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# ICELANDIC JOURNAL



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BY  
ALICE SELBY

EDITED BY  
A. R. TAYLOR

VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH  
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## PREFACE

TO ONE who in 1933 made a similar journey and who has always regretted the loss of his own diary from that time, it has given some pleasure to prepare the manuscript of Miss Alice Selby's journal for publication. I have tried to identify some of the people she met, but I am afraid a few of the identifications remain conjectural. Unfortunately I was unable to go to Iceland this summer and I have relied on works of reference and on enquiries made by letter. I wish here to record my sincere gratitude for information received from Mr Klemenz Tryggvason of the Hagstofa in Reykjavík, from Mr Bjarni Vilhjálmsón of the Þjóðskjalasafn, from Mr Steindór Steindórsson of Akureyri, and above all from my friend, Mr Eiríkur Benedikz, of the Icelandic Embassy in London. If there are mistakes they must not be blamed: the responsibility is mine.

I have not aimed at absolute consistency in the spelling of Icelandic place-names and personal names in the journal itself. The only Icelandic diacritic retained is the acute accent and that normally only over the letter "a" and in a few names seldom met with. In the notes and in any Icelandic word quoted in the text the appropriate Old or Modern Icelandic spelling has been retained.

Miss Dorothea Selby, sister of the author, brought the journal to the notice of Professor Kenneth Cameron of Nottingham University and President of the Viking Society, and he recommended it to the Society's Council and Editors. Miss Dorothea Selby made publication possible by a generous donation, and she also prevailed on Mr Hibbard to contribute his "personal recollection" of Miss Alice Selby, found at the end of the book. The journal now appears both as an independent publication and as a part of the *Saga-Book*, and I feel sure that many readers will be delighted by Miss Selby's human and often amusing account of her experiences.

A. R. TAYLOR

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## *Chapter One*

### REYKJAVIK AND THE LAND OF DREAMS

I LEFT Hull on the "Godafoss" on June 19th, 1931. The boat seemed small and uncomfortable. There were twelve passengers in the first class, four English, four German and four Icelandic.

The first few days were blank. The weather was grey and cold, and the sea restless. Till we passed the Pentland Firth I was still more or less alive and conscious of the bleak grey lands and the bleak grey sea. Then for the next two days my world was bounded by a rather unsteady cabin wall with a few dresses rocking uneasily on the cabin pegs. It was not until the afternoon of the third day that my horizon extended itself and I crept up into the pale clear sunshine of the deck. It was cheering to know that we should get our first far-off glimpse of Iceland in the evening, and on the strength of that prospect I had roast pork for dinner and was even able to feel romantic when, far off in the north, in the rose glow of the sunset, we saw an incandescent point and were told that it was Eyjafjallajökul. The air is so clear that the glacier snows can be seen for sixty miles.

At seven in the morning I came on deck to what the picture captions used to call "a land of dreams come true". A huge cliff fell precipitously from a green velvet head to a milky sea at the foot. The dark rocks where the sea-birds congregated and left their mark were streaked with white. Gulls were screaming and plunging round the boat. The little town of Vestmannaeyjar lay at the foot of a volcanic mountain, while away in the distance to the left the glaciers of Iceland, Eyjafjallajökul and Hekla (which strictly speaking is not a glacier but at that time was indistinguishable from the genuine jökuls because the

snows were lying on the summit), were glittering in the early morning sunshine. I went below, dressed, and then went ashore in a motor-boat from which women in the pretty little Icelandic berets were climbing on board the "Godafoss".

The Vestmannaeyjar are a group of some fourteen islands, though only one of these, Heimaey, is of any importance. The geological composition is different from that of Iceland, and the crags and black cliffs that surround the harbour are more spectacular and theatrically picturesque than anything I was to see in Iceland. The islands have a tragic history of rapine and disease. Lock-jaw was so prevalent at one time that very few of the new-born children survived. It was not until 1847 that Dr Schleisner discovered a prophylactic, the so-called 'navel-oil', and the scourge was removed.<sup>1</sup> The ravages of pirates are memorised in the little headland Ræningjatangi, Robbers' Point, where in the seventeenth century the 'Turks' landed from three Algerian pirate ships, burned, killed and looted, and carried off a large number of the inhabitants into slavery. Some of them were released a few years later, but it was only a handful who found their way back from distant Africa to these northern islands. One of the refugees was the priest of the parish who left a description of the tragic event.<sup>2</sup> For many years afterwards watch against the 'Turks' was kept on the headland, and the houses were protected by a dike or embankment of earth.

The once unhappy little island is now a flourishing port, and the boats call at least once a week. On shore I had my first sight of what is one of the most characteristic sights in the Icelandic towns, the cod-fish drying. This

<sup>1</sup> See K. Kálund, *Bidrag til en historisk-topografisk Beskrivelse af Island* (1877-82), I 282 and footnote.

<sup>2</sup> The raid took place in 1627. There were two priests in Vestmannaeyjar at this time, (a) Jón Þorsteinsson who was killed by the raiders and (b) Ólafur Egilsson who was carried off but released in the following year. He left an account of the incident which has been printed more than once, see *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi* (ed. Jón Þorkelsson, Sögurir IV, 1906-9).



fish, which is exported in large quantities, mainly for the Friday fare of the Spanish, is washed, split and gutted, and then set in the sun to dry. Every morning the fish is packed on wooden litters, which are then carried by two people to the drying ground. The fish is then unpacked and spread out; it lies there in the sun till evening, when it is again packed on the litter and carried to the tarpaulin-covered stack. Women, girls and little boys carry out this work. It is a pretty scene, with the white fish bleaching like linen in the sun, and the girls in their blue dungarees, and the women with white kerchiefs. Later, when I reached Reykjavik, I found the arrangements for drying fish were more elaborate and included even a miniature railway — the only one in Iceland. I am bound to say that I was never fortunate enough to see the railway function; but I walked along the rusty lines which ran through a desert of dry, shining fish-scales that crackled under the feet like sand above high-water mark, and which didn't smell as disagreeable as one might expect.

As it was still early morning when I stepped ashore at Vestmannaeyjar I did not see the town in its gayest aspect. Except for the girls carrying out the fish, and the little crowd of people on the quay, the inhabitants were all asleep. The town is not impressive. There are many one-story houses of wood and corrugated iron, most of them painted grey or white. Towards the edge of the town there are larger houses, villas of concrete, each standing in a little patch of grass, railed off from the un-made road with wire fencing. There were several motor lorries, a café, a picture-house and a barber's shop with a collection of depressing bead necklaces.

The hooting of the steamer called me from an examination of the barber's window, and we were soon off again. The day was bright but so cold. To starboard we had the jokuls glittering in the sun, and after that only a long line of intimidating coast with sands and barren lava fields. Then, far far away in the distance, the white

mass of Snæfellsjökul rose out of the sea, sixty miles away.

We rounded Reykjanes, and the sun went in. Reykjavik was a desolate little grey cluster as we neared it over the grey and choppy sea. And when I landed the feeling of greyness persisted. Grey buildings of corrugated iron and bigger, newer ones of concrete. Grey streets lead to a grey lake, and a grey sun occasionally peers through the grey clouds.

But one bit of colour caught my eye. I had hoped, but not expected, to find gaily dressed Vikings striding the streets of Reykjavik. So when I looked round at the clatter of hoofs and saw a romantic figure on a horse, I felt that I was back in the Saga Age. The man was gold-helmeted and scarlet cloaked. He had a red beard, and his blue trousers were laced with gold thongs. He had a gold spear in his hand and a dog at his side.<sup>3</sup> It was later that I learned how the Viking got his outfit. There is a movement for restoring the national costume, but this ideal gets no more sympathy from the majority of people in Reykjavik than does the Dress Reform Movement from most Londoners. So, as a protest against this freak ideal, some bright young people clubbed together and bought a complete Viking outfit. They gave this to a harmless lunatic who hangs about the town and flaunts his finery to the surprise and delight of foreigners.

Apart from this touch of medievalism, Reykjavik is no more romantic than any other town. There is a very fine hotel with a ball-room and innumerable bathrooms with hot and cold. This hotel, I was told, was built by an ex-champion of *glíma* (a form of wrestling which is the national and traditional sport in Iceland).<sup>4</sup> This man made a fortune in exhibiting the art at music-halls and

<sup>3</sup> Oddur Sigurgeirsson. For a photograph of this well-known figure see W. H. Auden and Louis Macneice, *Letters from Iceland* (1937), 219.

<sup>4</sup> Jóhannes Jósefsson (1883-1968).

circuses all over Europe and returned to his native land to invest the fortune in a fine hotel. There are other hotels, comfortable if not so pretentious. There are two picture theatres, and there is a scheme for building a proper theatre, to be financed by the money gained in taxes from the more popular, if less dignified sister art, the cinema. The shops, though they seem a little dowdy to one used to Bond Street, are not entirely contemptible. I was shocked when I arrived at the absence of what I should describe as "a proper book-shop", but during my six weeks absence in the country a very fine book-shop was opened with national and international literature in plenty.<sup>5</sup>

I had been met at the boat by kind friends, who set out with me on a Grand Tour of Reykjavik, not a lengthy business, for the whole town can be surrounded in half an hour's walk. We saw the Post Office, the Banks, the House of Parliament, the Museum-cum-library, the School, the lake, and the suburbs with their rather dashing new houses. I was shown examples of the flora of Iceland (till then I had hardly been aware that there was one), and I felt patronising at the rather wind-blown tulips and the stunted aquilegia. When I came back to Reykjavik I found the town a-flower with lupins, poppies and even delphiniums. There was also a fine display of red currants, but when I first arrived in late June the flowering season had hardly started. The rhubarb, however, was being harvested. After the allotments we worked back into the town, passing the very modern building where the sculptor Einar Jonsson<sup>6</sup> and his works are housed. In the course of our walk we met most of the passengers and staff from the "Godafoss" and also the only Iclander I had met before starting to Iceland, a girl whom I knew in Copenhagen. I began to perceive dimly a fact, that was later born out in full, that

<sup>5</sup> Briem's bookshop was opened on 1 August 1931. Miss Selby's implied criticism of the two already existing bookshops of Snæbjörn Jónsson and Sigfús Eymundsson seems scarcely justified.

<sup>6</sup> Einar Jónsson (1874-1954).

it is impossible to avoid anyone in Iceland. My journeyings became an absurd picaresque where people I had met in the North or East appeared in an apparently unmotivated way in the South or West. This caused me surprise at first, but I had hardly realised (a) that the inhabitants of Iceland only number 100,000 altogether and (b) that the inhabited area of the country is surprisingly small to the mind of one who is used to the tightly packed districts of Southern and Midland England.

The wind was cold, so we spent what was left of the evening in the pictures. When we came out at 11.30 there was no dark, but only a cold grey corpse-light. I spent the night on the boat.

No meals are served while in port, so next morning I crept out to find some breakfast. It was coffee and slices of sweet cake. After the first morning I benefited by the insistence of two of my companions who managed, though they spoke no Icelandic, to squeeze some quite convincing bread-and-butter from the girl in the café.

I paid a call on a lady to whom I had an introduction, and she, coming in from the garden with her hands stained from rhubarb-picking, received me with the courtesy and self-possession which I was to find characteristic of the Icелander confronted by a stranger, and further a stranger with but little knowledge of their language. I was whisked off in a car to see the famous hot springs and hot houses about ten miles from Reykjavik. We humped over a rough road through bleak stretches of lava country. A rough road, I say, but when I returned to Reykjavik from the country, I realised that this particular road is one of the finest in the country and is smooth as glass in comparison with many parts of the long main road that joins the North and South. The first enquiry of the solicitous when one steps into a car is "*Do you get bilveikur?*", i.e. car-sick. It is the most ordinary thing

in Iceland to stop the touring cars to allow a passenger to indulge the weaknesses of the flesh. There are two or perhaps three causes for the frequency of this distressing ailment. One is the actual surface of the road, and here a further discomfort may arise — that is the danger of hitting your head on a beam in the roof of the car when it leaps, and the passengers with it, at some particularly large bump in the road. The second cause is the direction of the roads, many of which, as far as I could make out, are simply a widening of the little twisting pony tracks. When these were enlarged for cars it didn't seem to strike the engineers that the curves might profitably have been shaved off. Thirdly, I think that the Icelanders' car-sickness is due to lack of practice in riding in motor-cars. It is still a novelty to a great many of them. Indeed, many young people's only idea of a binge is to hire a car and drive it anywhere, preferably with a convivial party and several bottles.

The lava country is desolate with nothing but grass and rocks. I asked if it was capable of being cultivated, and my friend replied that cultivation was possible but the difficulty was shortage of labour. The people in Iceland are so few. In the holidays all the young people, men, boys and girls, try to get some sort of work — very often road-making. It is considered the manly thing to do, so even rich boys work. This year, however, unemployment is much commoner than it was because of the world depression. One of the most trying things in the Icelandic economic world just now is that they cannot get their dried fish sold in Spain. The herring trade is also in rather a difficult position. But when we talked of poverty and trade depression someone told me that there was never in Iceland such a depth of degradation as one can find in an English slum. There is so much land to spare in Iceland that anyone can scratch a living from it. Moreover, there is always the sea with its plentiful supply of fish. So, though the conditions of

life may be hard, for no-one in Iceland is there danger of absolute starvation.

So we chatted until we saw steam rising in the distance, and there, in a perfectly bleak landscape, lying in the hollow of the bleak hills, was a little group of glass houses wreathed in steam. We walked through groves of tomatoes, plantations of cucumbers, houses of rather frail roses, and beds of melons. The warmth of the natural spring was very grateful after the dank cold of the atmosphere outside. Then we went up to see the parents of the proprietor.<sup>7</sup> They were a charming old couple — the father in working clothes and rope shoes, the old lady almost blind but holding herself erect, her bust firmly laced into the corset of the national dress. The little beret, with its long tassel, was perched coquettishly on her head, and she had beautiful ornaments of filigree on her bodice. We drank coffee, and they discussed politics with vigour but with perfect courtesy.

Then we went on to an open-air swimming-bath, supplied by one of the hot springs. The water was pleasantly tepid, though the effort of undressing and getting in under the rainy sky was considerable. We had more coffee, this time with the proprietor of the woollen factory which stands quite near.<sup>8</sup> The factory is run from the hot springs. Further the houses in the district use the spring water for central heating and for all ordinary purposes. It is so hot that tea can be made from it directly with no further boiling.

I spent a nice evening with some Icelandic friends. We discussed the national character. I said it was a peculiar experience to come to this country knowing nothing of the people but what I had learnt from the sagas. I had expected to find Iceland populated by

<sup>7</sup> Probably Ásgeir Bjarnason and Ragnheiður Helgadóttir, the parents of Bjarni Ásgeirsson, the co-owner of the greenhouses at Reykir in Mosfellssveit.

<sup>8</sup> Sigurjón Pétursson (1885–1955), another *glíma* champion who ran the Álafoss cloth factory.

those portentous figures, Gudrun of the Laxdale Saga, Egill Skallagrimsson, Viga-Glum. I had expected the most striking characteristics to be a sort of stiffness of character and a high degree of offendability. Instead of that I find the most civilized people in Europe, whose manners combine absolute courtesy to a stranger without any of the tiresome fussing or curiosity that often accompanies hospitality. I had noticed, however, that the people in the shops were a little unencouraging at first and seemed almost to resent your wanting to buy anything. But when I persisted they thawed and became eager to get me what I wanted. One of the party thought that the attitude of the shop people was due to pride and that pride is a very important quality in the Icелander. It is that which makes them dislike cadging for money, so the Icелander is always unwilling to over-charge. I was able to observe this phenomenon later, when I was riding in the country. When I asked one of the farmers how much I owed him for hire of horses and hospitality, he sat fingering his chin and, after some consideration, said "Twenty-five *krónur*". I thanked him and handed him the money, which represented a very reasonable charge. He took it and sat a few moments with it in his hand. Then he took a five-*krónur* note and gave it to me, saying, "No, I think I've charged you too much. Twenty *krónur* is enough." And this in a country where money is not too easily come by. The Icелander's pride is also the basis for his courage and power of suffering discomforts without complaints. I was told that at the celebrations of the millenary of the Althing the beds in the tents allotted to students had got damp. That, I thought, was in itself characteristic. I didn't find the Icелander a very practical person. The Norwegian and the Swedish students panicked on the grounds that they would catch cold. The Icelandic students slept in the damp beds and caught cold uncomplainingly.

Another of the party suggested that the kindness and

at the same time the lack of fussing had been developed by the farm life, i.e., that through the centuries the Icelanders had had to do with animals. It is an interesting theory that the Icelandic pony has tamed his fierce and uncompromising master. But the ponies themselves are tamed. I heard a funny story of the horse-fight that was to be shown at the millenary celebrations. There were many protests against the revival of this barbarous form of sport. But because it was traditional and of the Saga Age, the fight was held. But when the ponies were put to it, instead of biting with concentrated hatred, they rolled and played like a couple of puppies. The promoters of the fight had unfortunately picked on two firm friends, who enjoyed a good romp together.

Next morning I went out to Thingvellir, the plain where the first national parliament was held a thousand years ago. The car passed through desolate hills of monotonous and craggy outline until I wondered when we should arrive at the rocky ridge of the Almannagjá. Then we saw a lake to the right, Thingvallavatn, and skirting the edge we arrived at the craggy ridge down which the road runs between high cliffs.<sup>9</sup> We descended to the plain and made a large circuit to cross the river and arrive at the hotel.

Thingvellir is very beautiful and the formation of the rocks extraordinary. Sometimes they split, forming deep clefts filled with blue-green water. This is so clear that the floating weeds look like jewels. Above the lava plain is the ridge where the meetings were held. I scrambled about looking for the *lögberg* and the famous booths. There is no difficulty finding these as they are conveniently marked by tablets. The view from the ridge is exquisite, the river Oxará in the foreground with

<sup>9</sup> The classic description of the approach to the parliament ground at Thingvellir is to be found in Lord Dufferin, *Letters from High Latitudes* (1856), ch. VII.



the "holm" or island on which the famous duel between Gunnlaug Ormstunga and Hrafn was fought "for the love of a lady", then, across that, the church and the vicarage, a grey house with a bright green roof, which proved on closer examination to be of growing turf. Beyond stretches the lava plain, humping itself uneasily into little wrinkles, but covered between the rocks with grass, scrub and little birch trees. In the far distance the mountains stand blue in the morning sunshine, still wearing their winter caps of snow. It was from the shield-shaped Skjaldbreið that the red hot lava poured in distant ages, which was to cool, and harden, and form a stage for some of the most remarkable events in Icelandic history.<sup>10</sup>

I walked past the waterfalls along to the edge of the ridge, through the sweet-scented scrub birch. Snow was still lying in the shaded crannies of the ravine. Then I struck across the heath. It was very desolate and very lovely, with no life but the plovers, which whined round me with a persistence that soon became irritating. Then it began to rain, so I turned back and examined the little church and graveyard across Oxará. It was settling down to rain with more conviction now, so I went back to the hotel and drank coffee. I was smoking a cigarette and gazing out rather drearily into the grey and desolate monotony of the plain, when a car drove up to the hotel, and another, and another, till the plain was desolate no longer and the solitudes were filled with young students. The girls were trying to be reckless, and the boys were most of them tipsy, carrying bottles, shouting, kissing, singing, dancing and, it seemed to me, ignoring the young women. One young man practised his English on me and told me that they had passed their

<sup>10</sup> Skjaldbreið: this mountain is well known on the skyline from Þingvellir. During the whole of the last century it was generally assumed to be the source of the lava which forms the floor of Þingvellir. Regretfully we must now accept the more modern theory that most of the lava came from fissures to the east of Skjaldbreið. See B. Thorsteinsson and Th. Jóseppsson, *Þingvellir* (1961), 8.

matriculation into the university and were celebrating their entrance into student life. He told me (I suspect untruthfully) that he was going to be a clergyman and that he would have few opportunities in the future of enjoying himself in this particular way. He introduced a great many of his friends, who were all very distinguished. One was the best orator of the year, another the best mathematician, and so on. I thought the boys and girls were trying very hard to enjoy themselves, but even whilst I was there I noticed that their spirits flagged. They were to spend the night out there at the hotel, and I wondered if it would be long before they could return to Reykjavik and sleep off their aching heads. The weather was, of course, depressing. I suppose things would go with more snap in the sunshine.

I went home in a car with an earnest young German from Kiel, who wanted to improve his English. I wanted to improve my German, but he won.

The next day I spent at the Library and Museum. In the Museum I saw clothes, woven fabrics and above all carved wooden objects. There were carved wood cupboards, food-bowls, spoon-boxes, cake moulds, and even wringer handles. I suppose the long winter evenings are so boring that the men in the country decorate every available wooden surface with carving. I pictured Mother restraining them from carving the rollers of the wringer.

I had tea with an unsuccessful Labour candidate at the last election.<sup>11</sup> She is a large woman, intensely idealistic, and belonging to all sorts of International Leagues of Women, except the National Council. She sat there with her hat askew and her stockings wrinkling to the ankle.

In the evening I was to meet the same lady with a group of others for dinner. I saw a tall, fair, stately

<sup>11</sup> Laufey Valdimarsdóttir (1890-1945) was the daughter of Briet Bjarnhéðinsdóttir, the most famous of Iceland's suffragettes.

woman coming forward with dignity to meet me in the hotel. It was the same lady in national costume. Often during my stay in Iceland I was to see this extraordinary metamorphosis. Some school-girl slut in a bedraggled cotton frock would appear as a woman with poise and experience, only because she had changed into her national dress. The tightly laced corset forces the wearer to stand or sit erect and the long skirt gives dignity, while the little beret and the plaited hair are worn with an attractive air of coquetry. It was a little group of university women who composed our dinner party. It was a gay dinner, pretty dresses, a bottle of Sauterne, and a great deal of chattering and laughter. But they grow very serious when they talk of their country. They said that the Althing millenary was the greatest experience of their lives, and that the Icelanders who were present felt that not only a great past was behind them but that a great future lay ahead. That was their moment, when they had faith in Iceland's future. They said they had forgotten that faith later, especially with the fury of the election, but they had their moment and it was worth while.

What else did we talk about? Trifles mostly. The lady who felt that she had once been a lamb in Svarfadardale.<sup>12</sup> The ponies (at the millenary celebrations) that refused to fight. I asked if the University Women in Reykjavik gossiped and said unpleasant things about each other. They thought not, partly because there were so few of them, partly because they were united by their sense of pioneerdom. They had all been first in some field — one the first girl to enter the High School, one the first woman teacher in the school. One was the first government clerk, one the first to own a chemist's shop, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Aðalbjörg Sigurðardóttir (b. 1887), a well-known suffragette and theosophist.

<sup>13</sup> The first Icelandic woman to graduate from Reykjavik High School was Laufey Valdimarsdóttir, see note 11; the first woman government clerk was Ásta Magnúsdóttir who entered government service in 1910; Jóhanna Magnúsdóttir was the first to own a chemist's shop, which she started in 1928.

My boat was to leave that night for the north, so the gay little group saw me off in the now persistent rain.

The next day wore away. The unfriendly mountains were hidden in the mist and the unfriendly sea bickered round our little boat. The boat was crowded. Many of the passengers were being rather vocally sea-sick in their berths. A few of us huddled in the smokeroom. Someone was playing a gramophone, and we tried to make a tight little defence of human civilization against the void that lay outside.

Snow was falling on the mountains, but it turned to rain as it reached the fjord. The sea was rough, and I slept. When I woke it was calmer and we were creeping into Isafjord. It looked a grim place, packed onto a spit of land lying across the fjord. The mountains rise almost sheer from the water, and in the winter for nearly two months the little town is cut off from the sunlight. Then, in January when the first rays of the sun strike the town, the people drink coffee and eat cakes to celebrate.

We had a few hours to wait. I picked my way through the puddles of the street to pay a call. The place should have been romantic with the quays lined with brown-sailed boats full of sea-birds' eggs; but the rain and mud were as unromantic as they are in England. I went along a little gully to the mainland, where a road leads along the fjord. In a nice white house at the foot of the mountains lives the clergyman.<sup>14</sup> He is charming, intellectual, and was unflurried by the arrival of a visitor who dislocated the family dinner and drank coffee at an inconvenient hour. He talked Icelandic to me with the utmost patience, articulating every syllable, as did his son, Siggi litli. His two small, square, red girls were too shy to talk to the English lady. He had a lot of books, the Icelandic sagas, and a collection of English books on

<sup>14</sup> Sigurgeir Sigurðsson (1890-1953) became Bishop of Iceland on 1 January 1939. His two daughters were called Svanhildur and Guðlaug.

Spiritualism, mainly by the Rev. Vale Owen.<sup>15</sup> Then I called on the doctor whose little girls entertained me with courtesy and self-possession.<sup>16</sup>

That evening we were in the Arctic circle and should have seen the Midnight Sun, but it rained, so I had a bath and went to bed. Next day the weather showed faint signs of improvement. By the time we had passed Skagafjord and Drangey, where the outlaw Grettir found peace, the sun was out, and we arrived at Siglufjord on a glorious summer day.

I had heard a great deal about Siglufjord, a place of bad aroma both literally and metaphorically. I had been told that it was the only place in Iceland where a solitary woman is not perfectly safe. It is the centre of the herring industry and hence famous at certain times of the year for its bad smell. Fortunately the herring season had not yet begun.

The place certainly looked nasty. There were squashed fish and squashed birds on the quay, a great many sinister-looking men in the streets, and a not too obtrusive smell of fish-oil. The country round is lovely. I climbed up a bit of one of the mountains and had a magnificent view of the fjord and the town, which is not unpicturesque when seen from a height. Then the steamer's whistle blew, and we were soon rounding Siglunes and passing into Eyjafjord. The sun shone, the sea was blue and the mountain tops were white with snow.

<sup>15</sup> George Vale Owen (1869–1931) published several books on the after-life in the 1920s.

<sup>16</sup> Vilmundur Jónsson (1889–1972) became Iceland's Chief Medical Officer of Health in October 1931. His daughters were Guðrún and Ólöf.

## *Chapter Two*

### AKUREYRI AND EYJAFJORD

EYJAFJORD is one of the loveliest fjords in Iceland. The chief place is Akureyri, the largest town in Iceland after Reykjavik. It lies almost at the top of the fjord. To the left, just before it is reached, there is a range of mountains of the characteristic pyramid shape, which always reminded me of a row of ice-puddings with the top sliced off. It is an agreeable little town, with several comfortable hotels, two picture theatres and a very fine modern store belonging to the Co-operative Association. This large new building is the first thing that the visitor sees when he walks up from the quay. Behind the town the ground rises, and after a twenty minutes' walk you reach the foot of Sulur, the mountain that stands at the back of the town. Out into the fjord there is a spit of land where the small boats come in. Along the fjord the land is flat, and here is the fish-drying ground. Then there is a large factory before you come to Glerá, a river which supplies the town with electricity. Beyond that there is a working-class area of houses and a sort of suburb. Up the fjord on the hill behind the town the houses are more imposing. They are for the most part nice new villas and often have gardens with flowers growing in them. The other houses have all their patch of grass railed off from the road by wire fencing, but the owners cultivate the grass for hay and do not attempt any horticulture. Up the hill there is even a public garden, which stands next to the school. It is gay with columbines and valerian. Here also are trees, little birch bushes, none of them growing more than five or six feet high; but the people of Akureyri are very proud of their wooded park. On the lower road along the fjord there is a quay with stacks of

wood and barrels; these are followed by a district of smaller houses and a fish-drying ground. Here the men put out their nets and I found it fascinating to watch them dragging in the nets and flinging out the poor protesting fish with which they seemed always to be full. Another interest of this road that flanked the fjord was the families of eider-duck which swam near the edge. The fathers, I was told, took no further interest in their children after the hatching was over, but escaped to the sea where they enjoyed their bachelorhood together, leaving the mothers to their parental responsibilities. The down with which the nests are lined used to be a very valuable commodity in Iceland, and a farmer who owned a nesting-ground on the flats near the fjord was a fortunate person. But now the trade has dwindled because of the cost of collecting and cleaning the down.

Akureyri has an open-air swimming bath. It forms a very nice social centre, and though it is only the children and the more intrepid males who venture into its icy water, a great many people of both sexes sit about on the grass banks and watch the bathers. I was amused to read the first time I went that the bath was reserved for women at that particular time and to observe that the only people in it were men and boys. After that I stopped taking much notice of the printed word. Another thing that contributes to the gaiety of Akureyri is the Herdubreid Café. This was just opposite the window of my bedroom, and as there was a dance almost every night that I was there, I could watch the dancers arriving and leaving, and listen from my bed to the music of the jazz band. The place was often very gay as many boats called at Akureyri, and their sailors patronised the Herdubreid.

The arrival of the boats is the most exciting thing in Akureyri, for all letters and parcels come by boat and not by road. The day that the boat is due the excitement begins to simmer. You ask each other when "Dettifoss"

or "Godafoss" is due. Then you begin to argue about it, and someone tells you that they heard from the postmaster that she left Isafjord that morning. Then, perhaps, you hear the steamer's whistle as she comes up the fjord. You hurry out to see her come in, to meet your friends, to "goup" if you are to be merely an onlooker. She draws nearer and gradually, with a good deal of shouting and blowing of whistles, she creeps alongside the quay. You wave at your friends or scan the faces of the visitors. The gangway is put down and you hurry on board, come off laughing and chattering with your friends, carrying luggage and paper-bags or flowers from Reykjavik. The next excitement is the post. You have a key with which you can obtain your letters even though the post office is shut. So the street echoes to the hurrying steps, and round the post office there is a little crowd. Next morning the parcels have been unshipped, and the pavements in front of the shops are cluttered with wooden packing-cases. Then the windows are gay with the latest models from Copenhagen, and the tobacconist has a new supply of oranges. After the boat leaves the town sinks into torpor, until the next boat is due.

