case of Skarphedin, a character much more to Miller's taste, he outlines with relish his confrontations with chieftains at the Althing, suggesting

that he operates ‘within two or more literary genres at the same time’ (p. 208), but is vague as to what these literary genres actually are. There is little sense of the saga belonging to an evolving tradition of communal storytelling; it is presented as the work of a single inspired author, with little attention to possible earlier versions or to the testimony of the comparatively large number of manuscript witnesses that are now attracting renewed scholarly attention. Overlapping and comparable material from other sagas—including, usefully, *Sturlunga saga*—is called upon more often as evidence of social practice than of literary relationship.

Miller’s tendency to invest characters with a life larger than their place in the saga can be disconcerting. Thus Flosi, a somewhat mysterious character in Miller’s estimation (‘something of a proto-Hamlet’): ‘At times he seems to overplay his role, at times he appears mystified as to why he is even in the saga’ (p. 201), a doubt which similarly overtakes those reacting to Skarphedin’s verbal attacks: ‘it is almost a way of each of them asking: “Excuse me, would you tell me please whose saga we are cast in right now?”’ (p. 210). We may dismiss this as a conceit, as Miller’s way of marking what he calls ‘genre-shift’. The impression that the characters have taken over the saga becomes hard to ignore, though, in his concluding discussion of the end of the saga. He clearly finds the Clontarf episode, in which the remaining Burners are dispatched before the final reconciliation of Kari and Flosi, an embarrassment, and suggests this extended (and, in terms of the calculations and exchanges demanded by the feud, superfluous) wiping out of the remaining players is intended to stamp out any competing versions of the saga which, to all intents and purposes, has already been concluded: ‘Kari’s mission is no longer about avenging his son, but about repressing alternate versions of the saga’ (p. 298). Miller is the first to admit that this is not entirely convincing, and it is just one (he considers, the best) of three alternatives he offers.

It is fitting that this tentative idea is one of those contributed by one of Miller’s students. It underlines that this idiosyncratic reading of the saga is an uneven one, willing to try out and dismiss theories, assertive and yet collaborative. It is a highly personal response, underpinned by an unmatched understanding of the law and society in action in medieval Iceland.

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STUDIES IN THE TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION OF OLD NORSE LITERATURE. THE HYPERBOREAN MUSE IN EUROPEAN CULTURE. Edited by JUDY QUINN AND M. CIPOLLA. *Brepols*. Turnhout, 2016. xvi + 355 pp. 27 black-and-white, 5 colour illustrations, 7 tables. ISBN 978-2-503-55553-9.

The continued popularity of reimaginings of Old Norse narratives and characters has given rise to significant contributions to reception studies. *The Hyperborean Muse* offers a productive approach to this area, exploring the transmission of texts within as well as outwith the medieval period. This collection of fifteen essays

begins with Adele Cippolla's exploration of textual reconstructions of *Snorra Edda*, foregrounding the problematic nature of the material found in the manuscript witnesses. She ends by establishing the usefulness of online, hypertextual editions, which can reveal alternative readings. The second essay also examines the medieval period, as Judy Quinn addresses the complexities created by oral transmission and medieval conceptions of authorship. She argues that perceiving scribal alterations or additions as contaminations or errors and, therefore, trying to remove these from a text leads to an unnecessarily reductive version. The production of a conventional stemma to illustrate relationships between some Old Norse manuscripts is shown to be overly simplistic and to encourage questionable editorial decisions. Similarly, in the next essay, Odd Einar Haugen supports a recognition of the complexity of manuscript transmission in his exploration of the importance of intermediate manuscripts. The chapters in the first section emphasise the instability of many Old Norse narratives, particularly those with a history of oral performance. Indeed, the *Poetic Edda*, which Quinn looks at in some detail, proves a perfect example, with several poems offering alternative views of the same events. A salutary reminder that we often only have access to facsimiles of a narrative counteracts approaches which merely ascertain the faithfulness of re-writings of Old Norse literature to an 'original' version. It is impossible to know the oral works, and manuscript readings are frequently inconclusive; this means that attention needs to be paid instead to more interesting questions about the effect of differences between medieval versions, or between medieval and later versions.

The book's remaining two sections consider post-medieval texts of a kind that would more commonly be addressed in Old Norse reception studies. A discussion of the origins of the character of Hamlet, or Amlóði, is provided by Ian Felce, who suggests that some of the most interesting aspects of William Shakespeare's play are produced by the interplay between the different sources. He also notes the alternative conclusions of Old Norse and Shakespearean scholars regarding Saxo Grammaticus's influence: it is a clear demonstration of the importance of interaction between academics specialising in different periods and of the necessity of work on the post-medieval reception of texts. The consideration of the afterlife of the Saxo narrative is extended through Marcello Rossi Corradini's exploration of *Ambletto*, an early eighteenth-century Italian libretto. This text has significant differences from Shakespeare's, and Corradini draws attention to *Ambletto*'s focus on love, and the extended role of Veremonda, the equivalent to Hamlet's Ophelia. The analysis of the libretto on its own terms is productive, but the closing remarks, which refer to tensions created by the baroque musical staging and the anti-baroque ideals of the text, suggest that a fuller consideration of the music throughout the essay would have been illuminating.

The next essay, by Mats Malm, addresses another literary form through an exploration of early European translations of Old Norse poetry, arguing for the influential nature of mimetic translation on the development of free verse and the prose poem. Malm alludes to the nationalist purposes to which Old Norse literature has been put, and this is an ongoing theme throughout the collection. Indeed, in her wide-ranging study of the reception of narratives about Hrólfr kraki, Tereza

Lansing analyses eighteenth-century Icelandic *rímur*, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Danish fiction and *Hrólfr Kraki's Saga* (Poul Anderson's 1973 American fantasy novel); she concludes that Hrólfr kraki was used to emphasise national identities in both Denmark and Iceland, whereas Anderson's novel offers the past as a cautionary tale. Although both Massimiliano Bampi and Maria Cristina Lombardi examine the work of August Strindberg, Bampi emphasises the importance of Starkaðr to Swedish identity, whereas Lombardi argues that, in his reworking of *Áns saga bogsveigis*, Strindberg creates a more universal narrative. Like Lombardi, Alessandro Zironi provides a biographical focus on the author, exploring William Morris's reworkings of the *Poetic Edda*. Once more the importance of these narratives to national identity is asserted, in this case relating to Morris's conception of a Teutonic past. The appendix to this essay, a previously unpublished lecture by Morris on 'The mythology and Religion of the north', is a welcome addition to the collection. This section of the book concludes with Julia Zernack's demonstration that the use of Old Norse myth and legend as political propaganda extends far beyond National Socialism. Thus it has promoted other forms of nationalism and ideologies such as pacifism and communism owing to conceptions of the universality of these narratives, something recognised in the reimaginings by Strindberg and Morris. Zernack provides an especially illuminating reading of the effect of rewritings and translations of stanzas from *Hávamál* on the concept of *Tatenruhm* 'deeds of fame', which emphasises the everlasting heroic nature of death for a cause.

The final section addresses the more contemporary reception of Old Norse literature, beginning with Heather O'Donoghue's exploration of English and Scots poetry. She argues that, although some allusions to Old Norse literature are not particularly significant and appear no more than evidence of writers raiding a non-specific 'myth-kitty', the afterlife of the narratives also indicates the importance of a shared past for these poets; this again demonstrates the importance of Old Norse texts for contemporary national identities. Two further essays in this section, by Chiara Benati and Carolyne Larrington, address crime novels by Icelandic authors: respectively, Viktor Arnar Ingólfsson's *Flateyjargáta* and Arnaldur Indriðason's *Konungsbók*. Both essays explore the use of a medieval manuscript within the narrative, arguing that it is not merely, in Alfred Hitchcock's terminology, a 'MacGuffin', but something with a deeper significance. Benati argues that *Flateyjarbók* is important for the construction of cultural identity, and Larrington also suggests that Old Norse manuscripts have strong symbolic value for Icelanders, especially in the context of colonialism. *The Hyperborean Muse* concludes with Fulvio Ferrari's essay on Italian comics and graphic novels that use Old Norse narratives. These texts are revealed to provide an eclectic mash-up of Old Norse fictional and historical elements with new additions. The plentiful illustrations are a valuable demonstration of this creative afterlife of Old Norse literature, which would benefit from further attention.