The hotel I stayed in was kept by an ex-housekeeper from the hospital.<sup>17</sup> She is the Mrs Beaton of Iceland and has written a cookery book which I was told was on the way to becoming a classic. Certainly she was an excellent cook; the food was delicious and a good advertisement for her book. For lunch, I remember, on the first day we had a soufflé served in coquilles, trout with fried onions, and an exquisite cream made with tinned fruit. The chief draw-back for those not used to pension life in the Scandinavian countries is the ordeal of coming into the dining room and finding one's place at the long table, lined on either side with strangers. It is the most harrowing experience imaginable, especially when one is

<sup>17</sup> Jóninna Sigurðardóttir (b. 1879). Her cookery book, first published in 1915, has gone through several editions.



aware that some sort of conventional greeting is expected from a newcomer, and one is not sure what the exact form is. It was some time before I acquired the right formula, *verði þú að góðu* ("may it do you good"). I used to murmur "God bless you" and trust that it would pass. Further problems arise when you are not sure of the exact sequence of the meal. The supper consisted of a hot course followed by a variety of cold objects of the nature of hors d'œuvres. But many of the inmates used to take a preliminary snack from these for they were all ready on the table. If one began like this one was immediately embarrassed by the arrival of the maid, who pressed hot meat and potatoes on you. Then, of course, all the most agreeable of the cold objects were out of range, and one did not know their names even in English, still less in Icelandic, and one was too shy, and too well brought up, to stretch or point.

This hotel was admirable in other matters. The rooms were plainly furnished and the walls painted with light grey washable paint. There was running water (but, alas, only cold) in all the rooms. There was a bathroom and central heating. The proprietress was kindly and the maid charming. She was rather sorry for me and suspected I was lonely. She used to come to my room in the evenings, when I was reading or writing, and talk to me patiently in Icelandic or, sometimes when I couldn't understand, in Danish. I remember one evening when an Englishman, who had been on the boat with me, got drunk and made a speech from the steps of the Herdubreid, that she came running up to my room to tell me and we peered together through the curtains and made the sort of shocked noises with our tongues that are common to all languages.

One evening I went to a play in Akureyri and there found the proprietress and the maid. They insisted I should sit by them and further, in the interval, asked me to take coffee with them and pressed cakes on me, for

which they paid. I had a picture in my mind of the conventional boarding-house keeper in England.

On my first visit I stayed only one night in Akureyri as I was being accompanied to Svarfadardale next day. The first evening in Akureyri was notable for me, in that I didn't quite see the Midnight Sun. We were told that we should see it from Sulur, but I didn't climb high enough and at 11.50 it disappeared behind a mountain. It certainly was a remarkably beautiful sunset, and it was a curious experience to creep home in the pink glow to find the town sleeping, the hotel locked up, and to wonder whether I was returning too late at night or too early in the morning.

The next day I left for Svarfadardale by motor-boat in company with the clergyman and his family.<sup>18</sup> We were to leave early in the morning, then it was to be at one, but the afternoon wore slowly away and it was six o'clock before the overloaded little boat got under way. The journey was not very comfortable as the small boat held Séra Stefán and his family, the crew and the owner and his friends, our luggage, a wooden door, hay rakes, sacks of rye, barrels and three rolls of barbed wire. The elder ladies wrapped shawls round their heads and disappeared into the tiny cabin. The rest of us perched on sacks and barrels and ate buns out of paper bags. Séra Stefán and his daughter removed the more external of their town clothes and struggled into oil skins and rubber boots. It was bitterly cold and spiteful little waves splashed over the side. After about four hours we arrived at Dalvík, the little fishing port of Svarfadardale. There is nothing but a cluster of houses, mostly new. The quay or quays, for there are two of them, fragile wooden structures, stretch out into the fjord and have a rusty truck-line down the middle. They are lined

<sup>18</sup> Séra Stefán Kristinsson was priest at Vellir from 1901 to 1941. His wife was Solveig Pétursdóttir Eggerz and his two daughters were named Ingibjörg and Sigríður.

with a grim array of fishes' heads, drying to be ground down into fishmeal. It is rather like the religious house in a Melanesian village — set on piles with ranks of grinning skulls.

We shivered on the quay whilst the boat was unloaded. There were a great many more things than I had been aware of — boxes, trunks and paper bags, Ingibjorg's clothes hanging rather insecurely on coat-hangers, a cistern, a lavatory basin, some drain pipes, a large iron object — probably a boiler, and a jam jar with a rose cutting in it. While these were being unpacked Ingibjorg's friends, two pretty girls in berets, were dancing around and giggling, delighted at the re-union, for she had been away for a year teaching gymnastics in Reykjavik.

I was led up the quay and along the village street. A wide valley opened up to the south with snow-tipped mountains on each side with a range shutting in the top of the dale. A wide and rather swift-flowing river wound through the flat green bottom. The mountain peaks were flushed with pink from a sun low over the fjords, and up the gently sloping sides of the valley, below the precipitous mountains, was a scattering of little white farms.

We were taken to the beret-girls' home and beside the grateful warmth of an electric radiator were given cold milk and cake. Nature's needs were satisfied in a bedroom with the help of a chamber perched rather insecurely on a feather bed.

Then a motor lorry came along. The goods from the quay had been collected and increased by the addition of a huge bunch of fish — trout and some big flat ones which were still jumping convulsively as a protest against their translation into another element. Mrs Stefán climbed in the front. Sera Stefán, Ingibjorg and I sat rather insecurely on the boxes behind, the driver got in, and a supernumerary clung to the mudguard. Then

we jolted off, swinging along what was a comparatively good road. After a mile or so we turned over the narrowest possible bridge and followed a cart track over the river flats, then another bridge, followed by more cart track. The river here is in four or five branches and at the last we had to transfer into a boat. Across the river there was a black fluffy dog called Snati, which was barking a hysterical welcome to the family. A boy was waiting with a long two-wheeled cart and a pony. We climbed up the side of the valley for half a mile or so and reached Vellir.

It is a white house of corrugated iron, lined with wood; rather like a double-fronted villa, with a flight of steps to the front door. It is the parsonage and close by there is a tiny white, green-roofed church. Round this there is an old graveyard, raised from the ground by a slight mound; but busy feet do not respect its sanctity for it makes a short cut from the house to the river. There is also a new graveyard, which is fenced in and has a row of mountain ashes and one of these brave attempts at a garden — a row of lupins and poppies, all rather bleached by the cruel wind.

I haven't yet described the clergyman and his wife. He is bearded like an apostle and has a brown, weather-beaten face with surprising light grey eyes. He was a fisherman in his youth and has the slightly slouching shoulders that are often a sign of great strength. He spits a great deal. He is evidently a wag, though I couldn't understand his jokes. On the boat he had struggled into a pair of light blue dungarees, put on some leather leggings and a yellow oilskin coat, and when he had finished he seemed a much more convincing country *prestur* than the respectable, brown-suited gentleman that I had met on the "Godafoss". Clergymen in Iceland wear no uniform in ordinary life. When they conduct the services they wear black cassocks and the sweetest frills or ruffs round their necks. Mrs Stefán

is fat and has a nice homely face. In Akureyri she was wearing the national dress, black and close-fitting, with a coloured silk apron and a huge white satin bow on her bosom. Her hair was plaited in several plaits and looped up under the little beret with its dangling tassel. Over this costume she wore an ordinary raincoat. In the house she wears a cotton frock that has no distinctive national qualities, and she wears her grey plaits down her back. The daughter, Ingibjorg, is a modern — a little athletic thing who whistles, strides like a boy, and despises the national costume.

When we reached the door of the house my hostess turned to me with a kindly "Welcome to Vellir". We went into the front room, where the table was laid for a meal — horn-handled knives, black and white bread, a large block of butter, and a large jug of milk. I enjoyed the meal, for it was now one in the morning and, except for a bun or two on the boat and the milk at Dalvik, I had had nothing since lunch. We had veal stew with potatoes and boiled eggs and then porridge and milk. After supper I waited out in the sunset-dawn till my bag was brought up from the river. There was a smell of dew, and a smell of peat smoke. It was cold and peaceful except for a curlew which was whining with its mate down in the grass near the river.

The parlour upstairs had been turned into my bedroom with pillows, sheets and duvet on the couch. There was a bowl of cold water and a piece of soap on the polished table for my toilet.

About ten the next morning there was a knock at the door, and the younger daughter, a pretty dark girl with two long plaits of hair, came in carrying a large copper kettle of coffee, a jug of cream, and a trayful of cakes. This was my first experience of the little breakfast that was always brought to me in bed in Iceland. At first it is a shade disconcerting to meet the fancy biscuits and cakes with layers of jam at such an early meal.

Sometimes the fragile and delicious pancakes that are such a feature of coffee parties were brought. But I came to enjoy my morning snack, and the coffee was always strong, hot and freshly made, and the cream delicious. I was often so ashamed at the gaps that I had made in the inevitable tray of cakes that I used to re-arrange them on the tray and trust that my hostess did not check the numbers.

Too soon for one to be really hungry again, we sat down to lunch — yesterday's stew and some of the fish that had ridden with us in the lorry the night before. My hostess told me about their life. The salary of a clergyman is negligible, so they live by farming. At Vellir they have nine cows and three calves, hence the delicious milk, cream, butter, cheese and *skyr*. This is the national dish, sour milk, which has been strained and beaten till it is like whipped cream. It is eaten with sugar and cream. It is supposed to be essential to health and to supply the deficiencies that would otherwise show in the Icelandic diet because of the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The housewife at Vellir is out at seven every morning to see to the dairy work. Then there are the sheep — not very many because the grazing is not good and the *tún* small. They have some meadows down near the river for the hay. But they spin the wool from the sheep and make it into stockings for the children, and they wear home-spun and knitted things in the winter. In summer they have shop-made clothes.

Meals at Vellir are continuous. When I was there, there were twenty mouths to feed, including the ten men and women who work on the estate and an additional group of workmen who were building a house for the eldest son. The bread is home-made, the meat is home-grown and home-killed, and the smoked fish and meat are home-cured. Except for the coffee, sugar, flour and condiments, everything can be produced on the estate.

During the week I was at Vellir I walked and rode up and down Svarfadardale, which is about twenty miles long, and Skidadale, which is a tributary dale about the same length. I wanted to see the places mentioned in the saga of the men of Svarfadardale.

It is better to ride in the dale than to walk. The streams are sometimes too deep and too swift to cross safely on foot, even when you are wearing rubber boots. But the ponies pick their way through the torrent with careful security, turning the heads upstream so that they will not be carried out of their course by the current. My first experience of riding was unalarming. The younger daughter from Vellir was my guide, a lovely girl, grave, reserved and kindly. She led the way at a gentle walk, increased later to a trot and finally a mild canter. The ponies are surer-footed on the steep slopes of the river bank than I should have been myself. In an emergency I clung to the mane. Once I found myself clinging round the neck, but that was before I had mastered the elementary rule of safety that going uphill the rider should lean forward, and going downhill the weight should be put back. After this fact was learned I was never even near to falling off.

During my week in Svarfadardale the weather grew steadily worse. At first it was bright but cold. Then it grew cloudy, and then the rain began. After that it grew still colder, the rain turned to snow and sleet, and the bitterest wind blew unceasingly. My first impression of the Icelandic countryside was one of complete gloom. The north wind whistled round the house. The grass was green, but in rather a subdued way. In the little churchyard at Vellir there were a few Iceland poppies, and I used to go out and warm my eyes with the red and yellow flowers. Everything else seemed bleak and cold. The river was a cold blue, the mountains colourless, except their tips, which were outlined in hard snow. The mountain sides take their colour from the sky; in dull

weather they are a neutral shade, greenish with huge stretches of yellowish sand, greyish rock and scree. It is only in the sunlight they become lovely, an indescribable blue, and the shadows from the little clouds chase across their slopes.

As I walked alone in the dale I used to contemplate Nature with a certain fear. Iceland seemed to me like a great animal, brooding and but half tamed. She is always hitching herself uneasily into wrinkles, and unless these are regularly smoothed by the hard-working farmer the surface of the fields became covered with little grassy humps. Sometimes there are bigger disturbances — volcanic eruptions or avalanches — so that in a few hours the whole face of the countryside is changed.

I think that my fear of the country was due to the fact that a vulgarian like myself should have been introduced to this undiluted Nature rather more gradually. Never before have I been brought into such close contact with such extensive stretches of Nature. In most of the countries I had travelled in I had seen the wilds in company or from the security of a steamer, a railway train or a motor car. Again, I was always hungry, and I was too shy to go to the farms and ask for coffee. I thought with longing of a walking tour in the Tyrol where one was as likely as not to find a nice little café round the next corner with check table-cloths and cream cakes. And I knew that round the next corner in these dales I should see only the grass slopes and the uncomprehending mountain sides. Even the animals seemed unfriendly, and no wonder in this land fretted by a bitter wind, with the June snow lying unmelted in the hollows. I was knocked down by a bull calf, snapped at by farm dogs, menaced by the sea swallows when I went too near their breeding grounds. Even the sheep were hostile and shook their horns at me until I was driven to creep round the other way.

I remember that on the Friday I was there I walked out



along the dale to the fjord; quite suddenly I came on a new road on which about a dozen men and boys were working. I felt cheered by the proximity of so much humanity and lingered there as long as I could. The road was rather casually constructed with a bed of turfs and a top surface of stones and boulders. Already the waters of the fjord were beating against its side, and I wondered how long it would be before the greedy waves had licked away this new link with civilization.

On my way home that evening I walked with a man in blue dungarees, and we chatted with some difficulty. When we drew near the farm where he lived, he led me out of the way to a sheltered hollow and showed me a little village of toy houses made by children from the farm. The tiny mud houses were roofed with turf and fenced with sheep's horns. There were flowers, daisies and little pink arenaria planted in the gardens, and there was even a cemetery with crosses made from match sticks. I felt unaccountably cheered.

That night the wind howled round the house and the sleet beat on the tiny windows of my bedroom. I had been given a little bedroom to myself, at the expense of poor Ingibjorg, who would normally have slept there. The mystery of how the family, servants and guests were housed in a house no larger than a villa was only incompletely solved for me during the whole of my stay in Iceland. The *baðstofa* houses most of the servants; but where the family pack themselves away was a thing I never understood. My bedroom conformed to what was a common type. It was a little, wood-lined room and its ceiling sloped down almost to the floor so that in my bed under the eaves I was in danger of hitting my head on the roof. The walls and floor were painted, the bedstead was a white wooden one with boards underneath, a straw underlay, a feather mattress and on top a feather duvet which was always slipping off. I slept in two jerseys. There was a tiny washstand, a chair, a quantity

of photographs, Christmas cards, picture post-cards, and some small china objects.

Icelandic interiors are seldom distinguished. The furniture is uninteresting, and there is nothing characteristic except a litter of photographs, the Nottingham lace curtains and a row of plants on the window-sill. But the kitchens of the smaller old turf and timber houses often have beautiful wooden furniture — chests and boxes in white wood or gaily painted. The lack of distinction in the newer furnishing dates from the time when the farmers built their new houses but had not yet emerged far in taste beyond the kitchen or *baðstofa*. So when they had new rooms, parlours and bedrooms to furnish, they bought the first furniture they saw in the town store. Further they were, and still are, circumscribed in their choice and have to depend on the shopkeepers, who have neither the taste nor the capital to stock a large variety of furniture.

It rained or sleeted all that day. I spent it in the pleasant warmth of the best room, where the stove had been lighted. It was *laugardagur* — Saturday which means washing-day — when everything is being cleaned in readiness for Sunday. Floors were being washed, clean curtains put up and the family washing and ironing was being done. As it was so wet the women were in from the fields and all busy about the house. We sat in the dining-room and drank coffee. The *húsfreyja* comes in with a fresh pot of coffee, we fill our cups and the conversation grows animated. They are talking of life after death, and in the warm little room, with the wind howling and the snow falling on the misty mountains, they discuss whether they would be afraid to see their dead friends. The *húsfreyja*, her broad face flushed from the kitchen, sips her coffee and thinks that there is nothing to be frightened of. Ingibjorg, modern and disrespectful, says something in her incisive way, and they all laugh. The Pastor, his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, is

ranging up and down the room as if he was on the deck of a boat, and now and then he pauses to tap the barometer or to peer through the steamy window panes. The workwomen, glad enough to sit passive, stir the dregs in their cups. A boy comes in with a message, his face glowing from the cold and an airman's helmet pulled down over his flaxen hair.

The *húsfreyja* shows me the house. We pass through the kitchen or *eldhús*, where a woman is frying some sort of crumpet or fritter over the peat stove. Then we pass along a turf passage, roofed with wood, into the *baðstofa*. This is new, but has been built on the site of the old one and on the old model. It is a three-roomed compartment. In the left-hand room sit the girls and in the right-hand one the men. In the middle room live an old couple, pensioners, who chaperon and keep the young people in order. The beds are old wooden ones, smoothed and polished with generations of handling. On the beds are brown blankets spun and woven from the wool of the Vellir sheep. When they are not more actively employed the girls sit on their beds and spin and weave, though now the price of labour is so high that it is cheaper to buy materials and clothes ready-made from Scotland and Sweden. I saw the spinning wheels and wool winders. The old couple, almost blind with age, were sitting on their beds in the middle room. The old lady was plaiting wool and crooning to herself. The old man had a white beard and was wearing a blue jersey.

Then I was taken to the *fjós* to see where the cows and horses lived. The *fjós* is made of turfs and has double doors; it seems warm and comfortable with the sweet smell of the cows. Each of the cows has a name — Brynja, Flora, and so on.

That wet day I had no cause to complain of hunger. I had coffee in bed, lunch at ten-thirty, and coffee and cakes at one. Then in the afternoon about five an unexpected and supererogatory meal appeared, excused,

I suppose, because of the cold weather. It was chocolate and *lummur*, the little thick pancakes that I'd seen being fried in the kitchen. I had three distinct varieties of pancakes or doughnuts in Iceland: (a) *pönnukökur*, little thin pancakes which are rolled and eaten with sugar, jam and sometimes whipped cream, (b) *kleinur*, little twisted pieces of dough fried in deep fat and dusted with sugar, and (c) *lummur*, or thick fritters. It was these we ate that afternoon. They had been made as a treat for the men who were working at the building in the rain, but we insiders also benefited. At seven I had little appetite for the dinner of fish and *hangikjöt*, or smoked mutton, which is not very nice, because the rank taste of the decaying meat is distinguishable through the flavour of smoke. There was also *harðfiskur*, the dried cod which is considered a dainty. You smear it with butter and poke a shred in your mouth, then chew, and chew, and chew. After some hard work there is a quite perceptible flavour on your palate, but the experience did not seem to me altogether to justify the labour involved. It is used a lot as a snack, on picnics or on riding tours, and also serves as hors d'oeuvres or a titbit to amuse yourself with while waiting for the next course.

After dinner I helped to take things down from the parlour to the kitchen. In the downstairs dining-room there was an animated scene. The work people were at dinner. Séra Stefán was sitting at the head of the table, his face curiously refined in contrast with the wind-flushed faces of the workers, who were sitting three on either side. They were all in dungarees and coarse home-spun shirts. Elbows on the table, they were intent on shovelling porridge into their mouths. The table was littered with large bones, which were picked so clean that I suspect that it was not only knives and forks that had been used. At the foot of the table was a small boy, an adopted son of the house. Round the room were one or two other men, puffing at their pipes so that the air was

blue with smoke. The old man and woman from the *baðstofa* were there, she with her wrinkled face, glazed blind eyes and two plaits of ungreyed hair. The gramophone was being worked by a tousle-headed young man and was grinding out alternately comic songs and religious music. Then the flaxen-haired boy came in carrying a plate, knife and fork, and a dish of meat and potatoes. He started in solidly, shovelling the butter onto his plate from the common dish. Another boy came in and elbowed his way to a place at the table.

After dinner an entertainment was promised us. The table was pushed back and a space cleared in the middle of the room. Round the walls sat or leant the red-faced men in blue, their hair ruffled and their pipes bubbling. The women from the kitchen, their hair in plaits and red handkerchiefs over their heads, crowded in the doorway. The *húsfreyja* sat proud and placid, and the little children played under the table. Then Ingibjorg came in wearing a blue bathing dress and gave a gymnastic display, contorting her lithe body as a spectacle for twenty pairs of eyes. In such a way would such an audience have watched the saga heroes at their wrestling, and all the time the gramophone played "Nearer my God to Thee".

Then we had another coffee party to celebrate the wet Saturday and the general feeling of festivity. We all sat round the table, Séra Stefán, his wife, the girls, the working-men, the women from the kitchen, and the old couple from the *baðstofa*. The coffee was served from an elegant brass pot, which was too small and dripped on to the table cloth. These Icelanders have a sweet tooth. After the cakes and biscuits they fancy a lump of sugar dipped in coffee, and that evening I saw many surreptitious and rather dirty hands stretch out towards the sugar bowl.

### *Chapter Three*

## AKUREYRI AGAIN AND A JOURNEY TO THE EAST

THE next morning I left Svarfadardale, paying an absurdly small amount for the hospitality. I had a long and rather tiring walk to Fagriskógur where I was to be picked up by a car and taken to Akureyri. It rained a great deal, and I had two heavy rucksacks to carry. I had a rest from my burdens when a boy on a horse stopped and offered to carry them as far as he was going. He made conversation so nicely to me. After Stærriárskógur the track grew wilder and less clearly defined, and wandered among bleak hills, whose sides were covered with scree. The mists came lower so that the tips of even the lowest hills were shrouded. Horned sheep threatened me from across bogs and I thought that I was on the wrong road. There was no one to ask. I wished for Sigurd's gift of tongues so that I could ask the way of a curlew. Then the old track vanished altogether, and I was in despair. But it was not for long, for I soon saw in the distance a row of stakes that indicated a new road. After that it was more cheerful. I balanced precariously on a plank over a ravine and soon arrived at a fine new house where I was to meet the car. It was the home of one of Iceland's famous poets,<sup>19</sup> but I did not meet any of the family as they were all out on some Sunday jaunt. A maid received me kindly, helped me off with my muddy boots, and I was grateful to sit in a little room, sipping coffee and to hear the wind blowing outside and to see the new fallen snow on the top of the mountain just

<sup>19</sup> Davíð Stefánsson frá Fagraskógi (1895-1964), poet, playwright and novelist.

outside the window. I smoked my last cigarette and felt at peace.

All the clocks in Iceland are wrong. The maid told me that the car would arrive at ten, by their clock, which was two and a half hours fast. I learnt later that there were two times — "telephone time" which is the right one, and "country time" which is settled by the individual farmer. It's a sort of daylight saving and often a device of the farmers to get more work out of his people. I heard that at one farm the clock had been so far advanced that the sun did not rise till afternoon.

Iceland is full of the most delightful contrasts. While I sat waiting for the car, I brooded over the grimness of this country and its boundless solitudes, and the rain and hail fell, mingled with snow. Then the car came and it was full of the most beautiful young men, the driver, in particular, had exquisite eyelashes. The young men (three Icelanders and a Faroese) were all slightly tipsy and in the highest spirits, sipping whisky out of a little bottle, offering me cigarettes and talking what they called English. They insisted on my getting out of the car in the pouring rain and taking a photograph of them as they leant in carefully negligent attitudes against the side. They sang what they assured me were native melodies though one of them was curiously like "Ramona", and we bumped and skidded across the damp plain while the mountains frowned on us with disapproval.

Then I was back at the Hotel Godafoss with running water and electric light and a prospect of a hot bath in the morning.

The next fortnight I idled in Akureyri. The hotel was so comfortable, the streets and shops seemed so gay after the bleak hill-sides. Summer came, and in a night the country took on a new aspect. The fine grass, which is so sweet to taste that I was always nibbling it like a sheep, seemed to spring as you watched it. Vadlaheidi, across the fjord, had a new patch of green each day, where

the grass and moss were clothing the bare rock. The streaks of white, hanging on its terraced side like threads of cotton seemed to thicken, as the snow melted and swelled the little waterfalls. The birches in the public gardens scented the genial air. I used to walk along the hill behind the town every evening till I came suddenly to a view of the fjord. There it lay, gently rippling in the breeze, while at the head the snow mountains reflected the sunset pinks. Here, up on the hillside, is the little cemetery of Akureyri, a desolate place of uncut grass, where the dead sleep in peace among the wistful wild-flowers.

They began to cut the hay and the hillsides were dotted with little patches of vivid green, which marked the day's work and the new mown field. Girls, their heads bound in coloured handkerchiefs, raked the new cut hay, moving with the rhythm and precision of a country dance. The scent of the hay drowned the fragrance of the birches. In the gardens along Hafnarstræti, the flowers bloomed.

There were so many things to watch — the boys leading in the hay, which was slung in two huge bundles, one on each side of a pony's back, the eider duck swimming with their young families in the fjord and seemingly confusing the babies so that one mother went home with the other's children, the fishermen pulling in the nets, while a group of delighted children pretended to help and actually hindered by throwing all the big fish back into the fjord and saving the tinies that should have been put back to grow up.

One day I stumbled on the *fjárrjett* (sheepfold), used when the sheep are driven down from the mountains for the shearing. There is a communal pen in a hollow about a mile from the town near the river Glerá. I was sitting there one morning in the sun, when I realised that there was a great deal of activity in this usually quiet place. People were gathering from all directions, from the hillside farms, but mostly from Akureyri. They were coming by foot, on horseback, on bicycles, by car,



by taxi. Then some of the horsemen rode off up the mountain-side. In half an hour or so a thin trail of sheep appeared. Soon the mountain-side was alive with sheep and the air full of their distressed bleatings. After a great deal of shouting and of barking from the dogs, the sheep were safely driven down and penned in the big central pen. Here the owners were walking up and down, peering at the sheep, which kept up a constant hum of protest at having been wrenched from the sweet mountain grass. I was reminded of one of those awful drawing-room games where you have to find someone with a label corresponding to your own, so you walk round peering blindly, intent on labels. When the owner recognised one of his own sheep, he carried it under his arm, if it was a lamb, or put it between his legs if it was a ewe or a young ram. Then he forced it into one of the smaller private pens which radiate off from the central one. Here the shearing took place. He, or she (for quite young girls were doing it) inserted the shears (usually rusty old scissors) and made a little cut at the top. Then the wool was gently persuaded or peeled off, falling in an entire mat, rather like the skin from a banana, while the clean naked sheep emerged, like the freshly peeled fruit. The belly was then carefully clipped and, if necessary, the wool cut from the legs. Everyone was enjoying it, except the sheep. The children played around and ate cake from the paper bags of the Co-operative. Dogs barked and were tiresomely officious. A group of ponies grazed nearby.

Among the spectators from Akureyri was a Salvation Army official whom I had met before in the boat. The Army till a year or two ago was recruited and organised from Denmark. But the Danes are not popular in Iceland, and now the officers are from England or Scotland. I met several of these exiles. They have a thankless piece of work before them if they hope to convert the Icelanders to the emotionalism of the Army. The girl I met watching

the sheep was a Scot and had been for some time in the Faroe Islands. She preferred the Faroese, finding them warmer-hearted than the Icelanders. She admitted that the manners of the Icclander were charming, but thought that beneath he was cold and critical. Incidentally she was engaged to one, so had every opportunity of knowing. But I suspect that as an official with the Salvation Army she would find the critical side of the Icelanders rather prominent, for all those I talked to considered the Army rather absurd. And so it seems in a country where there is little vice and little real destitution.

Quite innocently I made a gaffe with the Captain. She talked of a Chinese priest who had just come to Akureyri, who could speak Norwegian and Icelandic and who had been a missionary in five countries. So, pleased with the bizarritv, I said: "How interesting. He's come to convert the Icelanders to Confucianism." Then I realized he was an official in the Salvation Army.<sup>20</sup>

There are two picture theatres in Akureyri, but only one was open that summer. I saw some nice old-fashioned silent films, German and American, and was glad there were no talkies.

I went to a play one night. The company, who had produced the play in Reykjavik and had, I suppose, an amateur standing, were staying at the Godafoss, and it was interesting to watch the leading ladies charming the local shop-owners with their airs and graces. The play, "Hallsteinn and Dora", is by Einar Kvaran, one of the most distinguished prose writers alive in Iceland.<sup>21</sup> He has written charming stories but his later work has been rather spoilt by his habit of preaching Spiritualism. This play deals with that subject and is written mainly with the last act in view, an after-death scene. Hallstein, the hero, is an unpleasant character, selfish

<sup>20</sup> The "Chinese" priest could only have been the Icclander Ólafur Ólafsson who was a missionary in China for 14 years.

<sup>21</sup> Einar Kvaran (1859-1938).

and miserly. In the first act he and Dora get engaged. In the second they have a baby, which she produces in an incredibly short time while she is absent from the stage and he is discussing a new marriage with a rich widow. Then he insists on carrying his wife, in her childbed, out into the *baðstofa*, where she can be observed by the audience as she dies. In the third act he is about to hit the child, who is now a boy, but Dora appears in a white nightdress and the shock is so great that he dies. In the last act they are in *Ewigkeit*, which he mistakes for Thingvellir. He is in his ordinary suit, she in the white nightdress. They talk a good deal, and he becomes convinced that he is dead when a little curtain slides up at the back to show the hosts of the dead, all in white nightdresses, looking like a meeting of Romans in togas or an over-crowded Turkish bath. Finally she shows him that her love can outlast death, and the little curtain at the back slides up to reveal pink mountains with some palm trees, and they go off "to her mountain".

Outside the setting sun was painting a fantastic scene, much more unreal than that of the play.

I hired a bicycle or "wheel-horse" and tried to ride up and down the fjord. It was hard work and I should not recommend the bicycle as a means of transport. The roads are made of shingle roughly shovelled on to a bed of peat and rocks. Often the surface is less refined than shingle and shows large boulders. The surface is not rolled. That is left to the wheels of the passing cars so that the bicyclist is forced to keep in one or other of the wheel tracks of the cars. My hired bicycle was rather low so that the pedals were constantly catching in the sides of the ruts. I must have presented a pleasing picture to the Akureyrians as I laboured along in breeches with a large rucksack on my back containing books, a pump, and buns from the Co-op.

Still I got to the home of Gudmund the Powerful at Modruvellir, where he kept a thousand cows and a

thousand sheep on what appeared to me insufficient grazing ground.<sup>22</sup> There also, up the valley, I reached the little church of Saurbær,<sup>23</sup> one of the few turf and timber churches left in Iceland. These old churches have been replaced by gay structures of wood or corrugated iron like the fine building at Grund which I passed on my way up the dale. I went also to the other Modruvellir down the fjord, where there was once an Augustinian monastery.<sup>24</sup>

After some days in Akureyri I began to feel that I could bear the great open spaces again, so I made plans for a tour to the east coast. My plans got as far as asking the price of a guide and horses, and finding it beyond my resources. The guide and the minimum possible of five horses would have cost about two pounds a day. So I decided to go by car as far as I could, i.e. to Myvatn, and then to hire a horse and guide from farm to farm, trusting as I neared the east coast to strike a motor road and then to walk or get lifts in cars. I also realised that it would be much cheaper to take a boat back from the east coast to Akureyri.

So on the twentieth of July I started in a car for Myvatn. There were the usual Icelandic false alarms about starting. Never during my stay did I find an expedition that started at the scheduled hour. This time it was to be at 6 a.m., so I packed in a panic. Then a message came to the hotel that it was to be seven. Then the time was altered to eight. So when we actually did start at 9.30 I had been up and waiting a good time. I had reduced my luggage to as little as possible and had only a rucksack and a *hnakktaska* or neat little canvas saddle-bag. I wore breeches and rubber boots, which I found essential, though uncomfortable, as we often had to

<sup>22</sup> *Sorla páttir* is more modest in its claims for Guðmundr, to whom it assigns "hundrað hjóna ok hundrað kúa".

<sup>23</sup> Saurbær: this church was built by Séra Einar Thorlacius in 1858.

<sup>24</sup> The Augustinian monastery at Möðruvellir in Hörgárdalur was founded in 1296.

ride through rivers which came half way up my legs. Occasionally the water came higher and then I had the uncomfortable experience of riding with my boots full of water. I remember once emptying a quart out to the astonishment and amusement of my guide. I had no oilskins as I decided that they were too heavy to carry round and I trusted to an old Burberry for protection against the rain. The party in the car was a gay one and in holiday mood. It consisted of a young photographer who was combining business with pleasure. He had a very pretty and a very new wife with him. There was also a charming young man from the bicycle shop, whom I knew already as he had mended several punctures on my wheel-horse. Then there was his brother who owned and drove the car. They were off for a fishing expedition in the river Laxá and so also combining business with pleasure.

The journey was taken in holiday spirit. We made little detours to look at the view, to take photographs and to call on friends, as we did at Laugar in Ljosavatnsskard, where there is a fine school with a nice hot swimming bath. We ate sweets, smoked and had to unpack ourselves and the luggage while the car went through Ljosavatn, which had washed away the road so that cars are up to the axle in the lake. The ride was lovely, beginning with a long steep climb along the side of Eyjafjord from where we had a bird's eye view of Akureyri. Then we descended to Háls, which stands at the crossing of Ljosavatnsskard and Fnjoskadale. Here the steep banks of the ravine are covered with birch trees. Then we went along to Ljosavatn where, as I said before, we had to wait while the car swam the lake. Then a few miles on we reached the famous waterfall, Godafoss, had a lunch of milk, *skyr*, and cold meats, and walked along to admire the fall. It is a nice one, not nearly as terrifying as some I have seen. It doesn't fall from a great height but is very broad.

Then the road got worse and we crawled along cart-tracks, more rut than track, through the bleakest and dreariest country — lava with faint-hearted grass and flowers, and occasionally portentous rocks, looking like large solitary women brooding over their sorrows.

We jolted along what was less than a track and at last saw an expanse of grey-blue water with islands and fantastic black rocks. It was Myvatn. We lost it again, crossed Laxá where a colony of telephone workers were living in white tents, and arrived at Skutustadir at the head of the lake.

Myvatn, which means Mosquito Water, is one of the famous beauty spots in Iceland. It is certainly remarkable, lying as it does in a desert of lava. In the sunlight the colours must be marvellous, and even when I was there and the clouds were louring there was a sort of inky intensity about the land and water that was most impressive. The detail of this sinister landscape is surprisingly pretty. Here, as at Thingvellir, you find clefts in the lava full of exquisite flowers and grasses.

My heart sank a little as I stood there and looked down the lake. A bitter wind was blowing, which in one way was a blessing because it kept the mosquitoes away. A kind lady in Akureyri had lent me a green mosquito veil, but I didn't need to wear it more than once, and then only momentarily as we waited for the car to cross Ljosavatn. That was when I saw the sun for the last time for several days.

The farmhouse of Skutustadir was one of the old wooden ones and a curious old man with long hair was standing in the doorway. There was a church and the priest's house, which was a new and over-respectable structure. I stood and hesitated while the luggage was being unpacked from the car. I paid the driver, the car crawled off, and I felt that my last link with the west was gone. Then the photographer and his wife asked for coffee at the farm and I joined them. The hot drink gave me

courage and, in spite of the photographer who pressed a wretched motor-boat on me, I said firmly to the lady of the house that I wanted a horse.<sup>25</sup> I added that it must be a very "quiet" one. I felt that the critical moment had come and if I did not mount a horse that evening I should never get my tour done. The lady of the house seemed to think that it was quite natural to want a horse, and with a good deal of miming (we both straddled on the chairs to show what sort of saddle I wanted, for at the time I was uncertain of the difference between *söðull* and *hnakkur*) we settled the matter between us.<sup>26</sup> Then she took me to see the church, which is gaily painted and has a chancel arch which simulates a rainbow — a pretty idea, I thought, in a country where the continuous rain might well drive one to despair.

Then my horse came, a "quiet" one, and mounting rather timidly I was off with the old man, whose hair streamed behind him like a comet's tail.

I enjoyed that reckless ride in the cold grey evening. The rocks were fantastic, the lava forming all sorts of ridiculous shapes. The distant mountains stood grimly by, the lake lay steely-grey to our left, and occasionally from the glassy surface a strange island reared itself, the crater of some small extinct volcano on the lake-bed. To our left was one mountain of black stuff that made me feel I was at home among the slagheaps of the Midland coal-fields. There were a great many funny little volcanic craters, like toy volcanoes.

The ends of the lake, Skutustadir and Reykjahlid, where I was to spend the night, were less grim. The lava is not so evident, and the hills and fields slope gently down to the water, as to any self-respecting lake.

At Reykjahlid I paid the old man the eight *krónur* that he asked. He said he had contemplated asking ten,

<sup>25</sup> There were two farms at Skútustaðir at this time. The lady of the house referred to was probably Árnína Soffía Jónsdóttir, the wife of the farmer Kristján Helgason.

<sup>26</sup> *Söðull* is a lady's side-saddle.

but that we had come so quickly that he would let me off the extra two. I thought that the estimate of four hours that they had suggested for the ride was a little excessive, as we had taken only two.

At Reykjahlid the farm-house is positively manorial.<sup>27</sup> They have thirty people working and living there. There are a father and mother and seven children, their wives, husbands and offspring and the hired people. The place is a regular halt on the west-east route and they seem to put up any number of guests at any time of the day or night. When I arrived without warning at ten o'clock on that summer evening I was given a delicious supper of flat bread, which is nice, brown and soft and cooked on a griddle, trout from the lake with melted butter, milk, rhubarb, porridge and cream. It was all very welcome after my cold ride. The food and general arrangements of the house are admirable.

Next morning I wandered about and looked at the church, which stands on a little island in the lava. When the red-hot lava swept down and devastated the region, the stream forked as it approached the church and left it untouched though the rest of the district was submerged.<sup>28</sup> While I poked around, the people of the house made arrangements for me and rang up my next stopping place, Grimsstadir. I was to be met at the river Jokulsá, ferried across and was to take another horse on the far side. I was accompanied by a *fylgðarkona*, a woman guide, a grave, spectacled daughter of the house who was to accompany me on the five-hour ride through one of the most desolate districts in Iceland, a lava waste, where we were to see no sign of life for the whole five hours, unless the sheep from Grimsstadir could be counted as such.

<sup>27</sup> There were no less than four farmers in Reykjahlíð, so that it is impossible to say for certain to whom Miss Selby applied for lodging.

<sup>28</sup> This eruption, known as Mývatnseldar (1724-29), destroyed the farm at Reykjahlíð but spared the church. An account of the eruption was written by the priest Jón Sæmundsson and printed in Copenhagen in 1726.



This part of Iceland borders the great desert of Odáðahraun ("the lava of ill-deeds"). It stretches inland to the mountains Herdubreid and Askja and to the great glacier, Vatnajökul, which comes down almost sheer to the south coast. It is a place of ill association for outlaws used to take refuge there. Here also the trolls and creatures of ill-omen were supposed to live and breed. And here are volcanoes which are not yet extinct and craters with the potentialities of ruin. It is indeed a grim land.

I mounted my horse with care for I was suffering from the reckless riding of the night before, and we set out towards the peculiar red hills I had seen in the east and which I had thought were flooded with sunshine, while all the rest of the countryside was clouded. But as we drew near I found that it was their natural colour; they were the Námafjall (the mountain of the mines), so called because they are potential sulphur and brimstone mines. Smoke curls constantly from the red and yellow ground. We soon passed the mines and came into a belt of vegetation — low scrub, bilberries and the like. Then followed devastating stretches of lava and black soil, with only rare patches of coarse green grass. It seemed as if it would never end; the telegraph posts marched on, a slender army of civilization, and our horses' hoofs continued to beat up the black dust. The way was marked by cairns, one every hundred yards or so. I was glad of them, for when we had been riding for a few hours my guide cheerfully told me that she had never been to Jokulsá before, and I did not like the picture of two horse-women lost in the wastes of the great desert. The last hour seemed a long one and the distant mountains drew no nearer. I noticed one peculiarity, that the soil was always damp, through an inch or two of black dust. I believe that this is due to the melting snow from the distant mountains. Then, quite suddenly, we saw a white hut and came to the bank of the river which washes

its swift way through low sides of black soil. It is a desolate place with the stones bleaching on its dark banks like the skulls of famine-stricken sheep.

The *bóndi* from Grímsstaðir was waiting with the ferry boat and on the other side of the river two horses were grazing. I said good-bye to my guide and gave her a piece of chocolate to cheer her on her solitary ride home. We rowed across the swift river and pulled the boat up above the high-water mark. I climbed painfully onto a grey, and it dashed away as if it was Tom Mix's horse Tony. I clung on desperately for the four kilometres from the river and prayed that I should not fall off. Miraculously I didn't, despite the rucksack swaying dangerously behind me.

Then came one of the most acceptable coffees of my life in the nice upstairs front room of Grímsstaðir. The family were very friendly and gathered in the parlour to talk to me.<sup>29</sup> There were two nice boys, a large kind mother and a lovely little blonde girl from Akureyri who was spending her holidays there. She was a brilliant teacher of her own language and I was glad to practise my Icelandic. I found everywhere in Iceland that I could learn better from children than grown-ups; they talked so distinctly and were so sympathetic and amused. I had a pot of very strong tea with my supper — a kind thought on the part of the *bóndi*'s wife who knew that the English drank tea. After supper I went on a walk across the blank country, which is growing with grass and two kinds of willow scrub, one green and one silvery leaved. I was guided on my walk by a black and white dog and the smallest black and white goat that I had ever seen; it was two weeks old and accompanied me with the same fidelity as the dog. It was nice to feel that in these wastes there were two creatures that could understand me when I spoke. Goats, by the way, are common in

<sup>29</sup> There were three farmers at this time at Grímsstaðir. Probably the family referred to was that of Ingólfur Kristjánsson and Katrín Magnúsdóttir.

this part of Iceland though they are not generally seen elsewhere.

I discovered that Grimsstadir is not as isolated as I thought. It has a motor road leading to Axarfjord, where there is a trading station. The road is imperceptible, and the telegraph lines stretch grimly on to the east, pointing the way I had to go.

Next morning I sat looking out of my window and waiting to start. The sky was still dull, and under the louring clouds lay a featureless landscape, flat for miles, with the distant mountains an inky blue. The most obvious vegetation is the cotton grass which brightens the dull green with its white tufts. I was waiting for a man who was going to Modrudale, and taking what I understood, with my imperfect Icelandic, to be a parcel. I found that I was getting used to being handed on from farm to farm and felt quite passive, as if I was a parcel myself.

The "parcel" arrived about one and proved to be a train of a dozen pack-ponies and two riding ponies, one of which was to be mine. The pack-ponies were carrying unwieldy loads — two sacks of flour, with a few supernumerary bags, three large wooden boxes, some scythe handles and hay rakes, and an agricultural machine of some sort. My own luggage was tied on top of one of the burdens and only fell off once, when I unpicked my camera from it and trusted that my toothbrush wouldn't drop out. We started soon after one, and I was rather dashed, after a few hours riding, when a young man told me that we shouldn't be at Modrudale till ten that evening. However, it turned out that he was speaking in terms of "country time", which was two or three hours ahead of the "telephone time".

It was very cold and the sand was blowing thickly in some places. The poor ponies carrying the heaviest loads lay down every few minutes and tried to rub the wooden boxes off their backs. The string with which the

various objects were tied on came undone, and the ponies had to be calmed from their fright. The young man treated them with patience and consideration and did not allow himself to be annoyed, even when his own horse galloped off while he was attending to one of the pack-animals and he had to chase after it on foot and coax it back.

We made our way across the desert, yellow sand and black sand, patches of bent grass and dried-out river beds, sometimes full of snow-water. The farther mountains were shrouded, the nearer ones black, purple and sometimes red, but always ominous. The monotony seemed intolerable. Then we climbed a little col and came down to another expanse of desert with the blue mountains still far off. There was a flicker of sunshine and the black flats shimmered. Then more desert, and then the green began, *mýri* or swamp grass, and a *bær* in the valley — Vididale.<sup>30</sup> We stopped and my young man untied some of the bundles and retied them. Some children came out with wool, and a sad-faced young woman came quietly out and talked in an unenthusiastic way. We were soon off again through the quickly diminishing green into the desert. We climbed another col, with some jagged rocks this time to break the monotony, and came down a curious little pass to a river and the plain. More desert, more *mýri*, then in the distance an object which proved to be Modrudale. We had ridden thirty-five kilometres and taken seven hours.

There I found a party of two English ladies and two Americans, who were riding with twenty horses and four guides. The English ladies, characteristically enough, had gone to bed, the Americans, equally characteristically, were sitting up to inspect the English woman, whose coming had been flashed ahead over the telephone wires. Our ways crossed for that night only, as they

<sup>30</sup> Viðidalur was then farmed by Þorsteinn Jóhannes Sigurðsson and Guðrún Sigurbjörnsdóttir.

were returning to Akureyri and I was going east. But later we happened on each other a good deal, in several unexpected places. I was very grateful for their existence, partly because in many of the farms where I stayed the caravan provided a topic of conversation and partly because the contrast in our way of travelling impressed the farmers with the others' riches as opposed to my poverty, and as a result they were moderate in their charges to me.

The next day was uncompromisingly wet, not with mere *þoka* or mist of which I had already seen so much, but with a real downpour. The Anglo-American caravan started at ten, the ladies all rather green and dispirited, the guides worried because three of their ponies were missing and one had lamed itself on some barbed wire. The *bóndi* suggested I should wait until next day, and as I was incompletely equipped for heavy rain, I was glad to accept his invitation. So we watched the ladies off and turned back into the house to a sort of ghost coffee-party — ten cups, saucers, plates, a large coffee-pot and two huge cream cakes, all laid for the departed ladies and their guides. The *bóndi* and I sat and nibbled the fringes of this banquet.

Rain all day. The missing ponies are not found. A guide has been left behind to look for them, and he drops into the best room and drinks an occasional cup of coffee. The married daughter sits and talks to me, and I am quickly improving my Icelandic. It's a self-contained group at Modrudale, father, mother, three sons, two daughters, the husband of one of them, and the ensuing children.<sup>31</sup> There are no workmen or workwomen, and they live in this isolation with their eight cows, forty horses and three or four hundred sheep. I suppose they are quite wealthy; they make a little money from the visitors who stop the night, but it cannot be much as they charge so little.

<sup>31</sup> According to the 1930 census the farmer at Möðrudalur was Jón Aðalsteinn Stefánsson and his wife Þórunn Vilhjálmsdóttir.

It is a long day on that lonely farm, and I sit and read the hymn book and learn by heart the Icelandic version of "Onward, Christian soldiers". The rain drips steadily on the zinc roof. The windows of the *stofa* are steamed over. Then I moved to the *frammistofa*, my bedroom. It's cold and the door doesn't shut properly. They've been washing the floors and there is no carpet. A bowl of cold water on the table awaits my toilet. Outside the brown-green of the *tún* stretches down to a little river. Beyond that is the lava plain, ringed round by those sinister mountains. I have read the hymn book. I have read my Icelandic grammar, and now I go to bed to learn the adjective by heart and hope I sleep. The lost horses have not been found.

The next day was even wetter, and the *þoka* thicker. I decided to stay. The day drifted by. I read a novel by Hulda,<sup>32</sup> whose characters always die. I re-read the hymn-book, and my grammar. I ate, went for a walk in the rain, ate again, read, and was thinking of going to bed, when I saw a little boy driving the cows home. So I went and practised my Icelandic grammar on him in the cowshed, which was by far the driest and warmest place, as my bedroom roof had now begun to leak. Then I walked down with my niece Johanna, the married daughter, and a small girl to milk the goats. In the *tún* they were cutting the grass. Whilst we were busy with the goats, the little girl, who was standing on the roof of the *fjós*, called out that horses were coming, and we saw an army galloping towards us. We saw two men riding up and decided it was guests. We all got excited and carried the milk back to the farm, where the sons of the house, with admirable self-control, were continuing their mowing. But they too were tempted to come, and there was great excitement when the army of ponies rode up and were safely corralled in the *rétt*.

<sup>32</sup> Hulda was the pseudonym of Unnur Benediktsdóttir Bjarklind (1881-1946).

Then the two drovers got off their horses and with the utmost politeness said good-evening to everyone, shaking hands all round and murmuring their names. Then there was a conversation about the ultimate destination of the ponies, which were being driven east over Jokulsá to be sold. After that we had coffee in the best room, my host, the two men and I, and we talked personalities mostly — the Anglo-American caravan, me, and other visitors. The men, like most Icelandic men, have low, husky voices. Some of the women have soft voices too, but some have peculiarly strident ones. But it's a lesson in good manners to hear these country folk say "*Gerið svo vel*" as they hand you the sugar and to see the quiet way in which they rise at the end of the meal and shake hands with the host, saying "Thank you for the meal".

Next day was less wet, though one could hardly count it fine. Still we decided it was good enough to start in; so we set off at once. With me was a daughter of the house and a tiny girl who is some sort of adoptee, a pack-pony, and the two horse-drovers and their thirty or forty untamed animals. We were making for Eiríksstadir, a farm on the river Jokulsá. The girls intended to combine the business of guiding me with the pleasure of staying there a few days, as the *bóndi* at Eiríksstadir was an uncle or related in some way to the Modrudalers. It was a nice ride, diversified by wild-west incidents when the ponies strayed from the track. The desert was slightly more varied, at least there were ups and downs and the sun occasionally shone. We climbed a pass and came down to a green dale with a lake and swans flying over it. At the end of the lake there was a farm where we had coffee.<sup>33</sup> I was glad to see it as it was the first of the tiny turf houses I had been inside. It was like going into a fortress through the elaborate turf passages.

<sup>33</sup> This farm must have been Sænautasel, a small farm which was abandoned in 1942. The farmer was Guðmundur Guðmundsson and the housekeeper Halldóra Eiríksdóttir.

Then we came into the kitchen which had been beautifully scrubbed for Saturday — it was *laugardagur*. There was a stove with peat and *tað*, a table, a quantity of chests and boxes of white wood, from which cakes and biscuits were produced. There was also a pretty painted chest of drawers, a bride's chest I assumed. A ladder staircase led to the bedroom and there was one window which looked out at the level of the ground, because the house is built below ground level. We sat in the neat sparse kitchen while the Modrudale daughter fiddled with a pan of water at the stove, rather vaguely making coffee. The *húsfreyja* got out the best cups, dusted them, and wiped them with a drop of water from the coffee pan. The biscuits and sponge-cakes were produced and we ate and drank, at first shyly, and talked in subdued whispers. But as the coffee got into our systems, we became gayer, and the hostess and her guests were soon laughing and chattering quite nicely. I've noticed that the people on the isolated farms don't know what to do in the first minutes of meeting a visitor. They are ill at ease; it's almost as though they resent the violation of their solitude, but quite soon — and especially if they sit at coffee — they become pleased at the human contact and seem sorry to be left alone.

This woman lived alone with her husband and her children. The eldest child was a boy of about fifteen. Her husband was away, taking his wool to the nearest Co-operative store, a two-day's journey off in Vopnafjörð. She was with child. When her time came the midwife would ride to tend her, and perhaps one of the women from Modrudale or Eiríksstaðir would cross the twenty kilometres of desert that separates the farms and stay for a few days to look after the children. When anyone in these isolated farms is very ill, they are taken into hospital on a sort of bier which is fastened between two horses, and so for perhaps two days they are jolted over the mountains and across the rivers.



We rode away in the chill of the evening. Dark clouds came up and we lost the track. We passed another tiny farm,<sup>34</sup> lying at the side of a little lake in a little green dale. We asked the way, found the track, lost it again. Then we scrambled round the side of Eiríksstaðir Hnefill, a little knobbly mountain, and on and on, till we came out suddenly on a steep, green hillside, with a green hill opposite, which — though I was not aware of it at first — was on the other side of Jokulsá. The track turned down and far below us we saw the tiny church of Eiríksstaðir.

The herd of horses hurried down the steep track, scrambling, slipping, biting each other in the excitement of realising that they were getting near their night's rest. We followed more sedately on our tired horses and waited outside the *tún*, while warning was given of our arrival. There was a faint drizzle, and as I stood looking round everything seemed bright green after the dreary lava wastes — the cut hay on the *tún*, the turf walls, the turf roof of the out-houses, and the hillside across the river.

We arrived about ten, but it was after one when we got to bed, having eaten two meals — the inevitable coffee which is served as a sort of cocktail and then a supper of cold meats and *skyr*. It was the first dark evening of the summer; the hill across the river keeps the light away and there was a grey sky. We ate our meals in the twilight dusk of the front room, so that it was by faith that one speared a piece of smoked meat or made advances to the butter, and one's conversation was addressed to a grey, faceless shadow across the table.

The *bóndi* at Eiríksstaðir was charming, spectacled and grey-haired. He plays the organ. Most of the farms in Iceland have an American organ. This instrument has ousted the old-time fiddle or zither. He was like Tom Pinch, vague, sweet-natured and musical, and had the sprouting hair that one sees in Cruikshank's

<sup>34</sup> Veturhús which was abandoned in 1941.

interpretation of that character.<sup>35</sup> I had a charming picture of him in the morning, sitting in a sort of storeroom where the harmonium was housed with tools and sheeps' fleeces littering the bare boards. He was playing the organ and surrounded by a group of flaxen-haired children, his own little short-sighted son at his side peering at the music. They were singing national melodies in the shrill tuneless way that is common to the children of all nations.

Next day was Sunday and my host pressed me to stay and rest. I was not very keen to do this because I saw that I would have to hurry if, as I intended, I was to cross the river to Hrafnkelsdale, and then get to Seydisfjord in time to catch the boat back to Akureyri. But partly because I realised that none of them wanted to turn out on Sunday to guide me down the dale, partly because they were so nice that I was glad to spend a day with them, I accepted the invitation. Mother was away, she had taken one of the little girls to Seydisfjord to get spectacles, and the house was being run by two nieces, aged fourteen and sixteen. They were not very competent about the house, so coffee did not come to my bedside till eleven o'clock. Then I dressed and went out, and found a very Sunday group of men lazing out in the sun before the house. There was no service in the little church that day. The country pastors have often four or five churches in their care, so that each church gets a service only once a month or so.

I had hoped to cross Jokulsá at Eiríksstaðir and so reach Hrafnkelsdale, which lies a little further up on the other side. I found that the "bridge" there was merely a suspended basket running on wires across the swift, deep river. I wished to cross in this but my host said that it was quite impossible and very dangerous for a

<sup>35</sup> There were two farmers at Eiríksstaðir. The one referred to here was Jón Gunnlaugsson Snædal and his wife was Stefánfa Katrín Karlsdóttir. I have been unable to find a Cruikshank drawing of Tom Pinch. Perhaps the illustration of *Martin Chuzzlewit* by Phiz was meant.

woman, and the basket was only for inanimate objects and the most level-headed men. As he refused to operate it and as it was impossible to work it by myself, I was forced to give up the idea of seeing Hrafnkelsdale. So after lunch I took a walk up the dale to see, like Moses from Pisgah, my promised dale afar off. It was very hot near the river and the flies were troublesome, so I climbed the mountain and had a bird's eye view of my dale. I got back to Eiriksstadir about seven. The farm was deserted, the horses and their drovers had gone, and with them most of the family. The children and the girls were busy at the back of the house. I sat on the front step and felt as if it was a Sunday evening of my childhood, when the family had all gone to church and left me behind to take care of the house. It was very quiet in the dale. About nine the first of the wanderers returned, and at ten we sat down to supper.

Monday was wet. All night the rain had been beating on the roof, and there was a rhythmical tapping in the corner of my room, where the rain was steadily dropping into my wash basin. The roofs of all these farms were leaking just now, because they had just had a dry spell and the wood had shrunk. With continued rain the wood would swell, and the leaking season pass. I was glad to think so, for the sake of those poor people in the winter rains and snows.

The family was disorganised. Mother and a crowd of children had come back late at night while I was asleep, and still later a man arrived with parcels from the east. So morning coffee came at twelve, and it was after two when we sat down to lunch. It was decided that I should go on to a farm down the dale, where there was a proper bridge and spend the night there.<sup>36</sup>

I was accompanied by the Modrudale girls and a bright

<sup>36</sup> Before the construction of the bridge at Fossvellir which was capable of taking a motor car, there was a rather frail bridge at Hákonarstaðir where the old bridle-path crossed Jökulsá.

little boy who had been staying at Eiríksstaðir and was returning, as far as I could understand, to Seyðisfjörð. He was very small and looked about eight. He had a genius both for understanding my imperfect Icelandic and making me understand his, so the adults in the house used to turn to him to interpret their conversation. It was partly that he spoke slowly and distinctly, and partly that he had a great gift for synonyms and definitions. He was also as kind as he was clever and insisted on lending me his lovely little horse, Baldur, which was one of the smoothest moving horses I rode. Our little party started about four and he guided us very competently down the dale, though the mist was so thick that we could hardly see the track. We stopped once for coffee, as the little boy insisted on calling on some friends. It was almost ten when we reached Hákonarstaðir,<sup>37</sup> and there the children drank more coffee, though I could see that the eldest girl was worrying at the lateness of the hour and the fact that they all had a long way to go. But my boy-friend insisted in a lordly way on the coffee and on inspecting the cattle-sheds. Then they rode off through the mist, this party of children hardly out of the nursery, and I was left alone at Hákonarstaðir.

It was a grim place, the only really unpleasant house that I stayed in when I was in Iceland. To begin with, I was rather shaken by meeting a bull, which was straying loose round the house, and as I had been unnerved by a previous encounter with a bull calf, I didn't feel too friendly towards it. But an old man with a pitchfork drove it in. Then the housewife was discontented, grumbling to me about the desolation of the district and how she missed the gaiety of Vopnafjörð. The husband was sinister, the old farm-hand an unprepossessing figure with a week-old beard and bleary eyes. There were three pasty little boys who played rude games outside my

<sup>37</sup> According to the 1930 census, Hákonarstaðir was farmed by Sigvaldi Jónsson and his wife Jónína Rustikusdóttir.

window. The house was dirty, the floor black, the walls of my room painted with age-old yellow paint, which was peeling with leprous patches. Then it thundered and lightened and the rain came down in torrents.

Next day the aspect was hardly less sinister, and there was trouble about the horses which couldn't be found. I sat for three hours in the unclean parlour looking out at the dark hill which seemed too near and which shut out the light from the valley. Indeed, this particular bit of Jokuldale is shut in on all sides by high green hills, and there is no distant prospect of the mountains as in so many Icelandic valleys. As I sat there and looked out through the dirty Nottingham lace curtains, I felt as if I were in a trap and should never get out of Jokuldale, and still less to Hallormsstad, Seydisfjord, Akureyri, Reykjavik, Leith and London.

The horses were found at last and we were ready to leave. Then the postman came on his fortnightly call — he leaves the letters as he goes up the dale, and calls for the replies as he comes back. That meant another hour was spent in conversation.

My guide was rather disconcerting as he had one arm in a sling, but he proved to be a charming young man, friendly, gay and talkative. We crossed the river and climbed the steep side of the Fljotsdale Herad. Then we went across the top, a bleak expanse of land with a little grass and bilberry scrub, a great many rocks, much water and unmelted snow. We splashed and trotted over the heath, and chattered. My guide had been in hospital in Seydisfjord with five English sailors and "understood" English. How much, I didn't investigate. But he recited the names of the five sailors, asked me if I knew them and said that he had found them *gaman* (fun).

After two hours riding we came into *þoka* and stayed in it for the rest of the day, so that our spirits and our clothes were equally damped. At first it was impressive on that mountain top to see the brooks gleaming bleakly

through the mist, and still more to see the sheen of what were apparently uphill-sloping lakes, only to find, as one drew close, that they were large banks of snow. We came down eventually into the mists of Fljotsdale. We passed a farm called Bessastadir to reach the ferry which was to carry me over Lagarfljot, a large lake that cuts the west off from the east coast. We galloped over some wet meadows, through a river, and across some even wetter meadows, to come out on the banks of a large white expanse in which the water and the mist were hardly to be distinguished. We could just see a green strip opposite with a house. The young man took a deep breath, hollowed his hand, and called "fe-e-e-erja". There was a silence and then a faint echo of "fe-e-e-erja" mocked us from the hills and rolled round the lake. This happened several times, and in the silence between the calls and the echo we could hear nothing but the horses as they cropped the grass of the meadow. Then a thin childish voice called across the lake that the ferry was not at home, but would be back in two hours. I felt as if I should never see England again, but was doomed to spend my life suspended between west and east. So we galloped back to Bessastadir, and while I waited in the rain, my spirits at their lowest, the young man fetched the mistress of the house.<sup>38</sup> She was a tiny, straight-backed, rosy-cheeked old lady with two plaits of hair, a clean blue cotton frock, no teeth, but the pinkest little mouth and tongue. I waited in the parlour among a collection of books, English, Danish, German, Icelandic and in about half an hour the old lady came back with coffee. I was still feeling rather depressed, but was cheered by the hot coffee and the lace-like pancakes spread with jam. I congratulated her on them, and she giggled at my bad Icelandic. Then I made a remark about my gloves which were wet, but with my confused vocabulary I called them *kettlingur* (kitten) instead of

<sup>38</sup> Probably Anna Jóhannsdóttir.