As a whole, the collection provides valuable insights into ways in which the Old Norse world has been reused and adapted from the medieval period to the modern day. The essays cover a wide range of time periods and media, examining texts

that have received little critical attention alongside those by key figures such as Morris, to produce a broad picture of the reception of Old Norse literature. Many of the chapters work together in clear pairs (such as the two on the Hamlet figure, the two on Strindberg and the two that address modern Icelandic crime fiction), so it would have been beneficial for these essays to engage in more of a dialogue; or, alternatively, the collection would be strengthened by a conclusion that clearly explores these and other points of commonality (the recurring mention of national identities, for instance). Nevertheless, this is a book that furthers the understanding of the afterlives of Old Norse literature from the medieval to the contemporary period. Indeed, what more could one want than, in the words of Morris's lecture printed in this collection, to 'be happy and talk together of the old days of Odin and Thor'?

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ENDRE-BOKA. POSTFESTUMSKRIFT TIL ENDRE MØRCK. Edited by GULBRAND ALHAUG, TOVE BULL and AUD-KIRSTI PEDERSEN. *Novus forlag*. Oslo, 2014. 379 pp. ISBN 978-82-7099-802-9.

Endre-boka is, as the full title suggests, a celebratory volume, but one published after the initial celebrations. These took place in Tromsø on 20th December 2012, the day Endre Mørck turned sixty, and consisted of a programme of lectures delivered by colleagues from various institutes of higher education in Norway, followed by a banquet. There were eight lectures in all, and they form the first section of the *postfestumskrift* 'post-celebration volume' under review. The second section is given over to nine contributions from members of the University of Tromsø research group 'Språk og samfunn' (Language and Society), which Mørck was instrumental in founding. A third and final section is dedicated to two bibliographies: one is a chronological list of Mørck's publications; the other, 'Mellomnorsk bibliografi 1350–1525' (Middle Norwegian bibliography 1350–1525), compiled by Ivar Berg, provides a useful source of reference to books and articles on a lesser-studied period in the history of the Norwegian language. The reason for the inclusion of this bibliography is to be found in the main field of interest of the *postfestumskrift*'s recipient: Middle Norwegian is the area to which Endre Mørck has devoted most of his academic labours.

The eight papers in the first section of the volume cover a wide spectrum. Reidar Bertelsen writes on the north-Norwegian place-name Qmð, which makes an appearance in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Bertelsen runs through possible etymologies and meanings of the name, and goes on to consider the area or areas to which it might have been applied. Jan Ragnar Hagland discusses the use of the indicative and subjunctive in Old Norse relative clauses, arguing for a new, in part semantic, approach based on comparison with other languages in which the subjunctive is widely used. Lars Ivar Hansen directs attention to Sami personal names of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the degree of Norwegian,

Swedish and Finnish influence they had undergone. Odd Einar Haugen compares attempts to trace genealogical relationships between on the one hand manuscripts and on the other languages, and finds that the two endeavours have much in common. He asks why the stemma and the tree diagram have survived in the face of the weighty criticism that has been levelled at both, and concludes that no better models have yet been devised. This is a thoughtful and stimulating article, one of the best in the volume. Agnete Nesse examines the ways in which King Kristoffer's law amendment (*réttarbót*) of 1444 is cited and interpreted in works of different types and periods and in different languages. She urges further and more detailed studies of this kind for the light they can shed on results of language contact and not least the development of Norwegian in the late Middle Ages and early Reformation era. Magnus Rindal's article 'Mellomnorsk og norskdóm', roughly to be translated 'Middle Norwegian and what can be characterised as truly Norwegian', is in two parts. First he argues that there are no good linguistic reasons to reckon with a Middle Norwegian period: Old Norwegian continues up to about 1500, after which we have the modern language. He then goes on to suggest that the reason for placing a break between Old and Middle Norwegian around 1350 is not unconnected with a desire among earlier Norwegian philologists to exclude from the *nynorsk* norm many of the words and word-formation elements that entered Norwegian in the late medieval period. They wanted *nynorsk*, claims Rindal, to reflect Old Norse as it was before the adoption of the multitude of Germanisms that are now part of the language, and this could not be achieved if the Norwegian of the period 1350–1500 was to be considered Old Norse. With any luck Rindal's piece should provoke lively debate. Next comes a status report by Erik Simensen on a planned new English translation of the older *Gulaping Law*. The work is apparently to be carried out in part by non-native speakers of English—not an entirely wise decision, one would think, but in these days of 'international' English it may be that readers are becoming more forgiving of the substandard. The first section of *Endre-boka* concludes with a contribution by Olav Solberg on the nineteenth-century ballad singers of Telemark. Solberg focuses on the singers as bearers of a tradition, and stresses that, although most of them belonged to the poor tenant-farming class, there is evidence some may have descended from families considerably higher up the social scale. And such families, suggests Solberg, may well have possessed written copies of a number of ballads.