*vettlingar* (gloves). The old lady became helpless with laughter, I giggled too, and we became the fastest of friends. She took me out in the rain into her garden, taught me the names of flowers, and picked me a little bunch of poppies, Baldur's Brow, crane's bill and a pungent herb that might be tansy. Then the young man came out to say that the two hours had elapsed. We said goodbye, and she asked me to write my name on a piece of paper, "because I was so nice that she wanted to remember my name". I gave her a visiting card and she was delighted. I had found that this was a simple way of giving pleasure to my hosts and hostesses in the country, and judging by the objects that already littered their best rooms I believe that my visiting cards would be treasured for years, and that future travellers will see them getting dustier and dustier among the miscellaneous objects on the what-not in remote country farms.

I felt much brighter as we galloped for the third time over the water-meadows, and I reflected how I had found so often in Iceland that the inhospitable landscape of this bleak country was cheered by some warm human contact. But even as I sniffed my fragrant nosegay on the banks of Lagarfljot I was to receive another rebuff. Again the cry of "fe-e-e-erja" rolled across the lake and again the echoes mocked us from the hills. I felt that Lagarfljot was another Jordan, and across it lay the promised land or at least the key to all the amenities of civilization, and that I was fated never to arrive. We stood for perhaps half an hour in the mist. The young man was concerned and determined in a spectacular sort of way, saying that he would get me across to Hrafnkelsstadir, come what might. But when we discussed alternatives to the ferry he had none to offer. It was too difficult to swim the horses across and there was no other ferry. So he showed his sympathy by turning to me very often and saying "Ekki kalt?" ("Not cold, are you?"). At last there was some sign of activity on the bank opposite,

or at least the young man alleged that he could see the boat. I could see nothing through the mist, but soon the creak of oars came to my ears and the boat arrived. It was manned by two boys in blue dungarees. They had reddish hair and pink faces out of which the bluest eyes stared solemnly. And indeed they might well stare, for I must have been a curious figure looming out of the mist, in breeches and rubber boots with my rucksack on my back and a bunch of flowers in my hand.

We rowed slowly across the lake. Then came what might well have been the final catastrophe. About half way across the boat slowed even more, and the boys announced we had run aground. Now I could not help laughing, for the idea of spending the rest of my life actually on Lagarfljot, not merely ranging up and down Jokulsdale, seemed so funny. The boys laughed too and the catastrophe was not as serious as it had seemed. One of them climbed out of the boat and simply towed it ashore.

I had a nice night there at Hrafnkelsstadir. The new house is of concrete and seemed warm and dry. The roof didn't leak though the rain beat on it all night long. The walls were painted a nice bright blue. I had company in the upstairs room, a schoolmaster who was staying in the house and who came up with one of the blue-eyed boys, both of them obviously shaved and dressed in neat dark suits, collars and ties for the benefit of the English lady. They talked a great deal, asked questions about England, looked up places on a map; the schoolmaster corrected my pronunciation and genders and was patient and delightful. They seemed very gay after the rather grim household of Hakonarstadir.

Next day started well. One of the boys guided me to Hallormsstad. We had a pleasant ride and made a detour to look at the tallest tree in the wood there, a birch tree that was quite ten feet high. This corner of Lagarfljot is prettily covered with birch woods, which



run down to the lake edge. We were making for Hallormsstad where there is a school of Domestic Economy for girls. I had heard about this school and that the building was a new one, and I intended to spend the night there, as I hoped to find at last the conveniences I had failed to find anywhere else on my tour. But because of my own ineptitude I was destined to spend the night in another damp bed and old-fashioned farmhouse. The mist had come down again, so that when we arrived at a house and were taken into the sitting-room I assumed that I was at the new school, though I must admit that I was disappointed as the house seemed no different from any other good-sized Icelandic farm. The host came in, welcomed me, we drank coffee, and I asked if I could stay the night. Then I found that I had planted myself on a timid embarrassed widower,<sup>39</sup> who was too hospitable to say "Why don't you stay at the school?", which was indeed not a hundred yards away though hidden by the mists. He was kind enough to make me welcome and next day to invite me, as it was still raining, to stay for the night and to inspect the school.

His sister is the schoolmistress.<sup>40</sup> She is fat, wears horn-rimmed spectacles and is of the universal type, which would be as convincing in a high-necked shirt blouse as the headmistress of an English High School as she was in national dress presiding over twenty Icelandic young ladies. I spent an interesting day with her. She speaks English well and has an assorted library, ranging from the Old Norse Sagas to Dean Inge and "Companionate Marriages". She is intensely nationalistic, and on winter evenings the girls gather round her with their spinning wheels and she reads the Old Icelandic poetry aloud to them, just as a cultured British schoolmistress might read Yeats to her pupils. We talked a

<sup>39</sup> Guttormur Pálsson. It is interesting to note that this shy, embarrassed widower married his second wife only a month after Miss Selby's visit.

<sup>40</sup> Sigrún Pálsdóttir Blöndal.

great deal about national integrity. Her girls worry her by wanting to wear silk underclothes and playing the gramophone; she thinks the Icelanders are becoming effete and have no pride in their history because they don't spin and weave their stockings from the wool of their own sheep. She disapproves of the Danish influences on food and the introduction of cakes and coffee, though she approves of the native pancake.

The building, in the creation of which she had a hand, is dominated by the *baðstofa*. The hand-work room has panelling and a sloping roof, and windows that are too small. Some of the bedrooms are also designed on that model, and the schoolmistress hopes to introduce *lokrekkiur*, the rather unhygienic cupboard-beds of the old farmhouses. She talked a good deal about the Icelanders' lack of a furniture-sense. Her own room is very nice. One wall is filled with books, lovely old leather-bound editions of the sagas and geographies of Iceland. On the other walls are two or three paintings by modern Icelandic artists. There is a wide window with a picture better than any of the paintings, an exquisite view of Lagarfljót, with the mountains on the other side streaked with the white threads of falling torrents. I was a little contemptuous of the more practical side of this new building. The sanitary arrangements were hardly up-to-date; it is true there was a bathroom, but it was in the basement, was unventilated and smelt.

Next day was bright with sunshine. I said goodbye to my embarrassed host and set out free as the wind, because for the first time since leaving Akureyri I was travelling alone and on foot. I felt free and happy to dawdle along at my own pace and not the guide's or the horse's, to start when I liked, to stop when I liked, and even to take off my boots and paddle in the lake, though I had felt no temptation to do this earlier on the mist-shrouded mountains. The road went through the birch

woods, which were no longer fragrant, as they had been in last night's rain. I had had particular experience of this fragrance the evening before when I had taken refuge in a thick coppice from a young bull, which had snorted and roared around my shelter for half an hour. At last it had tired and I slunk home. When I made an allusion to this terrifying animal, my host had said: "He's quite harmless. He only does that for fun." He certainly got his fun that night.

The road left the woods and ran along the shore of the lake for some miles. It was so hot I played with the idea of bathing, but I played too long for the road left the shore and turned inland for a mile or so. I stopped at a farm and asked for milk, and a pleasant woman, hot from hay-making, gave me a jug free and would take no payment. She showed me some old side-saddles, with seats of embroidered velvet and a little rail at the back. Then I tramped on in the sun and rested often, because my pack and rucksack were burdensome. Rather suddenly I came to Egilsstadir, a group of three or four concrete buildings standing at the edge of the Fljot which narrows here almost to the width of a broad river and is spanned by a long slender bridge. There was a nice green petrol pump at the side of the road, and I nearly threw my arms round it as I felt it was a messenger from the great civilized world of baths and tramcars.

At Egilsstadir there is an hotel. I had for the last few days been brooding over this and planning what I should have for supper when I got there. I was looking forward to being in a place where I could give orders as to my comfort, and not feel that I was being obtrusive or a nuisance as one is bound to be sometimes when one arrives at a private house as an uninvited guest. So I marched in and firmly ordered a hot supper. I was a little dashed when they said that it would be ready at eight-thirty; I suggested they should hurry it up a little as I was hungry. It came ten minutes before it was due.

I ordered a packet of cigarettes, and with an intense sense of luxury lit the last survivor of the last packet I had brought from Akureyri. I ordered a bottle of beer — poor stuff this, but the best one can hope for in a semi-prohibition country. Then I ordered breakfast for eight o'clock, with bread and butter and no cake. Finally I ordered a packet of sandwiches to be ready for me at nine. My orders were received with the utmost respect and I even thought of putting my shoes out to be cleaned, but I decided that perhaps that would be going a little far.

It was grey and misty as I went to bed, and from my large window, which did not open, I could see the white water of the lake and the grey hills. All the day the lake had been blue and the mountains quite distinct — Snæfell to the south and other snow-topped peaks to the north.

Egilsstadir is a beauty spot, famous I had been told for its trees. I didn't notice any. Breakfast, brought punctually at eight, was a curious but not unpalatable meal of coffee and bread and butter overlaid with meat and cheese. There was a dish of jam. I removed the meat, but grappled with the cheese which went very well with the jam. It was a nice morning with rather subdued sunshine. Snæfell was peering over the hills at the top of the lake.

I had a mountain to climb before I could reach Seydisfjord, so I left the motor road which I had followed since Hallormsstad. The climb up the mountain was hard; the sun shone and my two bags were heavy, but the view over Lagarfljot was superb. The snow was still lying on the mountain top and sometimes unnerving. I had long snow bridges to cross, and here and there were cracks in the snow revealing steep ravines filled with rushing torrents. Where the snow had melted was mud. This was even more unnerving as, though it was deceptively firm to the eye, one could easily sink down into it to the knee. I thought what a nasty death it

would be to drown in thick mud. The mountain top was bleak and stoney, with very little vegetation and a few sheep nibbling what little there was. When I reached the flat top the river I had been following broadened out into an untidy lake, and I saw that a stream was running down the other side to Seydisfjord. One could just detect the ridge where the streams parted. There were a great many other lakes formed by springs and melting snow.

The path turned down and I entered a narrow, long, steep valley. Below, the river foamed and spread into blue and white patches. Far far away I could see a corner of the fjord and round it the tiny white houses of the village. It was a long time till I reached it, and I had a river to cross; the water got into my boots. As I went down I met a party on horseback, the first people I had seen since leaving Egilsstadir. Then I met more and more till there was a regular procession. I thought that it was the usual Saturday exodus from the towns, and felt that it was faintly like the Brighton road. I learned later that it was the August holiday and that the people from Seydisfjord always spent that weekend at Egilsstadir.

Seydisfjord looked a little dingy when I entered it. I had heard that there was an hotel in Seydisfjord, and further that this hotel was kept by an English woman. So I had pictured a nice, clean place like the one at Akureyri, made even more comfortable by its English proprietress. I thought I should arrive to find a nice clean room, a hot bath, a pot of tea, and a little sympathetic conversation. I was rather dashed to find that the hotel of which I had heard so much, and indeed the only hotel in Seydisfjord, was the Salvation Army Hostel. The English woman was there all right; but she was Scotch, and a pathetic anaemic Army Captain, who was so conscious of her exile that I got quite enough conversation to make up for all that I had missed in the

past fortnight. The rooms were not clean, and though there was a bathroom, the furnace was broken and the water supply defective. However, my room had a lovely big balcony, and from it I could sit and watch the sun gilding the mountain tops.

It doesn't gild Seydisfjord, which is shut in by mountains on all sides. Even the mouth of the fjord is closed so that one cannot see the open sea. It must be a gloomy place in the dark winter days, but it was rather charming in the reflected autumn sunshine. The mountains near the town are so sheer that you feel that they may slip at any minute and bury the town. Indeed I was told that avalanches were an ever-present danger.

The town was gloomy that weekend because all the gay young people had gone over to Egilsstadir. But in any case there is a feeling of desolation about it; it has seen better days for it grew to its present size through the herring industry. Then, as a result of the mysterious and incalculable movement of the fish, the North coast and Siglufjord became the centre of the industry. Seydisfjord remains a monument to financial instability with only its bank and its three-storied houses to tell its former glories.

The boat was late so I had three days to wait. I found it interesting because I amassed a great deal of information about the Army, some of it rather discreditable. This young girl had been sent out like all the officers in foreign service with no fixed salary. She was given free quarters in the Hostel, which was run by an Icelandic woman, but for money she had to depend on what she could collect from the inhabitants (and that was very little as, like most Icelanders, they were contemptuous of the Army), and what she could wheedle out of the Norwegian and English sailors who called at the port. When a boat came in she went on board — if they would let her for Army officers, like clergymen, are considered to bring bad luck — and handed round her collecting box.

There was no one to keep any check on her accounts, so she had the opportunity of helping herself, an obvious stimulus to assiduous collecting. The Army, as far as I could see, served no useful purpose in Seydisfjord. There were no slums, no drunken wife-beaters to be converted, no destitute men to house and feed. The hostel was run purely as a commercial proposition and used by business men as an hotel. The Captain had succeeded in persuading six little girls to become girl guides, but as the little girls were Icelanders, they already had the qualities of resource, reliance and honesty that the Guide Movement is supposed to encourage. A meeting was held once a fortnight for hymn and prayer. This was attended very well, according to the Captain's account, but she implied that many of the people came for aesthetic rather than religious reasons, to hear her solo-singing, and they asked her to sing not the Icelandic hymns but English songs like "Home, sweet home".

The Captain had come out to Iceland with five or six other officers about a year before, but in that time she had learned very little Icelandic. She had a comic way of using Icelandic words in English sentences — "Now I'll deck the board" for "lay the table" — and of expecting to be understood. But perhaps her lack of the language was a good thing, for there was constant friction between herself and the woman who ran the hotel. Kristin was the Captain's Lieutenant, and there were disputes about precedence. Then the Captain thought that she should reprove the false standards of Kristin, who was impressed by people whom she called "fine", for example the dentist and the commercial travellers. I was not considered "fine" because I came to dinner in my breeches though I expect Kristin would have considered me even less fine if I had come without them. On the grounds of the superior standing of the commercial travellers to myself, Kristin wished to turn me out of my balconied bedroom and give it to them, but she

found that she was up against a tougher proposition than she imagined, and I stayed in my balcony room. The commercials had to be content with a back one.

But it was a curious weekend for the weather was very hot. There was a sort of sirocco blowing that raised the dust in wreaths and ruffled the waters of the fjord, but it did not dispel the grey mist that brooded over the town. I heard that in some parts this most unusual wind wrecked a seaplane and sank a number of small boats. In Seydisfjord it damaged only the Salvation Army nerves.

The Captain was in a state of excitement the day I arrived, as she and a nice blue-eyed boy who was living in the Hostel thought of walking over to Egilsstadir early on the Sunday morning, staying the night there and returning on Monday. Certainly it was depressing for the poor girl to see the gay crowds hurrying off and to be forced to stay behind. The chief difficulty was her position. As an Army officer she had to be careful of her reputation, and to be seen walking alone with a young man might cause "talk". So I was a heaven-sent chaperon when I arrived at five o'clock in the afternoon, rather tired and muddy. She was all for starting back over the fifteen miles I had just walked. I demurred. Then we should start at four in the morning. I said that I would start not a moment before eight, so we compromised with six. Luckily no one woke before seven, so we were able to get breakfast at a respectable hour and set out about nine. The young man, Sigurbjorn, was wearing white tennis shoes, the Captain had a pair of black high-heeled shoes but went back for white tennis shoes when I suggested she might find walking over the mountains rather exhausting in such flimsy foot-gear. Sigurbjorn carried the lunch in my rucksack and complained at the weight as we toiled up the steep path. We crossed the river with a good deal of giggling and shrieking from the Captain and refusals from us both to be carried across by the handsome Sigurbjorn. I refused because I was too



heavy for him and didn't want to be dropped in mid-stream, she because she was a Captain in the Army and had to set a good example to other girls.

Quite soon it began to rain, so we sheltered under a rock. There we had to restrain Sigurbjorn from eating the lunch as it was not yet eleven. Then the sun came out so we walked a little further. Then it rained again, so we thought we'd better eat the lunch before it got wet. Then Sigurbjorn suggested we should go home, arriving in time for the mid-day lunch. We discussed what they were going to have for lunch down in Seydisfjord, whose distant little roofs we could see from our shelter. But the Captain was quite firm so we went on a little further. Then we rested again. Then we came to a morass. After we had gone three or four miles, the Captain asked how much further it was to Egilsstadir. We told her about twelve miles across the mountain. So she thought it would be better to go home, which we did, getting back in time for afternoon tea, which was lucky as Kristin had just made some fresh pancakes. She was not very pleased to see us. For the rest of the day the Captain and Sigurbjorn sat in my room and played the gramophone. It seemed funny to me that they clung to my chaperonage in this way, as the Captain sleeps in a tiny bedroom that leads off Sigurbjorn's and had to go through his room to reach her own. But to an Iclander, used to the tradition of the *baðstofa* where the men's room communicates with the girls', there is nothing odd in such an arrangement. The Captain told me in a shocked voice how Kristin had behaved when a lot of the English and Icelandic officers were together. They were all (mixed sexes) talking in a large room, which was to be the women's bedroom that night. Kristin got tired and wanted to go to bed, and so she calmly began to undress before the company.

The Captain and I went to the open-air swimming pool, and I had a swim. The water was not warm as the pool

was filled from the river which comes down from the mountain swollen with snow-water.

The last day was spent waiting about for the boat. "Esja" was due to arrive at any moment. There was the undercurrent of excitement that runs through these little ports when a boat is expected, hopes of letters and parcels. Several of the men were taking "Esja" back to Akureyri, so we were busy paying our bills, packing and so on. Quite suddenly as we were sitting over the ruins of afternoon coffee, the steamer's whistle blew. We all hurried to fetch our luggage and take the twenty minutes walk to the quay. While we were waiting the Captain introduced me to a fellow-countryman, a fisherman from Hull who had been knocked on the head by a hatchway on his trawler and hurried unconscious to the nearest port. He was enjoying himself and told me how kind the people at the hospital were and how they gave him tea and bread and butter when the other patients were having soup. Then the boat started and I waved goodbye to the two little scraps of jetsam on the quay — the fisherman and the Captain, thrown up on that desolate shore, the one by the rage of the sea, the other by a flood of emotion, to be left high and dry.

The sunset was wonderful. There was a frail moon, and the sky blushed over the sea and snow mountains. The waters of the Heradsfloi, which lay to port, were darker blue than the sea, and the mountains showed like wraiths.

The morning was cloudy, but the sky soon cleared and we sailed in a sea as soft as milk. We stopped at Thorshofn, a desolate little bunch of houses on the edge of a long ridge of shingle. But we couldn't go ashore as the ship did not go in to land. Then we sailed into the Arctic circle. The coast was grim, often low with long shingle stretches. On one of these was the rusty wreck of an English trawler, which had run ashore the previous winter in fog. There was a surprising cliff, Raudinupur,

craggy but set in banks of red earth like Námafjall near Myvatn. Then we reached Kopasker which is the shopping town for Grimsstadir and Modrudale. When I had heard of it on these two farms, I had pictured a gay metropolis, teeming with traffic, picture theatres and amusements. There were two or three houses, one of them the Co-operative warehouse, and a church a mile or so away.

The sunset was wonderful again, but the colours were so cold. The mountains facing the sun were a ghostly grey-blue impossible to describe — not lavender, but somehow the pale ghost of a lavender that has turned blue with cold. Then there was a rainbow rising from the mountain, with straight-up sides — a larger section of a circle than we commonly feature at home. And there was Flatey, an insecure little island that seemed to be floating in the sunset, and looked so low that it might be submerged in the first high sea. Behind it the sun was setting in clouds and the sea was shades of pale green, blue-grey, mauve and pink. It was all very pastel with none of the stronger shades one sees in the South, or even in Finland.

## Chapter Four

### A RIDE IN SKAGAFJORD

THE next morning I was drinking coffee in the Hotel Godafoss in Akureyri. We had turned into Eyjafjord on the previous evening and at last I had been able to return to my dear Godafoss and its comforts. I had a lovely day littering my clothes about my room, fetching letters from the Post Office, eating, bathing and taking gentle walks.

Akureyri seemed a very pretty place to come back to. The street is so gay and the view of the fjord and mountains as lovely as anything in Iceland. I think I should retire there in my old age and snub the English tourists.

I met a great many people I knew there. As I was having lunch on the second day after my return I had a visit from a girl I had met in Reykjavik.<sup>41</sup> She was returning there in a round-about way, and she suggested I should join her in a little detour and do some riding. So we got my heavy luggage packed off to Reykjavik to await my arrival, and I donned once more the riding-kit I had discarded, I thought for good. My friend was going a short motor tour with some friends, and I was to meet her in Skagafjord at a farm called Vidivellir.

I was to go by car on Sunday morning. There were the usual misunderstandings. I was ready for the car and it didn't start; it was ready for me and they couldn't find me. Then it did start and the radiator leaked, the water boiled and the cap flew off on Oxnadalsheidi. The *heiði* was grim and the corners terrifying, taken rather

<sup>41</sup> Steinunn Anna Bjarnadóttir (b. 1897). Studied at Westfield College in the University of London 1919-22 and is the author of a text book for English. In 1933 she married Séra Einar Guðnason, the priest at Reykholt in Borgarfjörður which Miss Selby visited on her return journey to Reykjavik (p. 87).

recklessly by our driver who never worried about the ravine below.

I felt rather like Thomas á Becket's mother,<sup>42</sup> as I had two words of information only about our joint plans — Vidivellir and the name of my friend. So when the car stopped and the driver announced that this was Vidivellir, I felt a little unfriended. I walked up to the house and explained in my halting Icelandic that I was the "English girl", and that my friend had told me to meet her there. Happily my hostess seemed to have been forewarned, and I put in two or three hours waiting in the front room. Then my hostess came in with a meal and we talked.

She is a charming and remarkable woman, well known in Iceland for her hospitality.<sup>43</sup> She will not take money for her food and shelter, and as her house lies on the main road between Akureyri and Reykjavik a day never passes without some incursion. She had a tent at the Althing celebrations and for three days served coffee and cakes to any who chose to come. Every year she gives a party to the children of Skagafjord and entertains some hundreds of them. My friend knew her first some years ago, when she was riding in Skagafjord and thrown from her horse. Her wrist was badly hurt, and Lilja took her into the house, nursed her devotedly and would take no payment. Since then she had stayed with my friend in Reykjavik and had invited her to return some time and to bring a friend for a little riding holiday. The invitation had been extended to me, so here I was at Vidivellir.

Lilja is unmarried and so is her twin brother Gísli, who by the curious picaresque convention that I've talked about before turned out to be one of the horse drovers

<sup>42</sup> The legendary story of the Saracen maid who came to London seeking Thomas's father can be found in the preface to the *Life of St Thomas* by Edward Grim (Rolls Series, 1876, 455).

<sup>43</sup> Lilja Sigurðardóttir (b. 1884) farmed Viðivellir with her twin brother Gísli for many years. She also taught for a time at the Kvennaskóli in Blönduós.

whom I had met in the East. I felt that the cigarettes that I had unselfishly, and rather reluctantly, as my supply was limited, cast on the water of Jokulsá, were returning to me multiplied tenfold.

Lilja and Gisli then are childless and unmarried, but the house is full of children. There are the children of a sister and two little boys Lilja has adopted. And these boys have friends with them, so there was always a group of blue-dungareed boys in front of the house or leading in the hay, slung in two large bundles, one on each side of a pony's back. Lilja has another comfort — her garden. This is famous in Iceland and many visitors stop to see it. To us with our rich deep soil and the care of centuries, it would seem a pathetic little place, but to the Icelander it is a horticultural wonder. It was blossoming bravely when I saw it with crane's bill and a sort of valerian. There is an attempt at a rockery in the middle, and a few shrubs. Away from the house they've planted some trees, and these are growing as well as they can in the shallow soil and bitter winds.

My friend arrived in the evening with a gay party. They brought with them a most unpleasant medicine which they produced with a good deal of giggling — Icelandic brandy. It was pure alcohol, diluted with water. They laughed and sang, and a nice little clergyman from the next farm led the singing and the gaiety.<sup>44</sup>

It rained all night and the roof leaked, though I had hopefully thought that here at last was a waterproof house. We spent an idle day, eating and hoping the rain would stop. We had two car loads of visitors. The first party was led by a large handsome elderly lady, who smiled a great deal, took her coffee with considered charm, and kissed us all when she left.<sup>45</sup> She is the widow of a well-known poet, and having been a famous

<sup>44</sup> Presumably Miklibær. The incumbent at that time was Séra Lárus Arnórsson.

<sup>45</sup> I have been unable to trace the handsome elderly lady.

beauty in her youth has still something of the professional charmer about her. When she had gone, my friend and I went up to our room and read her late husband's poems. We were disturbed by the arrival of a second car which contained the Anglo-American caravan that I had met in the East. I was not altogether surprised to see them as I knew they were coming that way.

When they had gone, we went to the next farm to drink chocolate with the little clergyman of the night before. Then we had supper.

Next day we continued to eat. We had three coffees and a large lunch before we started on our tour at one o'clock. Lilja rode side-saddle and had a long-skirted riding habit. We took a pack-pony, which was a constant nuisance, as it refused to keep up with the other horses and had to be dragged along. So one of us used to ride behind and hit it continually. We followed the motor road and had to go slowly because of the stoney surface. We reached the bridge over the Heradsvatn, the river which provided the delicious trout which was seen dried on the roof of the house. We followed, crossed and re-crossed one of the rivers, and stopped to look at a waterfall and get a distant view of Vidivellir across the Heradsvatn. Lilja told us a pretty story of her old mother.<sup>46</sup> She had lived when she was a child at a farm close by, and in the summer she had often been sent to watch over the sheep near this waterfall. The child, alone in these solitudes, had amused herself by looking across the river to the distant Vidivellir, which was the only house within view. She had sat and dreamed of it through the long summer days, and so closely had the place woven itself into her consciousness that she used to call it "home" and came back to her parents with accounts of what they were doing "at home" that day. Later when she grew up, she met the owner of Vidivellir, married him and so it became in reality her home.

<sup>46</sup> Guðrún Pétursdóttir, born at Reykir in Tungusveit in 1852.

We left the waterfall and climbed a stoney track, and seemed to be penetrating uninhabited regions — mountains, stones, an occasional pony, but no house. It was nine o'clock and was getting dark. Still we rode and still there were no houses. At last, at ten o'clock, we saw a grey house through the dusk — a fine stone house with large windows and a long flight of steps. This was Tunguháls, where we intended to spend the night. Lilja went up to the front door and knocked gently, but there was no sign of life. Then she tried the door and peered in. Anna joined her and I was left alone with the horses. They disappeared into the house and came back to say that no one was stirring. There was a sort of assembly hall where we might be able to sleep, but the prospect was cheerless as we hadn't eaten since one o'clock. They went off to investigate the hay house, thinking that it might be warmer than the bare boards of the assembly hall. Then through the dusk I saw the door of the grey house open and a skirt or something fluttered round the edge. It looked rather uncanny in the half-light, and wearied by the long ride I wondered if here perhaps was a house of the dead and that one of them had risen and the grave clothes were fluttering in the wind. Anna and Lilja were still hidden behind the hay house. After a few seconds the door opened a little more and the ghost came out — a young woman who had obviously put on a dress over her nightgown, hence the fluttering effect.

The evening was still ghost-like. We unsaddled the horses in the dark and went into the dark house, where we sat in a large hall and could but faintly perceive two large ornamental windows, a great litter of bedclothes, and some books. We talked together in whispers, and the ghost woman hurried about with mattresses and bedding. Then we were led through a long room full of sleeping men and women. There were two beds on each side of the room, and in one of them a child coughed



uneasily in its sleep. We came into a little room and dimly saw two nice white beds. Then we had a meal taken blindly, but my sense of taste told me that it was rye bread and butter with milk, and finally fumbling with our clothes in the dark fell at last into bed.

Next morning the sun shone, and after a meal we started up Vesturdale. We crossed the bridge over Jokulsá and made for Hofsdale. After riding for perhaps two hours we came upon the farmer from Gil, a house at which we had called on our way up the valley. Our tour was in a sense a social one, at least for Lilja, and she had a great many calls to make at different farms. The farmer from Gil was at his hay-making on a little estate with a deserted farmhouse that he had rented.<sup>47</sup> While Lilja and he chatted, I sat and dreamed that I should take the deserted farmhouse and live in this solitary dale for the rest of my life. I had just reached the point of furnishing the *eldhús* when the farmer said we must go down to the river and see the view. It was very fine, as the river flows through a deep ravine. We climbed about on the crags and looked at the little flowers growing in the cracks of the cliff. Then there was a great discussion as to whether we should go further up the valley. The farmer was enthusiastic that we should and offered to accompany us. Another two or three hours ride up the dale would give us a splendid view of the glaciers of central Iceland. In the end the project was reluctantly abandoned; it was now four o'clock and we had five or six hours ride to reach the farm where we intended to spend the night. I was interested to see the recklessness and hardihood of the Icelandic character in this discussion. Lilja was particularly eager to see the glaciers and was prepared to forego food and sleep to do so. We had no food with us, and as far as I could see no chance of getting any as the upper part of the dale was uninhabited. We had had nothing since we left

<sup>47</sup> Probably Þorljótsstaðir in Vesturdalur.

Tunguháls at ten that morning. When we discussed the question of sleep, they said airily, "We shall just have to lie down in the open for a few hours." Later I discussed this question of hardihood with Anna and she admitted that it was an important quality in the Icelandic character today as it had been with the saga-folk of old. It is closely linked with their pride; she says that the motor-drivers on the road from Reykjavik to Akureyri are prepared to drive eighteen hours without rest, and this on a road that taxes both muscle and nerve as the surface and the gradients are very trying.