Endre-boka's second section is devoted chiefly to aspects of modern Norwegian, with particular emphasis on results of contact between speakers of Norwegian on the one hand and of Sami, Finnish and 'kvensk' (a distinct variety of Finnish used in northern Norway) on the other. Since it is to be assumed such topics are not central to *Saga-Book* readers' interests, most of these nine papers will be dealt with summarily. Gulbrand Alhaug writes about what he calls epenthetic *d* and *t* in names—exemplified *inter alia* by the name of the *postfestumskrift's* recipient (*Endre < ein + riði*). Oddly, Alhaug ignores the widespread existence of such intercalated consonants (in all types of words) in medieval and later Danish and Swedish (cf. also modern Norwegian *andre* 'other', 'second' < Old Danish *annræ*). In a fairly turgid piece Tove Bull agonises over theoretical questions in

sociolinguistic research centred on the understanding of gender (is it a ‘variable’ or a ‘construct’?). More down-to-earth are the examples she gives illustrating the role of women in the process of language shift from Sami to Norwegian. Phillip Konzett offers a sketch of the changing patterns of word formation in Norwegian from Early Norse (*urnordisch*) to the present day. Reasons for the changes are briefly explored. In an excessively wordy contribution Florian Hiss discusses the relationship between language and the workplace with the focus on multilingualism in the northern Norwegian environment. Åse Mette Johansen and Sirkka Seljevoll—as part of a collaborative research project into ‘the multilingual family’—delve into linguistic problems faced by immigrants in Tromsø. Jorid Hjulstad Junttila examines factors motivating choice of language in three bilingual families resident in Skibotn in northern Troms, a community close to both the Finnish and Swedish borders. The article explores the choices made by parents and offspring at different periods in their lives and in different situations. Moving away from Norway, Anna-Riitta Lindgren questions the claim that men were the driving force in the change from Swedish to Finnish among leading families in nineteenth-century Finland. She identifies a variety of factors underlying the change, but concludes there is no evidence that gender was one of them. Hilde Sollid discusses the occurrence, in certain types of northern Norwegian, of declarative clauses in which the finite verb is in third or later position rather than second. Verb second is reckoned to be the norm in all Scandinavian tongues, and Sollid ponders whether contact with Finno-Ugric languages may have resulted in this unusual word-order pattern or if other factors could (also) be involved. Finally, Eira Söderholm considers three interpretations of the first element in the northern Norwegian place-names Kvænangen and Kvenvik. The author confirms the traditional belief that *kven-* reflects the name of the Finnish-speaking people who settled in the region (cf. Ohthere’s *Cwenas*).

At one time *Festschriften* were the home of the light-hearted or quirky article, perhaps exploring an idea the author hesitated to make the object of a detailed and formal study. Times have changed. In the present university climate a *Festschrift* is likely to be a peer-reviewed volume, with colleagues of the recipient invited to contribute but in danger of having the invitation withdrawn if their contribution is found wanting. Thus the light-hearted element is rapidly giving way to the heavy, detailed and downright stodgy. Regrettably *Endre-boka* exemplifies the trend. A number of the seventeen articles it comprises are heavily bolstered by ‘theory’ and of considerable complexity, with little regard for the simplicity or otherwise of the ideas presented.

All the contributions to this volume are written in Norwegian, which tends to be of the radical *bokmål* or *nynorsk* variety. These are idioms manifestly favoured by teachers in the humanities at Norwegian institutes of higher education—including those at ‘Norway’s Arctic University’ as UiT (University of Tromsø) is henceforth apparently to be known.

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FRÆÐINÆMI. GREINAR GEFNAR ÚT Í TÍLEFNI 70 ÁRA AFMÆLIS ÁSDÍSAR EGILSDÓTTUR. By Ásdís Egilsdóttir. *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag*. Reykjavík, 2016. 275 pp. ISBN 978-9979-66-349-2.

On 26 October 2016 Dr Ásdís Egilsdóttir, Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Iceland, celebrated her 70th birthday. In commemoration of this event, several of Ásdís's colleagues and former students—Ármann Jakobsson, Gunnvör S. Karlsdóttir, Sif Ríkharðsdóttir and Torfi Tulinius—arranged for the publication of a *Festschrift*, which comprises twenty-two articles written by Ásdís between 1993 and 2016. The pieces selected for inclusion in the collection either appeared previously in other venues or are forthcoming, and are written in Icelandic, English and Danish. The *Festschrift*'s title, *Fræðinæmi*, is taken from *Jóns saga helga*, in which a young woman named Ingunn is said to be among those studying at Hólar. The sentence from which the title is derived appears in the *Festschrift* as an epigraph: *Þar var ok í fræðinæmi hreinferðug jungfrú er Ingunn hét* 'Among those studying was a beautifully pure maiden named Ingunn'.

In a foreword to the collection ('Fylgt úr hlaði'), Ásdís outlines the book's origins and gives an overview of her career as a student and then professor of medieval Icelandic literature. Ásdís's research has focused primarily on saints' lives and, more specifically, on the sagas of native Icelandic saints (the *biskupa sögur*), on which she intends to publish a book in the near future (tentatively entitled *The Icelandic Saint: Saints and Books in Medieval Iceland*). While she has dedicated the bulk of her career to legends and cults of saints, both Icelandic and foreign, she has also taught and published influential works on gender and masculinity, as well as writing and translation. The volume's articles are therefore grouped into three categories, reflecting these three areas of expertise and scholarly output. Immediately following Ásdís's foreword and preceding the main text of the volume is a *tabula gratulatoria* with the names of over 250 individuals and institutions from around the world.

Part I, *Helgisögur* 'Sagas of Saints', is justifiably the largest of the three categories, and its ten articles explore such topics as hagiographic composition, miracles and the construction of national identities through local saints. Half of the articles in this section ('Constructing Space, Cult, and Identity'; 'The Beginnings of Local Hagiography in Iceland'; 'Jarteinir, líkami, sál og trúarlíf'; 'Abbadísinn sem hvarf'; 'Sanctity and the Sea') concentrate primarily on the lives, miracles and cults of Iceland's three saintly bishops: Þorlákr Þórhallsson of Skálholt, Jón Ögmundsson of Hólar and Guðmundr Arason of Hólar. Only Þorlákr was formally canonised, but all three bishops were venerated locally as saints, officially until and unofficially beyond the time of the Reformation in Iceland (1550). Three of the articles in this section focus more broadly on topics in hagiography and foreign saints, especially Margaret of Antioch, who was one of the most popular saints in medieval Iceland ('The Fantastic Reality'; 'Handrit handa konum'; 'St Margaret, Patroness of Childbirth'). Other holy but not canonised individuals from medieval Icelandic literature, stories about whom follow

the pattern of a saint's life, are examined in the remaining two pieces selected for inclusion in Part I ('The Hermit and the Milkmaid' and 'Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, Pilgrim and Martyr').