But I think that my two friends were influenced on this occasion by consideration for the English lack of hardihood; with many backward glances at the invisible glaciers we turned our horses' heads in the direction of Mælifell where we hoped to stay the night. It was a good thing perhaps that we did turn back. We had several minor mishaps. I got my boots full of water as we crossed the river. Lilja was sick because we drank some sour cream at a farm. Then her horse came down on some loose stones, and she fell. Fortunately she was not hurt, but the frightened horses had to be pacified. It seemed a long way to Mælifell and we didn't get there before ten-thirty. The sunset was beautiful, the sky very pink in the east and the mountains grey and blue. We filed through the magic twilight, a very tired caravan, Lilja at the head, bravely perched on her pillion saddle, Anna leading the pack-pony, and me at the rear occasionally flicking at the animal in a half-hearted way. But, curiously, when we reached Mælifell in a state of the utmost exhaustion and fell stiffly off our horses, the exhaustion vanished. We found the house still awake, as they were awaiting the return of the clergyman. We had a blind supper, smoked salmon on bread — I think.

Then Anna and I went to bed and talked so long that I thought the household would protest. We discussed the quality of *hófðingskapr* (liberality, or to translate

the word literally, the disposition of a chieftain). We thought that Lilja, and her brother, and her mother had it. It seemed odd to use the word of the mother — a gentle, dirty old woman, who sits on the front steps with her knitting on summer evenings. But it was quite true that the courtesy and consideration with which she treated her tiresome and rather inarticulate English visitor might well deserve the term. And the hospitality that they delight to show — they invited eighty members of a glee-club to a party — is like the lavishness and liberality of a chieftain of old.

The next day was very hot, and everyone exclaimed at the heat. It seemed a nice warm summer day to me. We were going to climb a mountain near the house and get, perhaps, a view of the jokuls we missed the day before. But as everyone was sitting about groaning at the heat, it was decided to give up the idea. We sat about and drank several coffees. Some other visitors drifted in, so we had some more coffee. My friend and I were to ride to some point on the main Akureyri and Reykjavik road and intercept a car which would take us to Blonduós. There we were to spend the night, and I was to travel on to Reykjavik the next day with the same car. Anna was to stay in Blonduós with friends.

We started in the early afternoon, and it was pleasant riding in the warm sun, though the horses seemed disinclined to hurry. So we dawdled along with frequent rests. I was getting a little anxious, as the car which we were to intercept was scheduled to leave Saudárkrokur at four. But I consoled myself by the thought that the driver had no better time-sense than other Icelanders I had met. It was well after four when we came in sight of the main road, and almost immediately we saw a car drive past. The thought that it was ours made us urge the horses to a gallop. So followed a comic cinema chase. The car was proceeding fairly fast along a long flat road, it turned uphill where the road began to zigzag up a

mountain side. We shouted and hallooed, but the car ignored us. We flogged our horses, and they simulated a gallop which was in reality no faster than a trot. In fact we provided an excellent slow-motion picture where all the movements of the gallop are produced but the pace is of the snail. We hooted and clattered for about two miles after the fast receding car, and the dust flew from under our horses' hoofs. Finally we reached a farm and a petrol pump, and gave up the chase. We enquired from the man at the farm who told us that we had been chasing an illusion, for the car was not driven by Páll but contained some quite irrelevant tourists from Akureyri. To add to the comedy, the car now came back slowly along the road for its occupants had decided to fill up with petrol before climbing the pass over the mountains.

It was nice to rest here at Vidimyri, to cool ourselves and to inspect the old church;<sup>48</sup> there is some pretty woodwork inside, including high carved pew-ends and some old painted inscriptions.

Then a car arrived, driven not by Páll but by the young man who had brought me from Svarfadardale that wet Sunday, which now seemed so long ago. As we didn't know whether Páll was ahead or behind, we decided to travel in this car. So we said goodbye to Lilja who was riding back to Vidivellir with the horses, and we turned up over the *heiði*. We had a lovely ride, and the view from the top was superb as we could see Langjokull and Hofsjokull. We ought also to have been able to look down Skagafjord to the sea, but at that point the *þoka* descended. We came down into Langidale and saw where the Svartá (the Black river, which is transparent) met Blanda (the mixed river that is opaque, formed from the melting glacier snows). My friend told me how the snow-rivers vary in height from hour to hour and how in

<sup>48</sup> The old turf church at Viðimýri was built in 1834-5 by Einar Stefánsson, the grandfather of the poet Einar Benediktsson.

the morning many of the rivers are quite safe to cross, whilst in the evenings, particularly after a warm day, they are swollen by the melting snows and extremely dangerous to cross. Langidale was very pretty in the afternoon sun. It is a wide, peaceful valley and the mountains are not too high or terrifying. Men and women were hay-making in the flat meadows by the river.

Then we drove out of the sun into *þoka*, and the descent into Blonduós was like passing from summer into winter. The place seems horrid, little low houses creeping round a grey sea which was dashing against the pebbles of the beach. The sea birds were screaming. It is surprising to find how the weather varies within a small area in Iceland. One dale may be enjoying the sun, the next is in mist or actual rain. I was told that the weather in Akureyri was never the same as that in Reykjavik. So that sun in Akureyri always means rain in Reykjavik.

I found it curious coming back to responsibilities and organisation again. The last few days I had been so well looked after by my friends that I had felt as if I was on a Cook's tour. I had gone where I was taken, eaten my meals when I was told — usually at most unusual hours, and I had slept when the others slept. Now I was Master of my Fate again. I had looked forward to an hotel in Blonduós. Indeed there was one, but it was untidy and uncomfortable, and the supper was not punctual. Indeed I found in most of the hotels I stayed in or ate in that the standard of comfort was much lower than in private houses. Possibly this is one of the many manifestations of Icelandic pride. If you are accepting hospitality as a guest (even if he knows you will pay a small sum when you leave), he does his best to make you comfortable, feeling probably that he is your host. But when the element of commercialism comes in and you are buying food and lodging from him, he does not feel bound to study your comfort. Further, pride forbids the Icelandic guest to complain, even if the hotel is

uncomfortable and the food poor and tardy. In this hotel I was woken up in the middle of the night by an unexpected guest who was parked in my bedroom. The guest rose at five-thirty and did her toilet with just enough noise to wake me, and just enough hush to be irritating.

## Chapter Five

### RETURN TO REYKJAVIK AND FAREWELL

I FELT rather cross when we did start, as we hurried over our breakfast to be ready by seven, the scheduled time, and then waited half an hour for the apothecary and his wife, who had overslept.<sup>49</sup> The apothecary's wife was soon *bílveik*. The road twisted along the course of an old pony track, and the swaying motion evidently upset the lady. But I think the horrors of motoring in Iceland are much exaggerated. We were fourteen hours on the way, and nearly all of it was agreeable and very little of it terrifying. I believe that in wet weather it is much worse. All the cars carry a spade or two with which the car can be dug out of the mud if it sinks too deeply.

The most striking feature of the landscape in the earlier part of the ride was a curious formation of little hills at the mouth of Vatnsdale. Here are countless little mounds (and I use the word countless as more than a cliché, for I was told that there was a superstition that no one could count these hills twice and get the same total). They looked like children's sand mounds poured from a bucket or, even more prosaically, like a very large collection of rubbish dumps.

We stopped at Grænumyrartunga for coffee before crossing the long long *heiði*, which was so incredibly boring that I fell asleep. When I awoke we were following a river and descended into a flood of *hraun* in a district of low scrub. We passed several hot springs and arrived at Reykholt, formerly the home of Snorri Sturluson, at three in the afternoon. Nowadays there is a grand new

<sup>49</sup> Helgi apótekari, as he was called, was Þorvarðarson. He worked as a pharmacist for his brother-in-law Kristján Arinbjarnar who was the doctor in Blönduós at the time. Helgi's wife's name was Jakobína.

building there — in winter a school and in summer a hotel. It is centrally heated from the hot springs, and I greatly enjoyed washing my hands in a nice white basin with new taps. We had a meal there. My fellow passengers sat down at three-thirty on a hot afternoon to stewed mutton followed by porridge. I noticed that none of them complained at the unsuitability of the fare. I should have done, but had anticipated by insisting on some cold food. We climbed up onto Kaldadalsheidi and had a marvellous view of the glaciers — Langjökul and Eiríksjökul — and the bleakest expanse of country — stones, mud, snow, not a blade of grass, and the road zigzagging across the grey and stoney surface. Here no road-makers have been at work, the cars have simply cut a track across the soft rubble of the mountains.

Then there were more mountains, some of them looking very insecure and with rocks that seemed to be shifting as we passed. We saw Skjaldbreid, a tame affair, I thought, to have made all the mess of lava that became Thingvellir. Then a narrow pass between two mountains of rubble and we came down under the ridge that runs on to form Almannagjá. Now there was a nice quick ride along what seemed a marvellously smooth road. I had to remind myself with some effort of the time I jolted along this same road when I first visited Thingvellir, and I reflected how one's standards change. Soon we were in Reykjavik and it all seemed urban and over-populated.

I found my luggage waiting for me at the Hotel Ísland.<sup>50</sup> I was pleased to unpack the things I felt I had lost some years before. I went down to the restaurant and had a meal of asparagus soup and fruit salad — the items on the menu that most forcibly symbolised civilization and cosmopolitanism to me at the moment. The place seemed brilliantly lighted, and the third-rate dancing and music incredibly gay. I gaped for some time like a hay-seed, went out into the streets and looked in a daze at the

<sup>50</sup> The Hotel Ísland was in the main street and burned down in 1944.



lighted shop windows and teeming crowds of passers-by. Then I went to bed.

Breakfast next morning presented a bewildering variety of fancy and plain breads. I had a bath, dressed in leisure, went to fetch my letters, had my hair cut, met a great many people that I knew, and received an invitation to a child's birthday party.

The party seemed to me a very sensible one. The child was ill in bed, so the grown-ups gorged chocolate, whipped-cream cakes and coffee, while the child was allowed a scrap of cake and a sip of chocolate. The family, which is a huge one, talked English and we were very gay.

At this party was a pretty girl, the fiancée of one of the young men. She was a pretty fragile thing with a pale face, broad brow and large greenish eyes set far apart. I noticed that she was smiling and bowing from time to time in an unmotivated way. When I had left I mentioned this to my friends. They replied, "Oh, she was only greeting the dead relations as they came into the room to join the party." Further, they told me that if this girl came to see them she would often look round rather vaguely after entering the room. "Won't you sit down," her hostess would say. "I'm sorry, I can't," she would reply. "All the chairs are occupied." And this in a room where the hostess was sitting alone waiting for her guests. We met the same girl the next morning. "I'm so tired this morning," she said. "A friend," and she mentioned the name of a girl who had died a day or two ago, "came to see me last night and she stayed talking so long that I had to turn on the light to get rid of her."

I went to see the Einar Jonsson sculptures which are housed in a new and modernistic building. I had heard a great deal of this sculptor for the Icelanders are very proud of him. Iceland is in a sense a paradise for artists and poets. The intense national pride creates a sympathetic feeling towards any form of art displayed by a

fellow-countryman. The government creates nice soft jobs for the poets, librarianships and the like, so that the artist can live untroubled by the struggle for existence and produce his masterpieces at leisure. It is surprising to observe the feeling that most of the people have about poetry, particularly if the verse is of a geographical nature and is written about waterfalls and mountains. Poetry with this theme is far more popular and also more emotional than love poetry. Often I noticed that the people I met would quote some poem at an appropriate spot — as if a member of a charabanc party in England should talk about “this precious stone, set in a silver sea” when he had the first glimpse of the Channel from the South Downs. Even tiny children would lisp the more famous of the national songs. I think it is part of the same feeling that created the sagas, an intense nationalism and a love of their country and of the particular corner of it they know, so that the events and people of that district become of the utmost importance in the minds of the poet or saga-writer. In the poetry, however, the concern is mainly with natural objects and is not projected into the inhabitants of a district, so that to me personally there is a bleakness in the verse. I can’t keep on being interested in a waterfall as I can in a person.

I found Einar Jonsson’s sculpture disappointing. His best work is that in which there is a design, where he is building round a pattern, triangle or cross. The Mountain Troll is rather impressive, a woman who is saved from the troll by the rays of the rising sun. His later work is spoiled by a detailed symbolism, which often seems to me to be merely funny. There is a statue of Evolution — a horse, out of which grows an ape, then a man, then a cross and a small figure praying. His naturalistic work did not convince me. His female figures though striving to imitate the human form have a curious lack of force.

I tried bathing in Reykjavik, but it was not a great

success. The water was exceedingly cold, the sunshine in which we sat after bathing was tempered, and the foreshore dirty and strewn with miscellaneous objects.

That evening I went with a friend for a picnic and walk across the lava to Hafnarfjord. We took a car out to the Sanatorium and walked from there.<sup>51</sup> It was a lovely evening and the sun put all sorts of magic colours on the sea, the mountains and the lava. We sat and chattered in the twilight till it grew so dark that we could hardly find our way across the jagged lava rocks. It was night by the time we arrived in Hafnarfjord. The little town by the sea seemed very romantic with its small houses and their lighted windows. Late as it was, my friend took me back to her home, and I saw her mother, a wonderful old lady, whose photograph has been incorporated in a German collection of Women of All Nations.<sup>52</sup> The old lady is like a woman of the sagas and will keep the control of her household in her wrinkled hands to the very last. Suitably enough she is a sort of curator in the Museum of Antiquities, and in her the visitor will see a much more potent reminder of the days of old than in the woven and embroidered fabrics that moulder in the glass cases with a scent of moth ball.

I went the next day to see the Museum. The old ladies who guard it would be very little protection against burglars. I was amused at this ingenious method of the Icelandic government of pensioning off its distinguished but impecunious old ladies. I called at the Natural History Museum, but did not find the birds and fish interesting enough to drown the natural atmosphere of death and corruption.

I had puffin for lunch next day, an agreeable bird not unlike goose in flavour. Then I made an expedition to

<sup>51</sup> Vífilstaðir, a tuberculosis sanatorium.

<sup>52</sup> I have been unable to trace the German book, but "the old lady" was almost certainly Guðrður Guðmundsdóttir, the wife of Matthías Þórðarson, the curator of the Museum of Antiquities. The daughter's name was Sigrður.

Hafnarfjord, which I had already seen in the romantic darkness of the night before. The place was less interesting in the clear light of the early afternoon, but there is a little garden in the lava which is appealing if only for the human optimism to which it bore witness.<sup>53</sup>

That night I left Reykjavik in the "Gullfoss". I had left undone many of the things I had meant to do. I had no time to visit Hekla and the Geysirs, to see the waterfall Gullfoss, and — the thing I regret most — to visit Hlidarendi, where the brave Gunnarr of *Njálssaga* lost his life.

It was dark when the boat left. There were faint reflections of the sunset, and I amused myself by pretending that I was seeing the Northern Lights, though I knew it was too early in the year for this phenomenon. I was touched, as we moved slowly off, to look down on the crowd of up-turned faces and shadowy forms on the quay.

We had a long wait at Vik on the south coast while countless sacks of wool were brought on board. The shore is too exposed here and the sea too rough to allow of motor boats, so the sacks of wool were piled in large eight-oared boats. It was amusing to see these boats being launched. They were carried to the water's edge on the shoulders of a great many men, so they looked like beetles or centipedes — a rounded shell above a series of trotting legs.

My last parting from things Icelandic was sad. We had a cargo of ponies, poor little things packed tightly, head to tail in pens of eight, in the hold. They are packed so tightly to prevent them lying down and so being trodden on.

I left the boat at Leith as they were being unloaded, each one strapped onto a pulley and suspended in the air before it was gently lowered to the quay. It was sad to

<sup>53</sup> This small park is known as Hellisgerði.

think that they were destined to the eternal darkness of the pit — gallant little Icelanders who had cropped the sweet grass and frisked in the sunshine of their native mountain-sides.

## ALICE SELBY

A personal recollection by G. R. Hibbard

I STILL remember my first meeting with Alice. It was the beginning of the Autumn Term in 1934; and I was one of a class about to make its first acquaintance with the History of the English Language and the mysteries of Indo-European Philology. Alice came in, sun-tanned, vigorous, alert, and began to teach. There was no introductory waffle. She had a job to do, she knew how to do it, and she got on with it. By the end of the hour it was already abundantly plain to us that at least one philologist was emphatically not the dry-as-dust pedant that the study of philology was popularly supposed to produce. We had felt the impress not only of superb teaching but also of a highly individual personality.

At that time Alice was Senior Lecturer in English in the University College, as it then was, of Nottingham, which, having no charter of its own, prepared its students for the External Examinations of the University of London. She had been there for sixteen years, having joined the staff of the English Department in 1918, after completing her studies at Cambridge. It was a tiny department, tucked away in a provincial backwater, but it was vital, creative, and exciting in a manner that makes many of the large English departments in our universities today look lethargic and elephantine. All the essential work was done by three people: and what remarkable people they were! Utterly unlike each other in almost every respect, they formed a perfect team. Poet, polyglot, and enthusiast for learning, the Head of the Department, Reginald Mainwaring Hewitt, with a lock of white hair sweeping over his high-domed forehead, seemed like a reincarnation of the Renaissance ideal of

the man who took all knowledge for his province. Blessed with a prodigious memory, he imparted information, much of it rare and out of the way, with unstinting generosity and unfaltering eloquence. George Stuart Griffiths, on the other hand, was a man of intuitive insights. He would often begin a lecture in what appeared to be a rather fumbling manner as he searched for the right opening into his subject, but, having found that opening, he caught fire, as it were, and said things that many of his students have never forgotten. Alice's special contribution, particularly in all matters that affected the day to day running of the Department, was that rare commodity, good, hard common sense. Overworked — Alice, for example, taught Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Old Norse in addition to the History of the Language — and underpaid, eking out their salaries by doing extra-mural teaching in the evenings, they had neither the time nor the opportunity to engage on any scale in the publication by which the academic world of today sets such store, even had they wished to do so. In fact, they did not. Highly civilised and very much alive to the nature of the world they were living in, they regarded the competitive spirit which prompts so much "research" with a proper degree of suspicion. They wrote only when they felt they had something to say; and the standards by which they decided whether a thing was worth saying or not were extremely high. But they never neglected their students. Far from being "unproductive", they helped to produce what a university should produce: men and women capable of making the most of such intellectual endowments as they have.

In 1935 I began to read Old Norse with Alice, and continued to do so until I left Nottingham in 1938. It was a richly rewarding experience, for, of all the subjects she taught, this was the closest to her heart. At the centre of her interest in the past, and in the present too for that matter, was her feeling for everyday life.

She never allowed us to forget that philology was about the speech habits of men who had lived and laboured on this earth; that *Beowulf* came out of a specific kind of society, with its own organization and its own rules. The sagas ministered, to an extent that no other older literature could, to her love of the factual and to her instinctive response to the hard realities of life. But her absorption in them also revealed another side of her nature to me, which I had barely glimpsed until then: practical, competent, efficient though she was, she also had something of the romantic in her. She delighted in the extreme individualism of the saga heroes; their adventurous journeys struck an answering chord in her; and she admired the ethos that prompted their last stands. The journey she had recently made to Iceland had evidently not been without its sentimental — in the very best sense of that word — motives and overtones.

For a period, during the early years of the Second World War, Alice was in charge of the English Department at Nottingham; but from 1939 until 1946 I was out of touch with her. In the Spring Term of 1946, after being demobilized, I returned to Nottingham as a lecturer, and for the next five years we were colleagues, until she finally retired from university teaching in 1951, after working on a part-time basis for several years. Characteristically, Alice's retirement was no ordinary retirement. Active by nature and of an enterprising temperament, she had no intention of sitting down to do nothing in particular. Instead, she had decided to embark on a new way of life which would also be an assertion of her attachment to traditional ways. Knowing that acceptance by a rural community is a slow and difficult process, she had taken the first steps towards a change of occupation in the mid-thirties, when she bought a cottage in the village of Kniveton, near Ashbourne. There she spent her week-ends and vacations, immersing herself in village life. Then, in 1944, she bought Church Farm,



in the same village, and, with the help of her sister Dorothea, adventurously set about running it, applying her ability to learn to the acquisition of new skills and also new items of vocabulary. By this time she was not only well known to the villagers but had also won their respect and trust, with the result that she became their representative on the Rural District Council, where she was able to put her good sense about matters in general, together with her specialized knowledge of education, to practical use in the service of the community to which she now belonged. She eventually gave up the farm in 1953, to move into a house she had built on the other side of the little Anglo-Saxon church, but she continued to participate in the life of the village.

In 1946 my debt to Alice was deep. In the years that followed it became immeasurably deeper. Visiting her, first at the farm and then at the Croft, was one of life's major pleasures. Good conversation was assured. At times it turned on village happenings, in which she took the keenest interest, often making them into minor sagas. More frequently it touched on larger topics and issues: history, politics, religion, the emancipation of women, to which her own life was a testimony, and so forth. To her discussion of them she brought that profound respect for facts and that sceptical attitude towards opinions which had been the very basis of her teaching. She never hesitated to say exactly what she thought, and what she thought was always worth thinking about. To know her was a liberal education. To know her well, in all her freshness of mind and generosity of spirit, was to feel a strong and abiding affection for her. She belonged to no school, she followed no fashion, she was her own unique self.



## ALISTAIR CAMPBELL

ALISTAIR CAMPBELL died suddenly on 5 February 1974, aged sixty-six. He graduated at the University of Birmingham, but thereafter his academic career was in Oxford, where he held the Rawlinson and Bosworth chair of Anglo-Saxon. He was President of the Viking Society 1946-8. He gave the Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies in 1970.

Both older and younger members of the Society mourn this loss, for he was deeply loyal to his friends, kind and helpful to his pupils. And Campbell was a rare bird. His most popular work was his *Old English Grammar* (1959), but for many years his main interest lay in English history of the tenth and eleventh centuries, as represented in English and Scandinavian records. This appeared already in the elaborate edition of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (1938), and developed with increasing complexity.

People would say, sometimes ruefully, that Campbell was a very learned man. True as this was, the learning was neither eclectic nor acquired for its own sake. Once Campbell detected a problem, he pursued it relentlessly, wherever it might lead. If the chase involved identifying quotations from classical Latin literature, analysis of Late Latin syntax, use of Welsh texts, or reading in Icelandic and the Scandinavian languages, Campbell was ready to deepen or extend his knowledge. His special skills in medieval Latin and in diplomatic were fittingly used in editions of Aethelweard's *Chronicon*, three Latin historical poems by English ecclesiastics, and finally the Anglo-Saxon charters of Rochester (1973). No medieval writer was too dull or too difficult. In his Presidential Address (1946) Campbell examined Books XI-XVI of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, traced the two strands of Danish and West Norse historical tradition, and showed

how historical events could be manipulated in the Icelandic Kings' Sagas. He had already pointed out some details of Snorri's methods in *Saga-Book* XII. This kind of searching criticism culminated in his masterpiece, the edition of *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (Camden Society, third series, LXXII, 1949), a work that will remain a classic for students of eleventh-century historiography covering English and Scandinavian affairs.

Campbell, more than most, spent his life in the advancement of learning. In addition to his literary and historical studies, he published *Englarged Addenda and Corrigenda* to the Supplement of Bosworth's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1972), the slim product of much labour and judgment. He collaborated with other accomplished scholars, but above all he belonged to the general community of learning, and treated all its members as equals.

J.T.P.

#### NOTE

The large collection of Middle English alliterative phrases of Scandinavian origin made by the late E. S. Olszewska (Mrs. A. S. C. Ross) is now deposited in the Library of University College London, where it is of course available to research workers.

The deposition is made on behalf of the Society, with which she was long connected.

Professor Ross will be glad to help anyone interested in the collection. His address is c/o Lloyds Bank, 19 Market Square, Winslow, Buckingham MK18 3AD.

## THE *BLACK* FOREIGNERS OF YORK AND THE *WHITE* FOREIGNERS OF DUBLIN\*

BY ALFRED P. SMYTH

IN 866 the "Great Army" of Danes crossed the Humber from its base in East Anglia and captured York on the feast of All Saints. Five months later, on 21 March 867, the Danes successfully repulsed a Northumbrian attempt to regain the city. In the battle-rout which ensued the Northumbrians lost both their kings, Osbert and Ælla, and the Danes became the undisputed masters of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary Irish annalists described the Danish assailants at York and the slayers of King *Alli*, as *Dub Gaill* or "Black Foreigners".<sup>2</sup> These *Dub Gaill* were so called to distinguish them from their fellow vikings and rivals the *Finn Gaill* or "White Foreigners" — the name applied by Irish chroniclers to the Norwegian invaders who harassed their own shores.

It is clear from other references to Scandinavian activity of the ninth and tenth centuries within Ireland that the "White Foreigners" had a predominantly Norwegian origin, and that their opposite numbers were Danes. We know from the annals that the *Finn Gaill* had been established in Western Scotland and Ireland before the arrival of their *Dub Gaill* enemies, and Scandinavian sources, together with archaeological and place-name evidence, make it clear that the earliest settlers in the West were

\*I am grateful to Professor J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, Oxford, and Professor S. Delargy for their helpful comments on this paper before publication.

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Smith, *The Parker Chronicle* 832-900 (1964), 24-5; C. Plummer and J. Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (reprint, 1965), I, 68-9; T. Arnold, *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia* (1882), I, 55; H. O. Coxe, *Rogeri de Wendover Chronica sive Flores Historiarum* (1841), I, 298; W. H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (reprint, 1959), 22-3.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, *Annala Uladh: Annals of Ulster, otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat, a Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 431 to A.D. 1540* (1887), I, 376-7 (sub anno 866).

Norsemen. The oldest Irish source which actually equates the "Black Foreigners" with Danes is the twelfth-century *War of the Irish with the Scandinavians* (*Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*) which speaks of "Danish Black Gentiles" (*Duibgeinti Danarda*) who tried to drive the "White Gentiles" out of Ireland in 851.<sup>3</sup>

This particular group of Danes mentioned in Irish sources in 851 can be shown<sup>4</sup> to have been associated shortly afterwards with the activities of the Great Army in England. The Northumbrian Danes, especially, maintained a keen interest in Irish affairs from the capture of York up to the end of their independence in 954. This period coincides very closely with the occurrence of contemporary references to *Dub Gaill* in Irish annals. The latter term occurs in these sources between 851 and 943, and in each instance a York connection is either obvious or suggested by the context. This indicates that the term *Dub Gaill* as used by Irish annalists in the ninth and tenth centuries referred specifically to Danes who had either settled in England or who carried on raiding activities from that quarter.

It is not clear, from the few Irish annalistic entries relating exclusively to English affairs, whether those "Black Foreigners" who campaigned in England were considered by Irish scribes to be Northumbrian Danes or simply Anglo-Danes generally. The *Annals of Ulster* have preserved their own laconic version of the victory by English ealdormen over the Danes at Buttington in 893, when in the words of the Irish scribe "countless numbers [of the Danes] were slain".<sup>5</sup> This account describes the enemies of the English as "Black Foreigners" (*Dub Gaill*), but since a Northumbrian (and East Anglian) Danish

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (1867), 18-9; 229.

<sup>4</sup> I intend to publish soon a detailed discussion of ninth-century connections between the Scandinavians of York and Dublin.

<sup>5</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 410-1 (sub-anno 892); *Parker Chronicle* 832-900, 46-7; A Campbell, *Chronicon Æthelweardi: the Chronicle of Æthelweard* (1962), 50.

force had joined Hæsten's coalition against King Alfred, it might well have been the participation of the York Danes which prompted the Irish scribe to use the term "Black Foreigners" in the first instance.

The distinction between the "Black" and the "White Foreigners" of York and Dublin was maintained by Irish annalists even after the kings of Norse Dublin had been accepted as kings of York in the early tenth century. Thus, Ragnall, grandson of Ívarr, who died in 920 was styled "King of the White Foreigners and the Black Foreigners" (*ri Finn-Gall 7 Dub-Gall*),<sup>6</sup> as was also his kinsman and successor Sigtryggr (†927).<sup>7</sup> No other Scandinavian leaders were so described in contemporary sources, and no other Scandinavian leaders can be shown to have been undisputed masters of both York and Dublin at their death. The title, then, of "king of the White Foreigners and the Black Foreigners" amounts to the same thing as "King of the Norwegians of Dublin and the Danes of York".

While medieval Irish writers and later Gaelic antiquaries, such as Mac Firbhisigh and Keating,<sup>8</sup> were clear on the overall Norwegian origin of the *Finn Gaill* and the Danish origin of the *Dub Gaill*, all of these early authorities have held their silence as to why one party should have been white and the other black. The mystery of this fundamental distinction which was apparently based on colour has exercised the minds of modern scholars for well over a century. The two explanations which have won widest acceptance interpret the "blackness" or "whiteness" to refer either to hair-colouring or to armour of the vikings. The most bizarre explanation of the terms was put forward by de Vries<sup>9</sup> who suggested that the "Black Foreigners"

<sup>6</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 440-1 (sub anno 920).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 448-9 (sub anno 926).

<sup>8</sup> J. O'Donovan, *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (1851), I, 481, note u (sub anno 849); D. Comyn and P. S. Dinneen, *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn: the History of Ireland by Geoffrey Keating* (1902-14), III ll. 2456-7.

<sup>9</sup> J. de Vries, 'Die Entwicklung der Sage von den Lodbrokssöhnen in den historischen Quellen', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* XLIV (1928), 139-40.

were none other than Moorish slaves, whom we know to have been carried off to Ireland in a viking raid on North Africa c. 860. He had, however, overlooked the statement in Irish annals that the "Black Foreigners" had captured York — an unlikely achievement for a handful of Moorish slaves. It would also appear that the raid on North Africa and the coasts of Islamic Spain took place some ten years *after* the first mention of "Black Foreigners" in Irish sources in 851.<sup>10</sup>

Attempts to explain away the "blackness" or "whiteness" of the two main Scandinavian factions in terms of hair-colouring, complexion, or armour, have never met with universal acceptance. The most plausible explanation would appear at first sight to lie in the hair-colouring or complexion of the invaders. This was the view held, for instance, by the Danish antiquary Worsaae, the Norwegian Bugge and the Irish linguist, Todd.<sup>11</sup> It is extremely difficult to accept that Norwegian and Danish armies of the viking age contained a conspicuous majority of dark-haired warriors. To begin with, we can deduce from the evidence of Old Norse poems such as *Hrafnsmál*<sup>12</sup> and from later writers such as Saxo Grammaticus<sup>13</sup> that large viking armies were not exclusively either Danish or Norwegian. Expeditions could contain a mixture of Danes and Norsemen who had been recruited from the shores of the Vík and the islands

<sup>10</sup> Jón Stefánsson, 'The Vikings in Spain from Arabic (Moorish) and Spanish Sources', *Saga-Book* VI (1909), 40-2; R. Dozy, *Recherches sur l'histoire et la littérature de l'Espagne pendant le moyen âge* (reprint, 1965), II, 279-83. A. Melvinger, *Les premières incursions des Vikings en Occident d'après les sources arabes* (1955), 129-64.