Seven articles are included in Part II, *Karlmennska og kynferði* 'Masculinity and Gender'. In five of these Ásdís examines gender roles and relationships, and concepts of masculinity in secular and religious literature from medieval Iceland ('Masculinity and/or Peace? On *Eyrbyggja saga*'s *Máhlíðingamál*'; 'Esja's Cave. Giantesses, Sons and Mothers in *Kjalnesinga Saga*'; 'Með karlmannlegri hughreysti og hreinni trú'; 'Kolbítur verður karlmaður'; 'En verden skabes—en mand bliver til'). The remaining two articles concentrate specifically on women and especially women in saints' and bishops' sagas. In 'Skjaldmær drottins: Frásögnin af Hildi einsetukonu í *Jóns sögu helga*', Ásdís explores gender in the *biskupa sögur* through the character of Hildur, who was an ascetic and anchoress at Hólar. The final article in this section, 'Kvendýrlingar og kvenímynd trúarlegra bókmennta á Íslandi', examines the representation and presentation of female saints and other holy women in medieval Icelandic literature.

Part III, *Ritun og þýðingar* 'Writing and Translation', is made up of five articles that examine topics of memory, literacy, education and translation. The first two look at saints' and bishops' sagas ('Translatio: Dýrlingar færðir heim' and 'From Orality to Literacy. Remembering the Past and the Present in *Jóns saga helga*'), and examine the process (and double meaning) of *translatio* and the role of memory and oral tradition in the construction of local hagiography. Three chapters deal specifically with education, examining the role of official and unofficial schooling of children ('Study, Memorize, Compose'; 'Að kunna vort mál að ráða'; 'Mannfræði Höllu biskups móður'). This third section is followed by a bibliography of Ásdís's works—some fifty-five single- and co-authored editions, volumes, articles, essays and encyclopaedia entries.

This collection of articles is both a testament to Ásdís's rich and robust scholarly career and a highly useful source for researchers working on hagiography, gender studies and the history of literature and literacy in Iceland. The grouping of articles is logical, as is the order in which they appear. Many of the articles included in the book are not readily available, so that their appearance together in a thematic volume such as this is of great value to students and scholars of any of the areas in which Ásdís has expertise. Regarding her intentions for the volume, Ásdís states: 'það er von mín að þetta greinasafn eigi eftir að verða áfram samtal mitt við fræðimenn og aðra áhugamenn um íslensk miðaldafræði, í nútíð og framtíð' (it is my hope that this collection will become my continuing conversation with scholars and other enthusiasts of medieval Icelandic studies, today and in the future) (p. xvii). In this reviewer's assessment and experience, this absolutely is and will continue to be the case. Ásdís Egilsdóttir's *Festschrift* is therefore as much a gift to students and scholars (present and future) as it was to her.

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SAGNALÍF. SEXTÁN GREINAR UM FORNAR BÓKMENNTIR. By JÓNAS KRISTJÁNSSON. Edited by ÞÓRÐUR INGI GUÐJÓNSSON. *Rit 90. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum*. Reykjavík, 2015. 422 pp. ISBN 978-9979-654-32-2.

In a short foreword to this volume, written by Þórður Ingi and the two other members of his editorial committee (Gunnlaugur Ingólfsson and Jóhannes B. Sigtryggsson), it is noted that the book was planned before Jónas Kristjánsson's death in 2014 and with his knowledge, and that he himself chose from among his publications the sixteen essays that appear in it. The book is thus very much Jónas's own, now serving, sadly but fittingly, as a fine memorial to him. A photograph of him, taken by his stepson, Egill Benedikt Hreinsson, forms the frontispiece, and the editorial foreword is followed by a table of contents and an introduction by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, entitled simply 'Jónas', and translated from Norwegian into Icelandic by Vésteinn Ólason. The final item in the volume is an exhaustive bibliography, prepared by Ólöf Benediktsdóttir, of Jónas's writings, covering the years from 1943 to 2014 and including translations, scholarly editions and monographs, reviews, typewritten manuscript catalogues, two historical novels, obituaries and personal tributes published in newspapers and selected newspaper interviews. *Gigantes autem erant super terram in diebus illis!*