<sup>11</sup> J. J. A. Worsaae, *An Account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland and Ireland* (1852), 313-4; A. Bugge, *Contributions to the History of the Norsemen in Ireland: I, The Royal Race of Dublin* (1900), 4, and n. 2; *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, xxx-1, lxii; cf. W. F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban* (1886), I, 304.

<sup>12</sup> See next paragraph.

<sup>13</sup> Saxo mentions for instance, that the ninth-century viking hero Ragnarr loðbrók led an army of Norwegians and Zealanders against the Jutlanders and Skanians. A Holder, *Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum* (1886), 303.



of the Kattegat.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, while dark-haired elements are found today among both Norwegian and Danish populations, these are certainly in a minority, and it would be unrealistic to assume that any large Scandinavian host could be composed exclusively and over a long period of time of dark-haired individuals.<sup>15</sup>

The notion that the colour-difference derived from the weapons used by viking armies has been recently revived by Jón Steffensen. This writer<sup>16</sup> has ingeniously observed from a study of the Old Norse poem, *Hrafnsmál*, that this early tenth-century work refers to the shields on the ships of the Norwegian king, Haraldr hárfagri, as being red (*rauðum skjöldum*), while the shields of his enemies were white (*hvítra skjalda*).<sup>17</sup> Steffensen has furthermore suggested that King Haraldr was aided in his struggle against his Norwegian magnates by a force of Danes, while his enemies consisted, in part, of vikings from the Scottish Isles and Ireland. He concluded that the bearers of the white shields were Hiberno-Norsemen or the "White Foreigners" of early Irish sources, and assumed that the red shields were carried by Haraldr's Danish auxiliaries — the "Black Foreigners".

It is not stated in *Hrafnsmál* or any other source that Haraldr's enemies in Norway were exclusively viking raiders from the Celtic West, or indeed that white shields were actually carried by that faction. Nor are we justified in concluding on the evidence of laconic and extremely stylised verses that Haraldr's enemies carried only white shields. Likewise it is not stated in the poem

<sup>14</sup> Saxo informs us that Ragnarr loðbrók's crews were recruited from the Danish islands, *ibid.*, 305. The essential unity of the Norwegian and Danish coasts on either side of the Skagerrak in the ninth century is suggested by an entry *sub anno* 813 in the *Annales Regni Francorum* where this source refers to Danish kings demanding submission from the Norwegians of Vestfold. R. Rau, *Fontes ad Historiam Regni Francorum aevi Karolini illustrandam* I (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters V, 1955), 102.

<sup>15</sup> G. Turville-Petre, *The Heroic Age of Scandinavia* (1951), 62, has rejected the white- and dark-haired hypothesis, as has also Jón Steffensen, 'A Fragment of Viking History', *Saga-Book* XVIII (1970-1), 59.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 77-8.

<sup>17</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla* I (Íslenzk fornrit XXVI, 1941), 116, cf. 103.

that any Danish allies of the king actually carried red shields.

An argument against accepting this or any other theory concerning the blackness or whiteness of Scandinavian armour rests on our knowledge of the make-up of Germanic armies in the early Middle Ages. Regular uniform or equipment for warriors was unknown at this time, and fighting men in a state of migration fought with whatever clothing they could individually procure and with what weapons they could afford or came to hand. To accept that Norwegian pirates could afford the luxury of carrying nothing but white shields is fanciful in the extreme.

There is finally an argument which calls into question the validity of any explanation which is based on the literal meaning of "black" or "white" in relation to the terms *Dub Gaill* and *Finn Gaill*. If the invaders really did exhibit a conspicuous "whiteness" or "blackness" whether of hair or body-armour, then why was this phenomenon only observed in Ireland? It is true that England experienced attack largely from Danish invaders in the ninth century, and it might be argued that Anglo-Saxon observers lacked experience of "white" Norwegians to appreciate the "blackness" of their own Danish enemies. From the beginning of the tenth century, however, Northumbria witnessed extensive Norwegian colonisation west of the Pennines and the York armies also included from that time Hiberno-Norse "white" followers of the kings of Dublin.<sup>18</sup> The Mercian and West Saxon levies had ample opportunity to observe the contrast between these "black" and "white" warriors, yet no Anglo-Saxon chronicler ever thought fit to record such a colourful distinction, if it existed.

<sup>18</sup> F. T. Wainwright, 'The Submission to Edward the Elder', *History* XXXVII (1952), 124-5; A. Campbell, 'The Northumbrian Kingdom of Raegnald' in 'Two Notes on the Norse Kingdoms in Northumbria', *English Historical Review* LVII (1942), 85-6; F. T. Wainwright, 'Ingimund's Invasion', *EHR* LXIII (1948), 145-69; F. M. Stenton, 'Pre-Conquest Westmorland', in *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England, being the Collected Papers of Frank Merry Stenton* (ed. D. M. Stenton, 1970), 214-23; E. Ekwall, *Scandinavians and Celts in the North-West of England* (1918), 8-9; 17-46; 95-103.

France was repeatedly attacked, particularly on its northern coast and westwards as far south as the Loire, by both Danish and Norwegian raiders. Frankish chroniclers were aware of the separate Danish and Norwegian origins of these pirates, but there is no record of any "blackness" or "whiteness" attributed to either party. On the contrary, Frankish writers frequently applied the term *Nordmanni* indiscriminately to Danes and Norwegians and this suggests that there was no remarkable difference in the physical appearance of these raiders.<sup>19</sup> Islamic observers in Spain were equally colour-blind when it came to describing the vikings. Arabic writers described successive waves of northern barbarians who raided the shores of the Emirate as *al mağūs*.<sup>20</sup> This word was the equivalent of *gentiles*, a loose term applied to the same barbarians by the monks of western Christendom.

It is clear, then, in reopening the problem of the "Black" and "White Foreigners", that the names as translated by Celtic lexicographers appear to be meaningless. So the possibility suggests itself that historians of the early medieval period have been labouring with a false translation. The definitive dictionary of Old and Middle Irish published by the Royal Irish Academy translates *Dubgall* as "black foreigner . . . a Dane" and *Dub-Gen(n)te* as "black heathens".<sup>21</sup> *Finn-gall* is rendered as "a fair-haired foreigner" but the alternative term *Finn-genti* is given as "white heathens" (*sic*).<sup>22</sup> It is curious that one of the earliest English translations of the

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, i, 14 (16): *Dani et ceteri, qui trans Daniam sunt, populi ab istoricis Francorum omnes Nordmanni vocantur*. W. Trillmich and R. Buchner, *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (Quellen z. deut. Gesch. d. Mittelalters XI, 1968), 184.

<sup>20</sup> R. Dozy, *Recherches sur l'histoire et la littérature de l'Espagne pendant le moyen âge* (reprint 1965), II, 267-83. J. Stefánsson, 'The Vikings in Spain from Arabic (Moorish) and Spanish Sources', *Saga-Book VI* (1909), 32. A. Melvinger, *Les premières incursions des Vikings . . .* (1955), 70-85.

<sup>21</sup> M. E. Byrne and M. Joynt, *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*, fasc. *dodéna-dúis* (1960), col. 427.

<sup>22</sup> M. Joynt and E. Knott, *Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*, fasc. iii, *F-fochraic* (1950), col. 143.

terms *Dub Gaill* and *Finn Gaill* has been hitherto overlooked by philologists and historians alike. This translation occurs in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, an early seventeenth-century English rendering by Conla MaGeoghagan of a book of Irish annals, the original Irish of which has not survived. We know enough about the original source to recognise that many of its entries were derived from earlier annals which are extant, notably the *Annals of Ulster*.<sup>23</sup> The passage in which the reference to *Dub Gaill* and *Finn Gaill* occurs belongs to this class of material.<sup>24</sup>

(A.D. 922) *Sittrick o'Himer, prince of the new & old Danes, died.*

This translation preserves exactly the same word-order as a slightly later Irish version found in the *Annals of the Four Masters* (A.D. 925):<sup>25</sup>

Sigtryggr grandson of	<i>Sitriuc ua hIomhair,</i>
Ívarr, lord of the <i>Dub</i>	<i>tighearna Dubhghall 7</i>
<i>Gaill</i> and <i>Finn Gaill</i> , died.	<i>Fionnghall, décc.</i>

All of these annals were ultimately derived from a contemporary entry in the *Annals of Ulster*<sup>26</sup> which runs:

Sigtryggr grandson of	<i>Sitriuc H. Imair, ri Dub Gall</i>
Ívarr, king of the <i>Dub</i>	<i>7 Finn Gall, immatura aetate</i>
<i>Gaill</i> and <i>Finn Gaill</i> ,	<i>mortuus est.</i> <sup>27</sup>
died at an unripe age.	

The *Sittrick* of MaGeoghagan's translation was Sigtryggr, grandson of Ívarr, who ruled as king of York from 921 until 927, and who was married for a brief period to Eadgyth the sister of King Athelstan.<sup>28</sup> The remarkable point

<sup>23</sup> A. P. Smyth, 'The Earliest Irish Annals: their first contemporary entries and the earliest centres of recording', *Roy. Irish Acad., Proc.*, LXII, section C (1972), I, 31-2, 34.

<sup>24</sup> D. Murphy, *The Annals of Clonmacnoise being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408* (1896), 148.

<sup>25</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters* II, 617-8.

<sup>26</sup> Smyth, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 448-9 (sub anno 926).

<sup>28</sup> Coxe, *Rogeri de Wendover Chronica* I, 385-6; Plummer and Earle, *Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel* I, 105 (MS D, sub anno 925, recte 926); D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042* (1968), I, 257.

about the English translation of Sigtryggr's title in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* is that it offers a completely different interpretation of *Dub Gaill* and *Finn Gaill* from what lexicographers have presented to medieval historians over the past century. Sigtryggr was not, in the opinion of Conla MaGeoghagan, king of the "Black and White Foreigners" but of the "New and Old Foreigners" of York and Dublin respectively. MaGeoghagan had a good command of English prose, and he belonged to an aristocratic Gaelic family well versed in the native anti-quarian tradition. His translation of the terms *Finn Gaill* and *Dub Gaill* is therefore worthy of close scrutiny.

The dictionary of the Royal Irish Academy devotes some 7500 words towards elucidating the meanings of *Dub* and *Finn* and their compounds. The primary meanings offered for the adjective *dub* are "black, swarthy, dark", and in a moral sense "gloomy" or "melancholy".<sup>29</sup> It also has an intensive meaning of "great" or "mighty". For *finn*, the compilers offer "white, bright, fair, handsome", and in a moral sense "just" or "true".<sup>30</sup> These meanings are undoubtedly correct, and are attested from numerous textual examples, Latin translations and usage in modern dialect. It is equally true, however, from reading some of the translations<sup>31</sup> of both *dub* and *finn* that other important meanings of these adjectives in the early language have escaped the notice of the linguists.

If we accept for the moment MaGeoghagan's translation of *dub* and *finn* as "new" and "old" respectively, then we should expect to find further examples of this usage in early texts. The most striking instance of *finn* meaning "old" is found in the same compound *Finn-Gaill* but applied in this case to the descendants of the

<sup>29</sup> Byrne and Joynt, *Contributions* . . . fasc. *dodéna-dúus*, col. 425.

<sup>30</sup> Joynt and Knott, *Dictionary*, iii, cols. 141-2.

<sup>31</sup> As for instance "our white fights" (ar mbága finna), *ibid.*, col. 142, ll. 10-1; and "fiery dark snow" (sic) for *imat duibhshnecta teintidi*, Byrne and Joynt, *Contributions* . . . fasc. *dodéna-dúus*, col. 428, ll. 27-8.

old Anglo-Norman families in Tudor Ireland.<sup>32</sup> These people of Norman stock were, literally, the "Old Foreigners" or the "Old" English as opposed to the English proper who had only recently settled in Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The use of *Finn Gaill* in this context is rare, but it is definitely recognised to be synonymous with "Old Foreigners" or *Sen Ghaill* (*Sen* = old; *Sen Ghaill* = "Old Foreigners"), a more usual term for those of Norman Stock.<sup>33</sup>

It may well be argued that MaGeoghagan translated *Finn Gaill* or "Norwegians" as "Old Foreigners" by analogy with the usage of the term in his own day in connection with the "Old" English, and so he does not afford us proof of the meaning of the word in the tenth century. We may certainly accept that the translator was drawing on contemporary usage when he chose to translate *finn* as "old". It is equally clear from the few textual examples that survive that such a meaning was already archaic by the early seventeenth century, which is consistent with its disappearance from the modern language. MaGeoghagan was thoroughly versed in the antiquarian lore of his people,<sup>34</sup> and his use of *finn* meaning "old" is much more likely to stem from his knowledge of a survival of Middle Irish usage than from a passing fashion in the language of his day.

Several other compounds of *finn* in early Irish suggest that the adjective had the meaning "old" in certain contexts. Thus, *finn-scél* is accepted as meaning "a legend", or "saga", (*finn* = old, *scél* = story); and we

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of the Four Masters* V, 1798 (*sub anno* 1583). A comment on the deaths of David and Ellen Roche: "There did not exist of all the Old English (*Fionn-Ghallaibh*) in Ireland, a couple . . . of more renown than they." Cf. Joynt and Knott, *Dictionary*, iii, col. 143, ll. 49-56.

<sup>33</sup> *Fine gaoidel sen ghoill féin* or "The race of the Irish and Old English too". *Fine* ("family" or "nation") may well be a pun on *finn* meaning "ancient", thus giving "The ancient Irish and Old English too". A poem c. 1610 in S. H. O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (1926), I, 467, l. 11.

<sup>34</sup> He "prized and preserved the ancient monuments of our ancestors . . . both lay and ecclesiastical so far as he could find them". One of the Four Masters on MaGeoghagan, *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, viii.

could translate *finn-focal* (*focal* = word) as an "ancient word", and so perhaps a "wise word", which explains why the term is associated in the literature with the usage of poets and with wisdom and knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, *Finn-lebar* (*lebar* = book) could well translate as an "ancient book" or codex.<sup>36</sup>

The conclusion that *Finn Gaill* meant "Old Foreigners" would in itself indicate that the opposite term *Dub Gaill* referred to "New Foreigners". There are also indications that in addition to meaning "black", *dub* might signify "fresh, new" or "young" in Middle Irish. The latter meaning is particularly evident when *dub* is found compounded with personal names. In the Rawlinson collection of Irish genealogies in the Bodleian library, the rare name Dub-Chormac is found, accompanied by the following gloss:<sup>37</sup>

Ab hoc nomine uocatus est ideo quia pater eius obiit nascente illo propter memoriam mortis patris eius uocatus est Dubchormac.

We are not told the name of Dub-Chormac's father, but it is clear, if the passage is to make sense, that it was Cormac, an extremely common personal name in early Ireland, and that the son born at the time of his father's death was called *Dub-Chormac* or *Cormac the Younger* in memory of his father. The name might also mean, but with less probability, *Cormac the Black*. The use of *dub* as a sobriquet in this way, however, was extremely

<sup>35</sup> *Finn-focal* is translated in the *Dictionary* as "fair-word, magic (?) word", Joynt and Knott, iii, col. 142, ll. 82-3.

<sup>36</sup> Joynt and Knott, iii, col. 143, ll. 5-6. There is a rare instance where *finn* is used as a noun and is tentatively translated by the compilers of the *Dictionary* as "an Irishman". This occurs in the phrase *neascoid ni bhfiann* which is glossed as *seanchus na Gaoidhiol*, "The traditional lore of the Irish". It seems clear that the original phrase meant literally "the lore of the ancients" and the glossator has correctly identified the "ancients" in this context as the Irish who were, in contrast to later invaders, the custodians of the *seanchus* or traditional Gaelic learning. Joynt and Knott, iii, col. 143, ll. 77-80.

<sup>37</sup> M. A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (1962), I, 214 (MS. Rawlinson B 502, 150. a. 51, note s).

common and would scarcely have called for an explanatory note from the medieval scribe. Furthermore, as a nickname we should expect the adjective to follow the noun, this being a characteristic feature of the Irish language.<sup>38</sup>

There are also numerous instances of mysterious proper names in medieval Irish, beginning with *Dub* and followed by a personal name in the genitive dual, such as *Dub-dá-Cholmán* or *Dub-dá-Suibne*. A large number of such forms may mean "the Second or Younger of two Colmáns", "the Younger of the two Suibnes" and so on. In this particular case the form is unlikely to mean "the Dark One of two" for the reason that we have no example of this construction used with *finn* ("fair") instead of *dub*. The absence of *finn* in the construction seems to suggest that the persons contrasted were not "fair" or "dark" contemporaries, but *younger* and *older* members of the same name within a family. Thus, there are no recorded examples of *Finn-dá-Cholmán* ("The elder Colmán"), since it is usually the younger individual in any age whose name is distinguished from that of his senior during the lifetime of the latter. In the case of *Dub-dá-Suibne*, we actually find in the Rawlinson genealogies that he had a grandfather who was called simply *Suibne*.<sup>39</sup>

MaGeoghagan's application of "New Foreigners" to the *Dub Gaill* of York and "Old Foreigners" to the *Finn Gaill* of Dublin is strongly supported by the facts of ninth- and tenth-century viking history. These were facts of which MaGeoghagan showed himself to be completely ignorant

<sup>38</sup> As in *Aed Finn* ("Aed the Fair") and *Aed Dub* ("Aed the Dark"), two royal brothers in seventh-century Leinster, *ibid.*, I, 339 (*Book of Leinster*, 316. a. 25-34). Cf. the rare form *Dub-Aed* ("Aed the Young"?) in the *Book of Armagh*. Byrne and Joynt, *Contributions* . . . , fasc. *do dénta dúis*, col. 429, ll. 50-1.

<sup>39</sup> O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, I, 212-3 (MS. Rawlinson B 502, 150. a. 39). It would seem that forms such as *Dub-dá-maige* or *Dub-dá-thuath* ("The Great One of Two Plains or Tribes"?) had become personal names in their own right by the eighth century with little reference to their literal meaning.



elsewhere in his work,<sup>40</sup> and so they could not have influenced his translation. The Dublin Norsemen can well be described as "Old Foreigners" in relation to their Danish rivals. The Norwegians had reached the Scottish Isles by the last decade of the eighth century and may well have been known there as traders long before. The earliest hostile Norwegian attacks on the Western Isles and north-east Ireland were recorded in 795 and these were followed by further devastations in 798.<sup>41</sup> From then on, raiding on the Irish coast continued on a scale that suggests the raiders were operating from permanent bases in the Scottish Isles. Archaeological and place-name evidence from Orkney and Shetland shows that Norse emigrants were settling there by A.D. 800.<sup>42</sup> Already, by the middle of the ninth century, a mixed Gaelic-Norse population had emerged called the "Scandinavian-Gaels" or *Gall-Gaedhel*. The first contemporary reference to this people as early as 856<sup>43</sup> confirms that some Norse and Gaelic communities had already co-existed for a generation at the very least. By 841, the Norsemen were sufficiently sure of their ground in Ireland to establish a permanent and flourishing trading station at Dublin,<sup>44</sup> and by the middle of the century, the Irish had come to recognise the *Finn Gaill* as a fact of life, however unwelcome on their shores.

The Danes, in contrast to the Norwegians, were late starters in the great Scandinavian westward expansion of the ninth century. The *Dub Gaill* can be aptly described as "New Foreigners" in both England and Ireland. Danish raids on England during the first half of the ninth

<sup>40</sup> MaGeoghagan used the word "Danes" to translate *Gaill* and to signify all types of Scandinavian invaders. He was not aware that the majority of his "Danes of Dublin" were in fact Norwegian. *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 150 (sub anno 931), 152 (sub anno 935). Cf. "Danes of Limerick", *ibid.*, 151 (sub anno 933), and it may be noted that Sigtryggr grandson of Ívarr was styled "Prince of the New and Old Danes".

<sup>41</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 274-5 (sub anno 794), 278-9 (sub anno 797).

<sup>42</sup> F. T. Wainwright, 'The Scandinavian Settlement', *The Northern Isles* (ed. F. T. Wainwright, 1962), 126-40.

<sup>43</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 364-5 (sub anno 855), and note 10, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, I, 344-5 (sub anno 840), 346-7 (sub anno 841).

century had been much more sporadic than the sustained and systematic Norwegian onslaught on Ireland.<sup>45</sup> Danish excursions into England at this time seem to have been largely confined to the south coast and their ravages did not seriously affect the political fabric of Anglo-Saxon society until the coming of the "Great Army" in 865. There is evidence to show that this host was related to a similar Danish fleet which sacked Norwegian Dublin in 851, and this Danish presence in the Irish Sea marked the beginning of a new phase in Scandinavian efforts to effect a permanent conquest in both Ireland and England.<sup>46</sup> The record of the Danish attack on Norwegian positions along the Irish coast in 851 contains the first mention in Irish sources of the *Dub Gaill* or so-called "Black Foreigners", and it is also the earliest reference to Danes of any sort in Ireland.<sup>47</sup> The translation of *Dub Gaill* as "New Foreigners" fits in perfectly with their role not as enemies of the Irish, but as conquerors of the Norwegians or "Old Foreigners" who had already been established in the Celtic West for at least half a century.

A significant point about the terms *Dub Gaill* and *Finn Gaill* is that prior to the arrival of the Danish fleet in Irish waters in 851 the Norwegians were invariably referred to by Irish chroniclers merely as "Foreigners" or *Gaill* in a general sense.<sup>48</sup> It was only after the arrival of the Danes that the Norwegians became *Finn Gaill*. This suggests that the terms *finn* and *dub* never signified a physical "blackness" or "whiteness" of the invaders, but were indicative of a distinction of an abstract nature. The Irish would never have needed to introduce such a

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Turville-Petre, *Heroic Age of Scandinavia*, 60, 71-2.

<sup>46</sup> I hope to go into detail on this subject in a forthcoming study of Scandinavian activity in Great Britain and Ireland during the period 840-900.

<sup>47</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 358-9 (*sub anno* 850), 360-1 (*sub-anno* 851). The term used in this instance was *Dub Genniti* or "Black Heathens".

<sup>48</sup> In addition to the word *Gall* "a stranger" or "foreigner" (literally "a Gaul"), Irish writers used other terms to describe the Norsemen, such as *gentiles*, *Nordmanni* and *Lochlannaigh*. A discussion of these terms is not relevant to the present study.

distinction had not the new Danish invaders of 851 been fiercely hostile to the older established Norwegians.

Dublin survived as an independent Scandinavian colony ruled by its own Norse kings until its capture by the Anglo-Normans in 1170.<sup>49</sup> The terms *Finn-Geinnti*/*Dub-Geinnti* or *Finn-Gaill*/*Dub-Gaill* only occur in contemporary Irish records between 851 and 927 with a possible reference to *Dub Gaill* or Danes in 943.<sup>50</sup> None of the scholars who accepted the "white" nature of the Norwegians in a literal sense seem to have thought it curious that this whiteness was only observed by the Irish for seventy-six years; that it only became apparent half a century *after* the so-called "White" Foreigners arrived, and that it ceased either to be obvious or relevant for two and a half centuries before "White" Norwegian rule came to an end.

Although the Norwegians had established themselves in the West by 800, they could not be regarded as "Old Foreigners" until their position had been challenged by the "new" invaders of 851. The "New Foreigners" eventually established themselves at York from 866 onwards, and the remainder of the ninth century was concerned with rivalries between the Danes of York and the Norsemen of Dublin. By the beginning of the tenth century, the Dublin rulers had succeeded in gaining control of York, but this was effectively lost after 927 with the death of Sigtryggr grandson of Ívarr. It is with the death of this king that we meet the last definite mention of *Dub Gaill* in contemporary Irish sources. With the final fall of York to King Eadred of England in 954,<sup>51</sup> the *Dub Gaill* ceased to enjoy an independent political existence within the British Isles. Sigtryggr's successors at Dublin, namely Gothfrith, Óláfr Gothfrithsson, and Óláfr Sigtryggsson, tried with varying degrees of success to snatch the kingship of York from the hands of the powerful House of Wessex. They

<sup>49</sup> M. Dolley, *Anglo-Norman Ireland c. 1100-1318* (1972), 63-6.

<sup>50</sup> This entry of 943 is discussed below. It does not appear to have been entered by the main hand of the oldest manuscript of the *Annals of Ulster*.

<sup>51</sup> Plummer and Earle, *Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel* 1, 113.

failed to retain their Northumbrian conquests, however, and they remained in reality only kings of the "Old Foreigners" of Dublin. Their strenuous attempts to rule the Danes of York is reflected in the title "King of the New Foreigners" which is accorded to their kinsman Blacaire in the *Annals of Ulster* in 943.<sup>52</sup> Blacaire was the son of Gothfrith, that grandson of Ívarr who had been driven out of Northumbria by King Athelstan in 927.<sup>53</sup> Blacaire's two brothers Óláfr Gothfrithsson (†941)<sup>54</sup> and Ragnall Gothfrithsson (†944) had each been accepted for a brief period as king of the Danes of York.

With the failure of the Dublin kings to maintain their grip on York, and with the final submission of the Danes to the English in 954, we find the term *Dub Gaill* has disappeared from contemporary Irish records. Consequently there was no longer any need to distinguish between "Old" and "New" Scandinavians, and we find that the *Finn Gaill* or "Old Foreigners" of Dublin revert in Irish sources to their old name of *Gaill*. Those who remained of the "New Foreigners" had become old in their turn and merged with the Norwegian population, with whom they had become reconciled under the rule of the grandsons of Ívarr.

With the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169, the Irish had once more to distinguish between the Hiberno-Norsemen or "the Foreigners of Dublin" and the aggressive newcomers. The situation was not quite the same as in the ninth century when Norwegians and Danes competed against each other for almost a hundred years. The Normans swiftly destroyed the political autonomy of the Norsemen, whose coastal towns they coveted, and almost all trace of the Scandinavian colonists had vanished within half a century of the Norman invasion. In the

<sup>52</sup> *Annals of Ulster* I, 462-3 (*sub anno* 942). The antiquity of part of this entry is in doubt.

<sup>53</sup> Plummer and Earle, *Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel* I, 107 (MS. E).

<sup>54</sup> Óláfr Gothfrithsson was defeated by King Athelstan at *Brunanburh* while leading the united forces of northern Britain and Norse Dublin.

beginning, however, the scribe of the *Annals of Inisfallen* coined a special word to describe Strongbow's men as he noted their progress in the first generation after their arrival. These Anglo-Norman warriors were called *Gaill Glasa*, or literally, "Green Foreigners", by this writer.<sup>55</sup> The recent editor of the *Annals of Inisfallen* translates the term as "Grey Foreigners", presumably on the assumption that the "grey" referred to Norman chain-mail.<sup>56</sup> The name, however, refers to a whole *class* of invaders, only a small fraction of whom were knights in chain-mail. Just as in the case of the so-called "Black Foreigners" of York, we must seek an alternative meaning for the *Gail Glasa* in the service of Henry II. In the case of *glas*, the *Irish Dictionary* does allow that, in addition to meaning "green, blue or greyish blue", the adjective may also signify "fresh" or "young".<sup>57</sup> It is undoubtedly this latter meaning of *New* or *Fresh Foreigners* that is enshrined in the term *Gaill Glasa* as applied to the followers of Strongbow.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> S. MacAirt, *The Annals of Inisfallen*, MS Rawlinson B 503 (1951), *sub annis* 1171, 1173, 1174, 1175, 1176, 1177, 1190, 1191, 1204, 1206 and 1211.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* The correct words for chain-mail were *iarn*, "iron", *Annals of Ulster* II, 230 (*sub anno* 1199), where only some of De Courcy's adventurers were wearing it, and *lúreach* (Latin *lorica*), *Annals of the Four Masters* II, 1172 (*sub anno* 1169).

<sup>57</sup> M. E. Byrne, *Contributions to an Irish Dictionary*, fasc. G (1955), cols. 95-6.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Cú glas* meaning "an immigrant from overseas" and *glasshine* "the child of an Irishwoman by a foreigner", *ibid.*, col. 96; R. Atkinson, *Ancient Laws of Ireland* (1901), V, 234, 236; *ibid.*, IV, 284, 290. This meaning of *glas* as a "foreigner from overseas" may be compared with the term *Allmurchaibh* as used by the *Annals of Ulster* to describe the newly-arrived Normans in 1171. The latter term is translated "men from across the sea", *Annals of Ulster* II, 164-5.

# STARKAÐR: AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION

By JAMES MILROY

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

*Genesis 6, 4.*

THE night before he was to do battle with nine berserks and kill every one, Starkaðr the Old took up his position under a hill as the wind howled and the snow fell around him.

Then, as though the gentle airs of spring were breathing upon him, he put off his cloak, and set to picking out the fleas. He also cast on the briars a purple mantle which Helga had lately given him, that no clothing might seem to lend him shelter against the raging shafts of hail.

Later, one of the berserks observed him "covered shoulder-high with the snow that showered down". He fought them, all nine together, and slew six without being wounded. Then:

though the remaining three wounded him so hard in seventeen places that most of his bowels gushed out of his belly, he slew them notwithstanding, like their brethren.

The wounded warrior then crawled to a nearby stream, but although he was overcome by thirst he would not drink the water because it was fouled by the blood of one of the slain berserks. Various passers-by now approached and offered to bandage his wounds, but despite his suffering Starkaðr refused them as they were of dishonourable estate, until finally he was accosted by the son of a peasant.

Starkad praised his origin, and pronounced that his calling was also most worthy of honour; for, he said, such men sought a livelihood by honourable traffic in their labour, inasmuch as they knew not of any gain, save what they had earned by the sweat of their brow . . . So the peasant's son approached, replaced the parts of his belly that had been torn away, and bound up with a plait of withies the mass of intestines that had fallen out.<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable example of hardihood is only the most extreme of a series. *Gautreks saga*<sup>2</sup> relates that in one battle Starkaðr sustained two nasty head-wounds, a wound on each flank and a broken collar-bone. Saxo tells of a festering head-wound which proved incurable. After the Brávellir battle Starkaðr's lung hung out of his chest, his neck was cleft to the centre and a finger was missing.<sup>3</sup> In the later *Nornagests þáttur* Sigurðr is said to have inflicted a mighty wound on him, cleaving his jawbone before he (Starkaðr) fled.<sup>4</sup> Saxo further relates that after his berserk fight and the tending of his ghastly wounds, Starkaðr immediately rushed back to the bridal chamber of his ward Helga and attacked her bridegroom for preferring the pleasures of the marriage-bed to assisting in the berserk fight. The bridegroom, Helge, inflicted yet another wound on him.<sup>5</sup>

This mighty endurance of cold and ghastly wounds is clearly one of Starkaðr's most abiding characteristics — one which in some form is discernible in all the sources, no matter how fragmentary. In this characteristic and in the manner in which it is presented, Starkaðr is sharply distinguished from the other great heroes of early Norse legend. Sigurðr, Gunnarr and Helgi are young and

<sup>1</sup> *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus* translated by O. Elton (1894), 240–43. The standard edition is *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder (1931).

<sup>2</sup> *Gautreks saga* is edited by Guðni Jónsson in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* (FSN), III (1954), and the Starkaðr story can be found in ch. 3, 4, 5 and 7. For the wounds see ch. 4. A convenient list of references to Starkaðr in medieval sources is provided by Marlene Ciklamini, 'The Problem of Starkaðr', *Scandinavian Studies* XLIII (1971), 169–88.

<sup>3</sup> Elton, 316. See also *Sögubrot*, FSN I 358.

<sup>4</sup> FSN I 323–4.

<sup>5</sup> Elton, 243–4.

handsome princes riding to battle with light gleaming from their spears, noble in love, war and death. Starkaðr is also a great warrior, but he is ugly and old, grim and solitary, intolerant and quick to chastise. Saxo goes out of his way to emphasise the old warrior's scars and deformities and presents him as being frequently in a ragged and verminous condition — so much so that on one occasion at Ingjald's court he is not recognised, and although deserving the highest honour he is accorded the lowest place at table.<sup>6</sup>

We may think it odd that a figure so violent and unattractive should be so admired by Saxo, and we may wonder why the historian saw fit to devote most of two books and part of a third to his exploits. After all, Starkaðr plays only a minor role in the great Germanic heroic cycles and references to him in extant vernacular sources are for the most part episodic, allusive and fragmentary. Nevertheless, the critical literature on Starkaðr is vast, and despite the small part he plays in Icelandic texts, many of the greatest Germanic scholars appear to have been fascinated by him. In this century alone, Axel Olrik has devoted the best part of a long book to Starkaðr; his story has been carefully examined by Ranisch, Schneider, Herrmann and Jan de Vries; and the French scholar Georges Dumézil has in recent years made two major contributions to Starkaðr scholarship.<sup>7</sup> The older scholars have generally taken a "philological" approach to the Starkaðr sources and have been much concerned with dates and provenances, whether Starkaðr

<sup>6</sup> Elton, 245.

<sup>7</sup> See especially A. Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, II (1910), 9-219; W. Ranisch, *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen* (Palaestra XI, 1900), xcvi-cix; Paul Herrmann, *Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus* (1922), II 410-67, 557-68; Hermann Schneider, *Germanische Heldensage*, II, part 1 (1933), 125-83; W. Ranisch, 'Die Dichtung von Starkad', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* LXXII (1935), 113-28; J. de Vries, 'Die Starkadsage', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* XXXVI (1955), 281-97; G. Dumézil, *Aspects de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens* (1956), 80-93, 107-11, and *The Destiny of the Warrior*, translated by Alf Hiltebeitel (1970), II 82-95; G. Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée*, II (1971). For a summary see G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964), 205-11.



was or was not of giant origin, whether this or that episode is or is not a late addition to the material from folklore or foreign sources, and so on. Dumézil, however, has seen Starkaðr as a figure of great importance in an Indo-European context.<sup>8</sup> To borrow a term from linguistics, he can be seen as the "reflex" of a great warrior figure, parallel to similar figures in other (supposedly related) mythologies. Like Starkaðr, these other heroes are known for the three abominable deeds they are said to have committed, deeds which are offences against the three "functions" of the godhead. I believe that Dumézil's approach is open to methodological objections, but there is little doubt that his work has immensely broadened the scope of studies of this kind. Although little of what I have to say is directly informed by him, this paper is greatly indebted to the stimulus of his work.

### *The sacrifice*

Students of Icelandic literature (as opposed to students of mythology and history) have generally been introduced to Starkaðr through the account in *Gautreks saga*, ch. 7, of Starkaðr's sacrifice of King Víkarr for favourable winds, supposedly the first of the three abominable deeds that

<sup>8</sup> In particular, Dumézil sees the tripartite structure of the Starkaðr story (the three sins) as an inheritance from Indo-European, associating Starkaðr with Indra and Herakles. In *Mythe et Épopée*, he sees Starkaðr as an Óðinn hero, although he had earlier argued (in opposition to other authorities) that he is a Þórr-hero. Although Dumézil pays careful attention to the texts, his arguments about Starkaðr are ultimately based on his own conception of an Indo-European mythic ideology, which has changed in some details over the years (hence his switch from Þórr to Óðinn), and which asks us to accept a hypothesis about the nature and transmission of myths that is clearly parallel to the Indo-European hypothesis in linguistics. Now, it is perfectly clear that this linguistic hypothesis is not equally useful in all aspects of language research (in work on modern urban dialects, for instance, it would be positively misleading). Even if it is reasonable to postulate an Indo-European mythic structure that results in certain constants being maintained in "daughter" mythologies, it is much more difficult than in linguistics to know with any certainty what these structural constants might have been, what kind of borrowings might have taken place from one mythology to another, and what kind of analogies or psychic universals (triads, etc.) might have operated at various times. It is altogether a more shadowy field than linguistics, and "definitive" statements about it must be viewed with caution.

Óðinn (according to Saxo) fated him to commit. The saga relates that in his early life Starkaðr is befriended by a certain Hrosshársgrani, who when Víkarr's fleet is becalmed and Víkarr has been selected by lot as a sacrifice, wakens Starkaðr at midnight and takes him out to a nearby island. On the island twelve seats have been set up, and eleven of them are occupied by gods. Hrosshársgrani takes the twelfth and is hailed as Óðinn. Þórr speaks first and ordains that Starkaðr shall be childless as a punishment for the fact that his grandmother preferred a giant to Þórr. Óðinn then grants him a number of favours — a triple life-time, great wealth, the gift of poetry and so on. But for each favour that Óðinn decrees Þórr pronounces a corresponding curse. In his three life-times, Starkaðr will commit three abominable deeds; although he will have great wealth, he will never be satisfied with it; although he will have victory in every battle, he will also be grievously wounded; although he will compose poetry as fast as he speaks, he will not afterwards remember it; although he will be admired by nobles and princes, he will be detested by the common people. When the assembly disperses, Hrosshársgrani asks Starkaðr to send King Víkarr to him in return for the gifts conferred on him. He gives Starkaðr a spear (which will appear to be a reed stalk), and next morning Starkaðr sets up a gallows, using soft calf-gut for a noose. The king is persuaded to go through with what seems to be a mock ceremony, but as Starkaðr utters the words "Now give I thee to Óðinn,"

the reed stalk turned into a spear which went straight through the king . . . the calf guts turned into strong withy, the branch shot up with the king into the foliage and there he died.<sup>9</sup>

This passage contains much that is typical of saga narrative at its best — the vivid dramatisation, the sense of mystery, foreboding and malignant power — and it

<sup>9</sup> *Gautreks saga*, translated by Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1968), 40.

is not therefore surprising that much of the research has been in a sense dominated by this subject-matter. Scholars have been greatly exercised by the enmity between Óðinn and Þórr that is described here and have sought to categorise Starkaðr as a "Þórr-hero" or an "Óðinn-hero". The convenient way in which the supposed functions of the gods are here set out has led to the assumption that Starkaðr is, among other things, the champion of the aristocratic class, although Saxo, I believe, gives us reason to doubt this. But it is the three abominable deeds that have been of greatest interest. Saxo in truth, once he has stated that Óðinn fated Starkaðr to perform these three crimes, pays no further attention to the malignant influence of the god and does not identify the crimes beyond the first. Scholars have generally been satisfied that the murder of Olo in Saxo's Book VIII is the third crime and de Vries and Dumézil in particular have tried hard to identify the second.<sup>10</sup> I do not think that an approach based on the data of the *Gautreks saga* account is the best way to understand the internal logic of the Starkaðr figure and his legend.

### *The abominable deeds*

Saxo's account of the destiny pronounced on Starkaðr is much more perfunctory than that of the saga, and as we have seen, the abominable deeds are not clearly identified.

Odin once wished to slay Wikar by a grievous death; but loth to do the deed openly, he graced Starkad, who was already remarkable for his extraordinary size, not only with bravery, but also with skill in the composing of spells, that he might the more readily use his services to accomplish the destruction of the king. For the same reason he also endowed him with

<sup>10</sup> De Vries argues that the second sin is Starkaðr's slaughter of the sons of Swerting at the banquet in Ingjald's court (*op. cit.*, 1955), whereas Dumézil believes that it is his flight from battle in Saxo's Book VII (Elton, 274). For a discussion of de Vries's disagreement with him, see Dumézil (1956), 107-11. Turville-Petre (1964), 205-11, sides with de Vries.

three spans of mortal life, that he might be able to commit in them as many abominable deeds.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, Saxo knew a forerunner of *Gautreks saga* in which the gifts conferred by Óðinn were known, but not the agency of Þórr in the warrior's destiny. The historian was interested, not in divine pronouncements or tripartite structure, but in the exemplary qualities of the hero's warlike career. And this he recounts at great length.

Starkaðr first appears as a retainer at Frode's court, whence he departs on giant-killing campaigns in Russia, Ireland, Byzantium and elsewhere, before returning to the court of Ingjald (Ingellus), Frode's son and successor. Here he is so disgusted by Ingjald's gluttony and degeneracy that he leaves again. Saxo's main attention in Book VI is given to the stories of Helga (Ingjald's sister) and of Ingjald himself. Finding Helga in the arms of a "low-born goldsmith", Starkaðr punishes the man by castrating him, and is equally ready at a later stage to punish Helga's bridegroom for failing to support him in his fight against the nine berserks. Subsequently, he urges Ingjald on against his father's slayers, whom, in his degeneracy, the young king is entertaining at court, and the sons of Swerting are slain at the banquet table. Starkaðr plays little part in Saxo's Book VII, his main action being to flee from the field of battle when fighting for a certain Swedish king. In Book VIII his chief exploit is the murder of the cruel king Olo in his bath. He does this for a hundred and twenty marks of gold, money which he later uses to purchase his own death, thinking it shameful to die in bed.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Elton, 226.

<sup>12</sup> Elton, 323-4. The most celebrated example in anthropological literature of a similar refusal to let death take one unawares is that of the Dinka Spear-Masters who, when they reached old age, were buried alive and suffocated. See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (1966), 82-5, and for other examples L. W. Simmons, *The Role of the Aged in Primitive Society* (1945), 229-41. It is perhaps not accidental that the early part of *Gautreks saga* tells the story of a strange family who leap over a cliff when unsupportable events take place in their lives. For a discussion of this see my 'The story of Ætternisstapi in *Gautreks saga*', *Saga-Book* XVII (1966-69), 206-23.

De Vries suggested that the unidentified crime of Starkaðr is the slaughter of the sons of Swerting at Ingjald's court — a breach of the rules of hospitality, whereas Dumézil sees his flight from the field of battle in Book VII (an uncharacteristic act) as the missing part of the triad. Dumézil, I think, bases his conclusion more on his own conception of the structure of the Indo-European godhead than on the internal logic of the Scandinavian story. As his approach is, and must remain, a theoretical construct, we may propose different approaches if we wish. It is obvious that we — or for that matter the medieval historian, fabulist or saga-writer — are free to interpret various of Starkaðr's violent deeds as crimes according to our own tastes and preconceptions. It is not difficult to add to the list if we are shocked by his mutilation of the goldsmith or by the savage punishments he inflicts on court entertainers — no matter how approvingly Saxo may view these deeds. And the difficulty that scholars have had in identifying the missing crime may well indicate that it was never entirely clear what the three crimes were. It is open to us to suggest that the triadic structure of Starkaðr's career, far from being an original and essential part of the legend, is a late imposition by a story-teller with some sophistication and structural sense, anxious to explain the apparent ubiquity and longevity of the hero and reduce the story's variety to some order. Triadic structure is not after all confined to Dumézil's conception of the Indo-European godhead, but is a universal tendency of epic and folk-literature,<sup>13</sup> and is, among other things, a literary device. The reader may care to work out for himself whether triadic structures can be discerned in the

<sup>13</sup> See A. Olrik's classic study, 'Epische Gesetze der Volksdichtung', *ZDA LI* (1909), 1-12, translated by Jeanne P. Steager in A. Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (1965), 129-41. For a fine example of a non-Indo-European myth that fairly bristles with triads, see C. Lévi-Strauss, 'La Geste d'Asdiwal', *École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses* (1958-9), 3-43, available in a translation by N. Mann, 'The Story of Asdiwal', in E. Leach (ed.), *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (1967), 1-47.

deeds of the heroes of *Íslendingasögur* — Grettir or Gísli for example.

Dumézil's theory that Starkaðr is a "reflex" of an Indo-European structure is hard to find particularly illuminating. Certainly, we can find a triad of faults or crimes in stories where it is difficult to argue convincingly that there is a direct descent from Indo-European mythic ideology. The fault of Gawain in the highly Christian Middle English poem can, for example, be seen as tripartite: an offence against the sacred in Gawain's supposed failure to confess his acceptance of the girdle, an offence against the second (martial) function in flinching from the Green Knight's blow, and an offence against the third function (sexual or venal) in accepting the girdle at all.<sup>14</sup> The triad is so clearly a universal of myth, folklore and literature that it may seem unnecessary or unprofitable to trace it in a given case to a specifically Indo-European mythic ideology, not because Dumézil's theory of the Indo-European divinity is necessarily wrong, but because it does not satisfactorily explain the structural features of a given story. In view of the fact that it is difficult to identify three, and only three, sins in the story of Starkaðr, it may well be that the triadic structure is imposed, or at least not essential to the "message" of the story and to its importance in Northern literature.

### *The terrible wounds*

Starkaðr's main attribute is clearly his physical strength — an attribute that he has in common with many great mythic heroes — Samson, Hercules, Cúchulainn, Beowulf, and in Icelandic literature, Grettir. In most heroes, particularly those of the great heroic cycles, Sigurðr and the others, the emphasis is on active strength manifested

<sup>14</sup> For discussions of Gawain's "fault" see D. Farley-Hills, 'Gawain's Fault in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Review of English Studies*, N.S. XIV (1963), 124-31, and J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1965), especially 122-43.

in the mighty exploits they perform against great adversaries. But essential to Starkaðr is the passive aspect of his strength — his enormous capacity to endure privation, discomfort and terrible wounds. This capacity, it seems to me, has a flamboyance and mythic quality that puts it in a different world from the more restrained sufferings of classical heroes (Odysseus, for example), and is most like the Irish.

Axel Olrik long ago pointed out that the episode of Starkaðr in the snow was closely paralleled in the Irish *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, in which Cúchulainn is found naked in the snow examining his shirt, just before a battle. Van Hamel later commented on parallels between Starkaðr's exposure and the self-imposed hardships of Irish saints, who used fasting and prolonged exposure to cold as a means of achieving spiritual or supernatural strengthening.<sup>15</sup> Icelandic heroes such as Gísli and Grettir are also celebrated, not only for their active prowess, but also for the privations they undergo. But whereas the rigours of these Icelanders are well motivated in the stories in which they take part, the mythic stories are fantastic and lack clear motivation. That is the best indication that they are indeed mythic and have a chiefly exemplary function. I do not believe that such a poorly motivated action would be preserved in the Starkaðr story if it did not carry within it an important message about the meaning of the Starkaðr figure.

Like Starkaðr, Cúchulainn and the Irish heroes are repeatedly subject to the most ghastly injuries. Of Cúchulainn's combat with Ferdia it is said:

If ever birds in flight could pass through men's bodies they  
could have passed through those bodies that day and brought

<sup>15</sup> A Olrik, *op. cit.*, 66 (see also the discussion by Paul Herrmann, *op. cit.* 449–54); A. G. van Hamel, 'Óðinn hanging on the tree', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* VII (1932–3), 260–88, especially 275–83. A similar story is told of Ketill Hœingr in *FSN* II 175. Ketill sits by a hill (*Arhaugr*), but it is specified that this hill is worshipped. Hope of contact with the spiritual world seems to be suggested.

bits of blood and meat with them out into the thickening air through the wounds and gashes.

And again:

(they) began hacking and hewing and striking and destroying, and cutting bits and pieces the size of baby's (*sic*) heads from each other's shoulders and backs and flanks.<sup>16</sup>

The language of these extracts is much more vivid than that of the historian of the Danes, but the motifs and their mythic functions are the same — that we shall know that these were indeed “mighty men that were of old, men of renown”.

Starkaðr's refusal to have his wounds treated is also paralleled, but with much greater flamboyance, in the *Táin*.

The hero Cethern kills many men in battle, but returns “with his guts around his feet”. A healer is called. He examines Cethern and tells him he will not survive.

“Then neither will you!” Cethern cried, and struck him with his fist, and his brains splashed over his ears. He killed fifty healers, some say, in the same way, though others say he killed only fifteen.

The healer Fingin then examines him “from a distance” and placates him by identifying the origin of his many horrible wounds (which are described in detail). Then he gives him a choice: “either to treat his sickness for a year and live out his life's span, or get enough strength quickly, in three days and nights, to fit him to fight his present enemies”. Cethern chooses the second course, so he is put to sleep day and night in bone marrow to absorb the strength from it, and because his ribs are gone, he is strapped up with a chariot frame which is “bound around his belly”. Thereupon he attacks the armies of Connacht and wreaks havoc among them till he falls.<sup>17</sup>

Here, as in the Starkaðr story, the motif of the wounds

<sup>16</sup> *The Táin*, translated by Thomas Kinsella (1970), 189, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Kinsella, 207–13.



and their relief exemplifies the warrior's endurance and magnifies his fortitude, but the literary treatment is different. Whereas the Irish story is pushed to a fantastic and humorous extreme apparently for its own sake, the tending of Starkaðr's wounds is made into a little allegory of the social order, which has, I believe, the greatest importance for understanding the Starkaðr legend. If we assume, by generalising from the *Gautreks saga* story, that Starkaðr is an Óðinn-hero and therefore a type of the warrior aristocrat, we may see in this episode further proof of his intolerance of the "common people". But if we resist the temptation to put Starkaðr into these pigeon-holes, we may give the story a more careful and different reading.

Starkaðr first refuses to have his wounds bound up by a "sergeant" (*preconis*) — apparently a kind of bailiff or tax-gatherer — who, according to Starkaðr, follows "the calling of a hanger-on". The second man who approaches turns out to be married to a bondservant, and a woman who then offers her help is herself a bondservant. Finally Starkaðr allows the son of a peasant to tend him because such a man earns his living by honest toil. Apparently, it is not humble social status that Starkaðr particularly condemns, but rather the absence of the puritan virtues of independence and self-respect. This conclusion is entirely consistent with other parts of the story. Starkaðr is throughout an outspoken critic of prince and pauper alike, and gives respect only when it is due to the person, regardless of social status.

Ingjald . . . scanned him closely; and, when he noticed that he neither looked cheerfully about, nor paid him the respect of rising, saw by the sternness written on his brow that it was Starkad.<sup>18</sup>

Ingjald is condemned for his unmanliness in failing to avenge his father, and for the degenerate luxury of his

<sup>18</sup> Elton, 245.

court in which he actually entertains his father's slayers. The "Irish" king Hugleicus, in an episode that foreshadows in some respects the Ingjald episode, is similarly condemned for degeneracy and also for meanness. The mimes and jugglers, the goldsmiths and the cooks on whom Starkaðr visits such unmanly punishments are punished not because they belong to the lower social orders, but because they are hangers-on at these courts hoping to gain approval by pandering to their superiors rather than by honest toil. These stories make much the same kind of social and moral criticism as that of the tending of the wounds — not, I think, the simple assertion of the Óðinn-inspired aristocratic temper that it has often been taken to be. The various stories told about Starkaðr assert for the most part the virtues of self-reliance and self-respect, physical strength and endurance — virtues which are not especially the characteristics of prince and noble, but which are more obviously those of the pioneer, the working farmer and the common soldier.

### *The supernatural birth*

The Starkaðr story is pre-eminently a celebration of these simple virtues as they are put to the test in situations of physical rigour, and a criticism of over-civilisation, the effete and luxurious. And it is the type of story that can be reasonably described as a myth.<sup>19</sup>

First, it is clear that, whatever historical associations the story may have, its events are played out on a level far removed from the humdrum and the realistic.

<sup>19</sup> No very specific or technical sense of *myth* is here intended, but it is worth emphasising in the context of Norse studies that a myth does not have to be about figures such as Óðinn and Þórr who are recognised by Snorri and by modern scholars as pagan "gods". The Starkaðr story is mythic in that it deals with mysteries of life and death, the relation between the natural and the preternatural, the order of society and the problem of origins, on a plane far removed from the "realistic". For varying approaches to myth, see e.g., the work of M. Éliade, especially *Myth and Reality* (1963), John MacQueen, *Allegory* (1970), 1 ff., Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and other Essays* (1969), and the same author's *Lévi-Strauss* (1970), especially 54–82.

Although Saxo has been at pains to rationalise and play down supernatural intervention, it is not necessary to refer to his summarised version of the Víkarr sacrifice to demonstrate that the story is mythic and Starkaðr a figure of myth. Obviously, Starkaðr's mighty endurance is supernatural in the sense that no mere human hero could be presented as enduring so much and surviving so miraculously. In his martial exploits too, he is larger than life. The Icelandic saga hero in the less "historical" part of his biography may, like Starkaðr, slay berserks, but he is not a giant-killer as Starkaðr is. Nor does he have the old hero's miraculous abilities to recover from wounds and to travel long distances<sup>20</sup> in an instant in order to be where he is needed, nor his direct association with gods, nor his supernatural origin. Starkaðr's attributes of character and the circumstances of his career are all exaggerated, idealised and exemplary to a degree that is not possible in life or in the presentation of any story (e.g. one of the *Íslendingasögur*) that purports to be "true". The meaning they have is the kind of meaning we associate with myth.

Most interesting and most important in this respect are the divergent accounts of Starkaðr's supernatural origin.<sup>21</sup> Saxo relates that Starkaðr is said to have been born in the country that borders Sweden to the east, but adds that he finds the details of his birth "flatly incredible". These tell that he was born with an extraordinary number of hands, four of which Þórr tore off, reducing his body to a more natural appearance. The verse of *Gautreks saga* relates how the young men at Uppsala claim to see on Starkaðr the giant traces of the eight hands that Þórr "north of the mountain" tore from "the slayer of Hergrímr". The prose accounts of *Heiðreks saga* and *Gautreks saga* tell a somewhat different story.

<sup>20</sup> Elton, 244: "So he accomplished a swift and headlong journey, as though at a single breath, by a short and speedy track . . ."

<sup>21</sup> Elton, 224-5; *Gautreks saga*, ch. 3 and 7; C. Tolkien, *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (1960), 66-7.

According to *Heiðreks saga*, Qgn Álfasprengir, wife of the eight-armed giant Starkaðr Áludrengr, was abducted from Jötunheimr by a certain Hergrímr, who begot on her a son. Starkaðr returned and killed Hergrímr, but Qgn ran herself through with a sword because she did not want Starkaðr. Then Starkaðr abducted the daughter of King Álfr from Álfheimr, but Þórr killed Starkaðr. This Starkaðr Áludrengr is of course the grandfather of our Starkaðr, and scholars have presumed that he, not the "younger" Starkaðr, is the "slayer of Hergrímr" referred to in the verse of *Gautreks saga*. The *Gautreks saga* prose supplies the name of Starkaðr's father and proceeds much in the manner of a factual saga genealogy — "There was a man called Stórvirk, the son of Starkaðr Áludrengr . . ." The elder Starkaðr was a "very wise" giant who abducted from Álfheimr Álfhildr the daughter of King Álfr. Þórr slew Starkaðr and returned Álfhildr to her father, but not before she had become pregnant. Her son was Stórvirk, who was "taller and stronger than other men" but "he had black hair". Stórvirk was a great viking in the service of Haraldr of Agðir. He too abducted a woman (Unnr, daughter of Freki), and their son was our hero, Starkaðr.

Scholars have been much concerned to explain away divergences in detail between these accounts and in particular to decide whether in the "original" Starkaðr (or his grandfather) was slain by Þórr or merely mutilated. It is not vitally important for my purpose to discriminate in this way. Myth and folklore do not, like history, try to establish factually accurate accounts of events, but may present accounts which seem contradictory in detail but similar in their meaning or "message".<sup>22</sup> It is,

<sup>22</sup> The account of the creation of mankind exists in two contradictory versions in Snorri's creation myth (*Edda*, ed. Jón Helgason and Anne Holtsmark, 1968, 7-11). First, it is recounted that the first man and woman grow from under the arm of the first being, Ymir, while the frost-giants grow from his legs. The gods, whose ancestor is released from ice-blocks licked by the cow Auðhumla, slay Ymir and the frost-giants, form the world from Ymir's body, and then create

however, clear that just as modern scholars have tried to rationalise the accounts and discriminate between them, so the medieval writers, having historical and antiquarian interests, also rationalised as far as they could without completely obscuring the meaning of the birth-story in relation to Starkaðr's career. Saxo, at any rate, is quite frank about his incredulity. How could anyone believe that Starkaðr had several arms and that Þórr tore some of them off? The writers of Icelandic prose sources have been less frank. They have preferred to accept or invent accounts in which supernatural agencies are put at some distance from Starkaðr, and which explain at the same time why Starkaðr is called "Stórvirksson" and why his grandfather is called "Hergrímsbani". The removal of the arms, being quite unbelievable, is replaced by the slaying of Starkaðr Áludrengr by Þórr. The verse of *Gautreks saga*, which is certainly older than the prose at this point, preserves and draws attention to the inconsistency. According to it, the giant marks of the eight arms that Þórr tore from Hergrímsbani can still be seen on our hero Starkaðr.<sup>23</sup> The account of Þórr's mutilation of Starkaðr I or II is less likely than the killing of Starkaðr I to have been supplied at a late stage

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human beings from trees on the sea-shore. On duplication in Genesis see Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth* (1969), 7-23, and consider his words from 7-8: "It is common to all mythological systems that all important stories recur in several different versions. Man is created in Genesis (i. 27) and then he is created all over again (ii. 7). And, as if the first two men were not enough, we also have Noah in chapter viii. Likewise, in the New Testament, why must there be four gospels each telling the 'same' story yet sometimes flatly contradictory on details of fact?" Dr Leach goes on to argue that this redundancy enables the believer to feel that "even when the details vary, each alternative version of a myth confirms his understanding and reinforces the essential meaning of all the others". There is obviously a parallelism between cosmogonic myths and myths of birth. M. Eliade points out (*op. cit.*, 21-4) that birth myths and genealogies "continue and complete the cosmogonic myth" and cites instances (from Tibet, India and Polynesia) where the histories of great families open by rehearsing the birth of the Cosmos. The birth of Oedipus is seen by some as a form of the creation myth (Leach, *op. cit.*, 18).

<sup>23</sup> Sjá þykkjast þeir á sjálfum mér  
jötunkuml átta handa  
er Hlórríði fyr hamar norðan  
Hergrímsbana höndum rænti.

*Gautreks saga*, ch. 7. The saga does not make it clear that Hergrímsbani is not the younger Starkaðr.

in the tradition, since it is more intrinsically memorable and is the *lectio difficilior*.<sup>24</sup>

But myths notoriously deal in duplications and inconsistencies. It is not these that matter, but the propositions underlying the myth. It may be that these will be found to be constant in the different sources. The myth of Starkaðr's origin, it is clear, makes certain propositions about his nature. Starkaðr is a supernatural figure, either a giant or the offspring of giants — it does not matter which. He is a figure of great strength and prowess since his own name and those of the figures involved in his origin (Stórvirkr, Hergrímr, Freki) personify strength and ferocity. Likewise, the multiple arms, whatever other meanings they may have, symbolise greater than normal strength. The sinister aspects of his career are foreshadowed in his giant origin,<sup>25</sup> but the sources suggest that he is the offspring of the powers of light (elves: Álfhildr is from Álfheimr) and of darkness (giants) or of order and disorder. The birth-story mediates between the good and bad in Starkaðr's nature, as it is shown (often ambiguously) in the later account of his career. But the most meaningful myth in the birth-story — in that it marks Starkaðr as different from many other mythic heroes of mixed parentage — is the motif of the multiple arms and their removal. The superfluity of limbs is at the same time an asset and a

<sup>24</sup> cf. Dumézil, *Aspects de la fonction guerrière* (1956), 91-2: "On voit bien comment un sagamaðr a pu substituer au façonnage humain d'un géant par Þórr le simple meurtre de ce géant: on comprendrait moins aisément l'opération inverse: le récit de Saxo est la *lectio difficilior*."

<sup>25</sup> Particularly interesting is the place of Þórr in these stories. The prose of *Gautreks saga*, ch. 7, has seized on Starkaðr's grandmother's preference for a giant rather than Asapórr, and has made Þórr's jealousy the motive for his enmity to Starkaðr in the forest-scene. There are signs that suggest that Starkaðr may have been a blood-relation of Þórr. The word *stórvirkr* is frequently used of the deeds of Þórr. See *Edda*, 29, where it is related that no one is so learned that he can relate all the mighty deeds (*stórvirki*) of Þórr, and *Edda*, 55: *sva miklar sögur sem menn hafa gort um stórvirki hans*. The enmity of Þórr towards Starkaðr may be explained as "Freudian" jealousy of father of son, which is common enough in myth and folklore. On the power of light and darkness in Starkaðr's origin cf. *Edda* 21: *Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr; þar byggvir fólk þat er Liósálfar heita, en Dökkálfar búa niðri í iðrðu . . . Liósálfar eru fegri en sól sýnum . . .*

liability, and Þórr's removal of them is at the same time a mutilation and a cure. The motif emphasises Starkaðr's sinister and monstrous nature and his great strength, but it also foreshadows a specific and recurrent aspect of his career — his susceptibility to terrible wounds. These primal wounds are the most terrible wounds of all, the paradigm of the others that follow. Whether the birth-stories that have survived are "original", or whether they were added late as an introduction to fit the rest of the story, they all say much the same things. In that they assert basic propositions about Starkaðr's nature, they are not only consistent with the rest of the story, they actually help us to interpret its message.