Most of the essays in this volume are in Icelandic; those in other languages are signalled in what follows. They appear in the order of their original publication. In the first, in English (from *Gripla* I, 1975), Jónas argues that Haukr Valdísarson's *Íslendingadrápa* dates from the twelfth century, predating the oldest of the *Íslendingasögur* and based not on the written sagas with which it shares details but on oral tradition, whether in prose or verse. In 'Egilssaga og konungasögur' (from the *Festschrift* for Jakob Benediktsson, 1977) he argues for the composition of *Egils saga* by Snorri Sturluson in the very last years of Snorri's life (1239–41), well after his composition of *Heimskringla*, and suggests that the difference in attitude between *Heimskringla* and the saga in their portrayal of Haraldr hárfagri and Hákon góði is explained by the former work being written for a Norwegian, and the latter for an Icelandic, audience (Jónas later modifies, in 1990, the first part of this argument; see below). In an article in English on *Landnámabók* and *Hænsa-Þóris saga* (from the *Festschrift* for Ole Widding, 1977), Jónas argues (against Konrad Maurer) for the influence on *Hænsa-Þóris saga* of *Jónsbók* (1280–81) and of the version of *Landnáma* by Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) or a version close to it. Together with Guðni Kolbeinnsson (*Gripla* III, 1979) he argues that the S-redaction of *Gisla saga*, edited in part below the text of the M-redaction in the *Íslensk fornrit* edition (VI, 1943) and thought to be further removed than M from the original version of the saga, is in fact for the most part closer than M to the original. In another *Gripla* article (IV, 1980), Jónas dates the inception of systematic annalistic writing in Iceland to the thirteenth century, suggesting that the annals derived their dates of years not only from Ari's *Íslendingabók* and twelfth-century genealogical writings, but also from sagas with links to the west of Iceland (*Eyrbyggja*, *Laxdæla*, *Kristni saga*), which show a greater interest than others in the dating of events. In an article in English from the Turville-Petre *Festschrift*

(1981) he questions Nygaard's 1896 distinction between the learned and popular (or 'saga') styles of Old Norse literary prose, showing with examples of style from pre-1250 saints' lives not taken into account by Nygaard that theirs is essentially the style of the sagas; and in an article from the Holm-Olsen *Festschrift* (1984) he maintains that it is not 'yarn for twelve ells of cloth' that Guðrún tells Bolli that she has spun in ch. 49 of *Laxdæla saga* when he returns from killing Kjartan, but 'yarn twelve ells long' (*tólf álna garn*), the point being that her activities have been trivial in comparison with Bolli's monstrous deed. In a contribution in English to the Hermann Pálsson *Festschrift* of 1986 Jónas reviews saga research, reasserts his criticism of Nygaard, and stresses the inappropriateness of applying modern approaches to literature to the *Íslendingasögur* and *Sturlunga*, works which, like the kings' sagas, were originally conceived of as history.

In a long article from *Skírnir* (1987) Jónas lists a number of methodological considerations (not least certain differences between *Sturlunga* and the *Íslendingasögur*) involved in assessing the historicity of the sagas. He quotes from the two Vínland sagas (taken to be from the first half of the thirteenth century) their accounts of the death of Þorsteinn Eiríksson early in the eleventh century, and further quotes from two seventeenth-century annalists their accounts of the death of Bishop Jón Gerreksson (1432 or 1433). He sees the two accounts in each case as mutually independent and invites the reader to find in each case a kernel of historical truth. He then conducts an experiment involving his ancestor Ari Þorgilsson (d. 1148), the two annalists he has quoted (Jón Egilsson of Hrepphólar, d. c. 1636 and Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá, d. 1655), and his maternal grandfather (Guðlaugur Ásmundarson, d. 1943) and paternal aunt (Friðrika Jónsdóttir, d. 1979), concluding that 120 years is about the limit of the extent of time over which informants about the past are likely to be reliable.

In a paper published in 1988 (delivered originally at the Sturla Þórðarson commemorative conference in 1984) Jónas considers the similarities and differences between *Sturlunga* and the *Íslendingasögur*, finding them alike for the most part in their structural variety and in their presentation of genealogy, horse fights and human courage in the face of death, but relatively unlike in their portrayal of supernatural occurrences, ball games and battles. Modifying his 1977 view of the date of *Egils saga* (see above), but still maintaining that Snorri wrote it after completing the greater part, at least, of *Heimskringla*, Jónas gives it, in an article from *Andvari* (1990), the new date of c. 1230, and goes so far as to suggest that with *Egils saga* Snorri initiated the genre of the *Íslendingasögur*. In a paper delivered at the 1990 conference in Reykjavík on Snorri Sturluson (and published in 1992), he argues that the mythological poems of the *Poetic Edda*, though mostly composed in the pre-Conversion period, are not expressive of pagan religious belief in the way that certain skaldic poems are, notably those of the tenth-century poets Eyvindr skáldaspillir and Einarr skálaglamm. In an article from *Skáldskaparmál* (1994) Jónas indulges the bee in his bonnet about the word 'Norse', taking too much on trust, in my view, the apparent equation of this word with 'Norwegian' in English and American dictionaries, but rightly pointing out that what is Icelandic and what is Norwegian should be respectively so called. In a contribution in Danish

to the Lars Lönnroth *Festschrift* (2000) he argues (against Einar Ól. Sveinsson) for a partial revival of the old idea of **Gunnars saga* and **Njáls saga* as the two main lost sources of the surviving *Njáls saga*, claiming that the latter's author had access to a brief written account of Gunnarr's life, which he expanded with the help of other sources and combined with a **Njáls saga* that complemented it in being relatively rich in verses and information about individuals. In yet another *Gripla* article (XVII, 2006) he argues on linguistic, metrical and historical grounds for the genuineness of the attribution in *Egils saga* of most of the verses attributed there to Egill Skalla-Grímsson. In a somewhat shortened version of an article written with four others and published (in English) in *Acta Archaeologica* (2012), finally, Jónas identifies the bay known as Sop's Arm, lying west of the head of White Bay on the eastern side of Newfoundland's northern peninsula, as the Straumfjörðr of *Eiríks saga rauða*. The article further suggests that the long pits found near Sop's Arm were used to trap caribou, possibly by Vikings.

There is a great deal more in each of these essays than I have had space to indicate here, and the bibliography which concludes this volume is enough to show that they represent only a small part of Jónas's scholarly output. Readers will find much here to stimulate them and a certain amount also, no doubt, with which to disagree. To give just one example: some might prefer to follow Jonna Louis-Jensen (*Nowele* 21/22 (1993), 267–81) in taking a rather different view from Jónas's of the passage in *Laxdæla saga* involving *tólf álna garn*. But Jónas's essays are written in a spirit that invites discussion and argument, and I suspect that this is the kind of response that he would have wished his book to have. Few readers of *Saga-Book* will be daunted by the fact that eleven out of the sixteen essays in this book are in Icelandic, but some may find it helpful to know that in a good many of them, whether in Icelandic or not, Jónas lists by number or letter either his conclusions or stages in his argument, and sometimes both. This greatly assists the reading of the volume, as does the fluent companionability of his style, which is well conveyed even in the essays that are not in Icelandic. Along with his other writings, this volume will ensure that Jónas Kristjánsson remains with us as a forceful, inspiring presence.

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3. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. Whenever possible the material should be incorporated in the text instead, if necessary in parentheses.

4. References should be incorporated in the text unless they relate specifically to subject-matter dealt with in a note. A strictly corresponding bibliographical list should be included at the end of the article. The accuracy of both the references and the list is the author's responsibility.

5. References should be given in the form illustrated by the following examples:

— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtsmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 154).

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flateyjarbok* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Syrlækiarosi*.

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf. *Heilagra manna søgur*, II 107–08).

The terms *op. cit.*, *ed. cit.*, *loc. cit.*, *ibid.* should not be used. Avoid, too, the use of *f.* and *ff.*; give precise page references.

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7. Words or phrases in languages other than English cited in the paper should be italicised and any gloss enclosed in single quotation marks, e.g. *Sýrdælir* ‘men from Surnadal’. Longer quotations should be enclosed in single quotation marks, with quotations within quotations enclosed in double quotation marks. Quotations of more than three lines, quotations in prose of more than one paragraph, whatever their length (two lines of dialogue, for example), and all verse quotations, should be indented. Such quotations should not be enclosed in quotation marks, and they should not be italicised.

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EDITIONS

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