### *The Starkaðr story in literary history*

It was suggested above that it is difficult to explain why our seemingly unattractive hero should have appealed so much to Saxo and to the scholars. There are of course obvious reasons why Saxo should have been interested in him as a model of the warrior of old and an example to the society of his own day, which he considered decadent. Olrik, also a Dane, was interested in Starkaðr's importance in Danish history and cultural background. But more important than these contingent reasons is, I think, the power of what I have called the myth of Starkaðr, which as we have seen is ambivalent in many ways and presents in memorable form certain paradoxes of the warrior-figure. Its importance has little to do with the true history of Denmark.

There is clearly a reasonable sense in which we may speak of the Starkaðr story as a myth or as having that kind of coherence that is best understood on a mythic

level. We have seen that it is inspired by the supernatural and that the birth-story in particular (like other "creation" stories) tries to mediate between human and supernatural, explaining man's origin (or the hero's origin), and therefore his nature, as partly human and partly divine. The Starkaðr story can be seen as a myth of the warrior, its function to define the warrior's place in society. But there is a sense in which the story as we know it, while having mythic qualities, is both less than and more than a myth.

Analysis of myth should work best when the myth is found in oral form in an illiterate society, where its function is to carry messages that define the moral, social and political structure of such a society. As such, it should have within it (according to some) clear and unambiguous messages that can be correctly deciphered by the anthropologist with direct access to the society concerned.<sup>26</sup> I find it hard to accept that any form of language in use can be totally unambiguous, never subject to differing interpretations. But it is clear that the Starkaðr story does not reach us as a "pure" oral myth from an illiterate culture, but as a literary relic preserved in differing sources. The minds of highly literate men with historical and antiquarian leanings have intervened between the myth and us, so that its original "message" (if we believe it ever had a clear message) has been variously interpreted, rationalised and obscured. So Saxo can record the cowardice on one occasion of this hero of perfect courage (although Saxo excuses it), and the late *Nornagests þáttr* presents him as an ugly Goliath who is put to flight by Sigurðr. When he appears detached from his origins in the Sigurðr-Helgi material, the significance of his own story has been forgotten, and he has become yet another monster for these princely heroes

<sup>26</sup> An example of myth-analysis of this kind, working with almost direct access to the society concerned (if not *quite* direct) is the study by Lévi-Strauss cited in note 13 above. On the general problem see E. Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (1970), 54 ff.



to defeat. This ambivalence, this susceptibility to differing and even opposite interpretations, is one of the things that gives to the Starkaðr story its power and influence as a *literary* myth, or to put it another way, as a set of data that underlie and give inspiration to the later literature.

For there is no doubt that Starkaðr in his character and in his exploits personifies many of the qualities that we have come to associate with heroes of *Íslendingasögur*. The conflict between duty to god and man — the problem posed by the Víkarr sacrifice — is common enough in the sagas, discernible even in the highly realistic *Hrafnkels saga*. The curses of Glámr on Grettir are like those of Þórr on Starkaðr (although I would not like to say which came first). The desperate wounds that are graphically described in the heroic last stands of men like Gísli find their prototype in the wounds of Starkaðr, and the hero of great physical strength and endurance who stands in some way apart from society (exemplified by Grettir) obviously bears a close similarity to him, as does the powerful and irascible Egill Skallagrímsson.

The similarities between the actions of the old warrior and those of the saga hero may indeed seem so obvious and so commonplace that the reader may think the point is not worth making. But it has been argued that the conflicts in the Nibelung story have inspired episodes in the sagas, though the milieu of these ancient kings is in some ways much more unlike that of the sagas than is the story of Starkaðr.<sup>27</sup> The eddaic heroes are the great princes of olden times living in a literary world of wealth and grandeur. Starkaðr, like the Icelandic farmer, is not of royal lineage and typifies the commoner. His ideals, as he expresses them in criticism of luxury and slavery alike, are those of the fiercely independent

<sup>27</sup> Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga* (1967), 65-93, and works referred to there.

freeman. He may not be finely attired, he may not be wealthy or privileged, but he is staunch and resolute, bold and self-reliant — equal to or better than kings. What could be more like the ethic of the saga? The stories of ancient princes, idealised and majestic, could not in themselves provide a model for the sagas. The story of Starkaðr could. This, for me, is its importance.

## SACRAL KINGSHIP IN ANCIENT SCANDINAVIA A REVIEW OF SOME RECENT WRITINGS

By R. W. McTURK

A PASSAGE frequently quoted in modern discussions of early Scandinavian kingship is that in which Gustav Vasa, according to Peder Swart's *Krönika*, complained in 1527 of the inordinate demands made by his people on himself as their king.

If they get no rain [he said], they blame me; if they get no sunshine, they do likewise. If hard times befall them — whether hunger, or pestilence, or whatever it may be — I always have to take the blame for it. It is as if they did not realize that I am a human being, and no god.

This statement, when cited specifically in a context of *sacral* kingship, as it so often seems to be,<sup>1</sup> raises the question of whether the expressions “sacral kingship” and “divine kingship” are to be equated semantically; of whether, in order to qualify as sacral, a king must be regarded by his people as a god, or at least as in some way divinely superhuman. Professor Turville-Petre, in his *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964), uses the word “divine” rather than “sacral” with reference to kings and kingship, even though his chapter on this subject<sup>2</sup> is based to a large extent on the work of scholars writing for the most part in German and the Scandinavian languages, and generally using expressions such as

<sup>1</sup> The passage in question, which is here quoted from A. Olrik and H. Ellekilde, *Nordens Gudeverden* (II, 1951), 871, has been referred to by e.g., Ivar Lindquist, ‘Kungadömet i hednatidens Sverige’, *Festskrift till Jöran Sahlgren* (1944), 221–34 (233); Otto Höfler, ‘Der Sakralcharacter des germanischen Königtums’, *Das Königtum. Seine geistigen und rechtlichen Grundlagen. Mainauvorträge 1954* (1956), 75–104 (88–9); Erik Gunnes, *Kongens ære. Kongemakt og kirke i ‘En tale mot biskopene’* (1971), 32.

<sup>2</sup> E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (1964), ch. ix, ‘The Divine Kings’, 190–5.

*Sakralkönigtum*<sup>3</sup> on the one hand, and *sakralkongedømme*,<sup>4</sup> *det sakrala kungadömet*<sup>5</sup> on the other. Turville-Petre also writes, in a review of Walter Baetke's *Yngvi und die Ynglinger. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"* (1964)<sup>6</sup> that Baetke's object in the book is

to challenge the view, too easily accepted by many, that Germanic kings, and particularly those of Scandinavia, were in some way divine, either incorporating a god, descending from him or representing him, forming a bridge between the human and the divine worlds.<sup>7</sup>

Ursula Dronke, in a review of the same book, writes that in it "Professor Baetke attempts to dispel the divinity that hedges the Germanic king", though she also regards it as an attack on "the mystique of Germanic sacral kingship".<sup>8</sup> Lee M. Hollander, also reviewing Baetke, uses the expression "sacral kingship" consistently, and claims that "we can speak of a sacral kingship only if the royal person, dead or alive, is the object of a cult, if sacrifices are offered up to him, if he is worshipped as a god".<sup>9</sup>

Taken on their own, these quotations might give the impression that the terms "sacral" and "divine" were synonymous when applied to kings and kingship, in a Germanic context at least, and that either word could be used in a discussion of the concept of (*germanisches*)

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. the title of Otto Höfler's *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum I* (1952), referred to by Turville-Petre (1964), 326.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 142 of Anne Holtsmark's review of Höfler (1952) in *Maal og Minne* (1953), 142-8, referred to by Turville-Petre (1964), 326.

<sup>5</sup> See p. 34 of Otto v. Friesen, 'Har det nordiska kungadömet sakralt ursprung?' *Saga och sed* (1932-4), 15-34, referred to by Turville-Petre (1964), 326.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Baetke, *Yngvi und die Ynglinger. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über das nordische "Sakralkönigtum"* (Sitzungsberichte der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Band 109. Heft 3, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> See p. 352 of Turville-Petre's review of Baetke (1964) in *JEGP* LXV (1966), 352-5.

<sup>8</sup> See p. 153 of Ursula Dronke's review of Baetke (1964) in *Scandinavica* IV (1965), 153-5.

<sup>9</sup> See pp. 512-3 of Lee M. Hollander's review of Baetke (1964) in *Speculum* XLII (1967), 511-3.

*Sakralkönigtum* in English. The meaning of the English word "sacral", however, is by no means always satisfactorily conveyed by a simple substitution for it of the word "divine", and this may be illustrated by another example of its use in a Germanic and Scandinavian context. In the first of his six Ford lectures on *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (published in 1971), in a passage which forms a convenient starting-point for the present discussion in more than one respect, Professor Wallace-Hadrill makes the following remarks:

Roman and Germanic paganism were not antipathetic. As in Scandinavia so within the Empire, kings without being priests could link the gods with those they ruled; they could appease and placate the gods and be deposed in sacrificial propitiation when things went wrong. The kings of the migrating Germans, like those of the Scandinavians, were sacral, by which we mean that they were cult-kings, representing the moral lives and domestic ideals of their people, incapsulating good luck. The old Scandinavian kings were certainly not thought to be descended from the gods or indeed to have a dynastic right to rule; but movement and victory and contact with Rome somehow changed this for the continental Germanic kings, who came to feel that there was something god-like in them, whether through association in office or through descent.<sup>10</sup>

It is not altogether clear to me what is meant by the expression "cult-kings", but I think it is highly unlikely that Wallace-Hadrill would be willing to substitute the word "divine" for the word "sacral" in this passage. Taken out of context, the expression "cult-kings", as I understand it, could reasonably be expected to refer either to kings who are themselves objects of worship, or to kings who have an important part to play in the conduct of worship and whose functions are comparable, if not identical, with those of priest-kings. Neither of these two meanings seems to be the one intended here,

<sup>10</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent*. (1971), 8.

however; but even if Wallace-Hadrill had written quite simply, "The kings of the migrating Germans, like those of the Scandinavians, were sacral, by which we mean that they were cult-kings", and had intended "cult-kings" to have the first of the two meanings I have just suggested, the word "divine" would still not be a wholly satisfactory substitute for the word "sacral" in this sentence. One reason for this is that the word "divine", when used of ancient Scandinavian kingship, has an almost tendentious quality; it brings us closer than we are entitled to be to the shadowy period of history with which we are dealing, and tells us in one word more about early Scandinavian attitudes to kingship than we know for certain, or are entitled to think we know on the evidence available to us. This point, which will be illustrated more fully below, may be emphasized by reference to Turville-Petre's sentence quoted above, where he mentions "the view, too easily accepted by many, that Germanic kings . . . were in some way divine".<sup>11</sup> His word "many" presumably refers to modern scholars writing on early Germanic kingship; and if taken literally, the sentence would mean that they, having accepted too easily the view that Germanic kings were divine, actually believed in the divinity of the kings about whom they are writing. Words such as "believed to be" or "regarded as" have been left out between "were" and "in some way divine" — an omission which, for reasons I shall suggest below, would perhaps have been more acceptable if the word "sacral" had been used instead of "divine".

The sentence just examined draws attention to another tendency of certain modern writers on early Germanic kingship. This is towards an over-directness of statement which, like the unqualified use of the word "divine", is inappropriate to a discussion of the obscure period in question, and may occasionally even trap the reader into

<sup>11</sup> Turville-Petre (1966), 352.

an uncritical acceptance of ideas for which the support in primary sources is debatable or negligible. An example may be found in Folke Ström's *Diser, normor, valkyrjor* (1954), where the author, after briefly discussing certain phrases in *Ynglingatal* — such as *Yngva þjóð* (v. 7) and *Freys áttungr* (v. 21)<sup>12</sup> — which suggest that the poet thought that Ynglingar were descended from gods, says: "Thus the dynasty of the Ynglingar traced its descent from the gods."<sup>13</sup> The decisive nature of this statement, together with the word "thus" which makes it seem a logical consequence of the foregoing argument, and the fact that it is given special prominence in a paragraph of its own, seem calculated to make the reader accept it as true — without raising the questions, for instance, of the reliability of *Ynglingatal* as a source, of whether the phrases in question are stereotyped kennings without religious significance, or of whether Yngvi was ever regarded as a god. If Ström had written, more tentatively, "*There is thus evidence to suggest that the dynasty of the Ynglingar traced its descent from the gods,*" his statement would at least have allowed that these questions might be raised. Another example is to be found in Otto Höfler's contribution to the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions in 1955. After referring to early Germanic kings as "Träger und Diener geheiligter Mächte", Höfler says: "Ein solcher König ist nicht ein Gott, wie es viele der Caesaren für sich in Anspruch nahmen, aber es ist ein Stück von göttlichem Sein in ihm."<sup>14</sup> This sentence seems almost to have been

<sup>12</sup> References are to *Ynglingatal* in Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, A. I (1912), 7-15.

<sup>13</sup> "Ynglingaätten har sålunda räknat sin härstamning från gudarna." See Folke Ström, *Diser, normor, valkyrjor. Fruktbarhetskult och sakralt kungadöme i Norden* (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar. Filologisk-filosofiska Serien I, 1954), 35.

<sup>14</sup> See Höfler (1956), 83. In this paper, which is also printed in *La Regalità Sacra* (1959), 664-701, Höfler gives an outline of his views on sacral kingship, some of which are advanced at greater length in his *Germanisches Sakralkönigtum I* (1952). Important reviews of this latter work are those of Anne Holtsmark, *MM* (1953), 142-8; Jan de Vries, *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* xxxiv (1953), 183-9; and Hans Kuhn, *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum* 67 (1954-5), 51-61.

written from the point of view of a German of Höfler's imagination living during or shortly after the time of the Roman Empire.

The use of a style of this kind is on a par with the use of "divine" in discussing the difficult subject of early Scandinavian kingship, insofar as it runs the risk of leading the reader too hastily to conclusions which, if they are to be reached at all, ought to be approached in a more tentative, exploratory manner. The word "sacral" seems more appropriate to the tentative style which in my view the subject requires; it is less familiar than "divine", and thus to a greater extent *demands* explanation and definition. The fact that it is a relatively modern term may serve as a useful reminder of our remoteness from the period under discussion, whereas the word "divine", as I have already suggested, implies a closeness to ancient Scandinavia, and a knowledge of it, which we do not certainly possess. This consideration in particular should make it feasible to use the word "sacral" with reference to ancient Scandinavian kings and kingship without adding the qualifying phrases of the kind mentioned above; but before the word "sacral" can be safely used in this way, it must, of course, be defined as fully and clearly as possible within the general context of its use. Let us turn to the expression "sacral kingship".

In an article published in 1968, Folke Ström has discussed the various implications of this expression against the background of recent attitudes to kingship in early medieval Scandinavia. According to Ström, the kingship, or Pharaohship, of ancient Egypt represents an extreme instance of sacral kingship, in that the Pharaoh was believed to be both the physical offspring and the earthly embodiment of the sun-god.<sup>15</sup> As H. W. Fairman

<sup>15</sup> Folke Ström, 'Kung Domalde i Svitjod och "kungalyckan"', *Saga och sed* (1967; published 1968), 52-66; see p. 55. On the relationship of the Egyptian Pharaoh to the sun-god see further Alan W. Shorter, *The Egyptian Gods. A Handbook* (1937), 11-13.



has written: "... the dominant element in the Egyptian conception of kingship was that the king was a god — not merely godlike, but very god."<sup>16</sup> Ström not only calls this an extreme instance of sacral kingship; he also uses the word "extreme" for the view that kingship of a type comparable to this was once prevalent in Scandinavia.<sup>17</sup> Yet he had written, in his *Diser, normor, valkyrjor*, that the ancient kings of the Swedes were believed to trace their origin to the fertility god Yngvi-Freyr, and that in this belief lay the ideological basis of Scandinavian sacral kingship. He had also claimed that the king, by reason of his divine origin, was identified with the godhead in a more or less realistic way, or at least represented the deity in a real and present sense.<sup>18</sup> Ström was here developing, in general rather than specific terms, conclusions drawn by Otto von Friesen in an article published in 1932. He there drew attention to the supposed divine origin of the Ynglingar in trying to show that *konungr*, "king", was related to the word *kona*, "woman", and that the king could be seen as the consort of the fertility-goddess in a matriarchal cult-system.<sup>19</sup> In 1956 Jan de Vries claimed that *konungr* was more likely to mean "member of a family", but nevertheless maintained that the family in question must have been regarded as a divine family. He also made the following claim concerning the concept of the king's luck:

... das Heil des Königs ist, dürfen wir schliessen, mit dem Geschlechte verbunden, aus dem er entsprossen ist, und es strömt durch alle Glieder von Generation zu Generation und

<sup>16</sup> See p. 75 of H. W. Fairman, 'The Kingship Rituals of Egypt', in S. H. Hooke (ed.), *Myth, Ritual and Kingship. Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (1958), 74-104.

<sup>17</sup> Ström (1968), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Ström (1954), 34 ff. Ström's explanation of his use of the Swedish expression "real representation" in this connection may be compared with Höfler's discussion of what he regards as the various possible uses of the German verb "repräsentieren" in a context of sacral kingship; see Höfler (1956), 81 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Otto v. Friesen, 'Har det nordiska kungadömet sakral utprung?' *Saga och sed* (1932-4), 15-34.

findet seine Quelle in dem Urahn. Die Überlieferung zeigt nachdrücklich: d e r U r a h n i s t e i n G o t t.<sup>20</sup>

Good luck is a quality which, according to the passage quoted above from Wallace-Hadrill, goes together with sacral kingship. De Vries also wrote, in the study referred to, of the Germanic concept of *Königsmacht*: "Sie war als Inkarnation der mystischen Kräfte der gesamten Volksgemeinschaft und besonders durch den göttlichen Ursprung der königlichen Person sakral."<sup>21</sup> It was to von Friesen's study, among others, that Åke V. Ström referred at the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions in 1955, in support of the confident statement with which he began his paper: "That kingship in Old Scandinavia was entirely sacral, is nowadays considered as a mere matter of fact."<sup>22</sup>

This form of sacral kingship is the one which surely comes closest, in a Scandinavian context, to meriting the label of "divine kingship"; according to the "sacralists" referred to in the preceding paragraph — with the exception of Wallace-Hadrill and now, it would seem, Folke Ström — a king in ancient Scandinavia was typically regarded as sacral insofar as he was thought to descend from and to incorporate or represent a god. Sacral kingship of this kind is obviously comparable (though not identical) with the type of kingship known in ancient Egypt. It is more than likely that Folke Ström (cf. above) has modified his position because of Baetke's important study, *Yngvi und die Ynglinger* (1964). In this salutary work of "anti-sacralist" scholarship, Baetke attempts to show, among other things, that the doctrine of the descent of the Ynglingar from a god called Yngvi-Freyr is not ancient and pagan in origin but antiquarian and euhemeristic, stemming from the Icelandic historians

<sup>20</sup> See p. 295 of Jan de Vries, 'Das Königtum bei den Germanen', *Saeculum VII* (1956), 289-309. See also, in particular, pp. 292-3 and 298-9.

<sup>21</sup> De Vries (1956), 298.

<sup>22</sup> Åke V. Ström, 'The King God and his Connection with Sacrifice in Old Norse Religion', *La Regalità Sacra* (1959), 702-15.

Ari Þorgilsson (1067-1148) and Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241). Since Baetke's book is nowhere mentioned in either of the two most recently published books on Germanic kingship in English — Chaney's *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England* (1970)<sup>23</sup> and Wallace-Hadrill's *Early Germanic Kingship* (1971)<sup>24</sup> — some space will be given to a discussion of it here. It must, however, be remembered that my chief purpose at this point is to explain and define the expression "sacral kingship". Claudio Albani, in his recent *L'istituto monarchico nell'antica società nordica* (1969), claims that Baetke's book "constitutes a fundamental stage in the history of research into the subject of Germanic kingship" and that "the scholar who in future seeks to busy himself with this problem must of necessity take Baetke as a starting-point, and keep the results of his research as a constant point of reference."<sup>25</sup> Since Wallace-Hadrill refers to Albani's book on the first page of his own,<sup>26</sup> it is curious that he does not take Baetke's work directly into account at any stage of his discussion. Erik Gunnes, in his recent *Kongens ære* (1971), refers to Baetke in his excellent chapter on sacral kingship, but does not examine his views in detail, and perhaps writes with too much confidence when he states, albeit tentatively, that the notion of the king's divine origin seems to be traceable back to the pre-Christian era.<sup>27</sup> Even if Baetke's conclusions are not acceptable in their entirety, they are of particular importance for the present discussion in drawing attention to the need for a more cautious approach to the subject of sacral kingship in ancient Scandinavia.

One of the most important sources for ancient

<sup>23</sup> William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (1970).

<sup>24</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>25</sup> Claudio Albani, *L'istituto monarchico nell'antica società nordica* (Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia della Università di Milano, 49, 1969), 3. For a succinct critique of Albani, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Rivista Storica Italiana* (1969), 652-4.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 1, note 1.

<sup>27</sup> Gunnes, 31.

Scandinavian ideas of kingship is the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal*, which according to Snorri,<sup>28</sup> and as Baetke tentatively agrees,<sup>29</sup> was composed by Haraldr hárfagri's court-poet Þjóðólfr of Hvinir in honour of Haraldr's first cousin, Rognvaldr heiðumhæri, a king of Vestfold. This would mean that the poem was composed in the late ninth century.<sup>30</sup> One purpose of *Ynglingatal* seems to have been to glorify the family of Rognvaldr — including Rognvaldr himself, who represents the last of the twenty-seven generations of kings listed in the poem — by providing it with a genealogy reaching back into remote antiquity, and by associating it with the ancient kings of the Swedes, whose seat was at Uppsalar; it is, in any case, a genealogical poem in which the kings of Vestfold are seen as direct descendants of the Uppsalar kings. *Ynglingatal* has come down to us because Snorri Sturluson used and quoted it as a source for *Ynglinga saga*, which is largely an exposition or elaboration of the information given in the *Ynglingatal*. In its present form, the poem begins by recounting the death of a certain Fjölfnir, who is said by Snorri but not by *Ynglingatal* to have been a son of Yngvi-Freyr.<sup>31</sup> The name Yngvi-Freyr is arrived at in the prose account by the statement that Freyr, an early ruler of the Swedes who was worshipped as a god, was also known by the name Yngvi, from which the name of the Ynglingar is derived.<sup>32</sup> According to Snorri, the first three rulers of the Swedes were Óðinn, Njörðr and Yngvi-Freyr,<sup>33</sup> and of these names the first two and the second element in the third are certainly names of gods.<sup>34</sup> Are we to conclude from this,

<sup>28</sup> Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla* 1 (1941), 4, 83.

<sup>29</sup> Baetke (1964), 71-2.

<sup>30</sup> See *Heimskringla* 1, xxxiv.

<sup>31</sup> *Heimskringla* 1, 25-6.

<sup>32</sup> *Heimskringla* 1, 23-4.

<sup>33</sup> *Heimskringla* 1, 16, 22-5.

<sup>34</sup> For evidence that the Njörð(r) remembered in some of the place-names of Sweden was a goddess rather than a god, see 109 ff. of Elias Wessén, 'Schwedische Ortsnamen und altnordische Mythologie', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* IV (1929-30), 97-115.

as some have done, that a number of lines at the beginning of the *Ynglingatal* have been lost, in which the ancestry of the kings was traced to the gods?<sup>35</sup> Such a conclusion would seem to find support in the *Libellus Islandorum* of Ari Þorgilsson, where Ari, who most probably knew *Ynglingatal* in some form, heads his own genealogy with the following names: Yngvi Tyrkja konungr, Njörðr Svía konungr, Freyr, and Fjölfnir.<sup>36</sup> In making Yngvi king of the Turks, however, Ari betrays, according to Heusler, the influence of Frankish genealogies, or their derivatives, as Baetke points out,<sup>37</sup> and this designation, according to Baetke, together with that of Njörðr as king of the Swedes, also demonstrates the influence of learned euhemerism.<sup>38</sup> Baetke further claims, among other things, that the names of Yngvi and Freyr were combined *for the first time* by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga*.<sup>39</sup> Baetke thus rejects the evidence of Ari and Snorri,<sup>40</sup> and does not believe that the beginning of *Ynglingatal* has perished.<sup>41</sup> In his view, the genealogy begins with Fjölfnir and his death by drowning in a vat of mead at the house of a certain Fróði.<sup>42</sup> Neither Fjölfnir nor Fróði, as Baetke sees them, were gods,<sup>43</sup> nor was Fróði ever identical with the god Freyr, as many have supposed.<sup>44</sup> The kings of Vestfold in eastern Norway were historically of Danish, rather than of Swedish

<sup>35</sup> See Baetke (1964), 89–90, for documentation of this view.

<sup>36</sup> See Baetke (1964), 89; and Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók* (1968), 27.

<sup>37</sup> Baetke (1964), 97–8.

<sup>38</sup> Baetke (1964), 98–99. Euhemerism may be defined for the purposes of the present discussion as the speculative treatment of myth as history. According to Baetke, the earliest Icelandic historians, Sæmundr and Ari, regarded the gods of the Scandinavian pantheon as historical kings and heroes deified by the pagan Scandinavians. Since it was important to the Icelandic historians to trace the history of the Nordic peoples as far as possible into the past, it was then a short step for them to regard the ancient gods as their own ancestors.

<sup>39</sup> Baetke (1964), 107–8, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Baetke (1964), 101–3.

<sup>41</sup> Baetke (1964), 88, 103.

<sup>42</sup> Baetke (1964), 85–6.

<sup>43</sup> Baetke (1964), 87–8.

<sup>44</sup> Baetke (1964), 86–7.

origin;<sup>45</sup> the Swedish kings were originally called not *Ynglingar* but *Skilfingar*, as the Scylfingas of *Beowulf* seem to confirm;<sup>46</sup> and the names *Yngvi* and *Ynglingar* point back to early contacts between the Danes and the Ingvæones, a group of tribes to whom neither the Danes nor the Swedes originally belonged, and whose legendary hero, Ing, was never regarded as more than a human ancestor and was never revered as a god.<sup>47</sup>

Such in sum are Baetke's principal arguments against the view that ancient Scandinavian kings may be regarded as sacral in virtue of supposed divine ancestry. His book is of great value for its careful criticism of the arguments of earlier scholars, and for its branding as little more than possibilities many aspects of Scandinavian kingship which were earlier regarded, without sufficient evidence, as virtual certainties. This is not to say that the book is entirely free from defects. Certain valid objections to Baetke's arguments have been made by his various reviewers, and some of them may be noted here. It has been suggested that in a poem of such great age and simple form as *Ynglingatal*, the phrases of the kind mentioned above — *Freys afspringr* and *Freys áttungr* — are unlikely to have been mere stereotype expressions without meaning, and may well indicate that the poet believed the Ynglingar to be of divine origin.<sup>48</sup> Mention has also been made of the genealogical poem *Háleygjatal*, composed by Eyvindr skáldaspillir near the end of the tenth century; according to this poem, as Baetke agrees,<sup>49</sup> the jarls of Hlaðir were descended from gods. Turville-Petre, in his review of Baetke, has claimed that Eyvindr is unlikely to have been influenced

<sup>45</sup> Baetke (1964), 135–8.

<sup>46</sup> Baetke (1964), 131–5.

<sup>47</sup> Baetke (1964), 156–63; 112 ff. For discussions of some details of this view, see the following reviews of Baetke (1964): Ursula Dronke, *Scandinavica* IV (1965), 153–5, p. 154; Heinrich Beck, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* LXXXVI (1965), 746–50, col. 749; Oskar Bandle, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* LXXXVIII (1969), 96–9, pp. 97–8.

<sup>48</sup> See Turville-Petre (1966), 354.

<sup>49</sup> Baetke (1964), 93.

by learned euhemerism — a possibility which Baetke does not exclude<sup>50</sup> — and that his poem is evidence not only of belief in the divine origin of kings and chieftains, but also of the possibility that such an origin was claimed for the Ynglingar in *Ynglingatal*.<sup>51</sup> On the question of the historical origins of the Ynglingar, attention has been drawn to the place-name *Inglinge* in Swedish Uppland, where there is also evidence for a place-name *Skialf* from which the name *Skilfingar* — corresponding to the *Scylfingas* of *Beowulf* — is thought to derive. The *Inglinge* place-name, together with the strong evidence of personal names compounded with the element *Ing(e)* in this part of Sweden, would seem to support the view that the Ynglingar were originally natives of this area, and were closely connected, if not identical, with the *Skilfingar*.<sup>52</sup> Baetke has also been criticized for being too sharp and rigid in his implied distinctions between kings and other social leaders on the one hand,<sup>53</sup> and between gods and legendary heroes on the other.<sup>54</sup> The former distinction is implicit in the relatively little importance he attaches to *Háleygjatal*, which is concerned more with jarls than with kings, as a source for ancient notions of kingship,<sup>55</sup> and in his passing reference to Grímr kamban, the settler of the Faroes who, although not a king, was an important chieftain, and was worshipped after his death.<sup>56</sup> The latter distinction is especially apparent in his discussion of Fróði<sup>57</sup> and

<sup>50</sup> Baetke (1964), 72, note 1.

<sup>51</sup> Turville-Petre (1966), 354.

<sup>52</sup> See col. 749 of Beck's review of Baetke (1964) in *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* LXXXVI (1965), 746–50 and the references there to E. Wessén, *Studier till Sveriges hedna mytologi och fornhistoria* (Uppsala universitets årsskrift, 1924, 67 (for the evidence of personal names) and to E. Elgqvist, *Skälv och Skilfingar* (1944), ch. VIII, Var låg Skilfingarnas stamgård?, pp. 68–74 (for a discussion of the *Inglinge* and *Skjalf* place-names; the book is also referred to by Anne Holtsmark in her review of Baetke (1964) in *MM* 1965, 82–5).

<sup>53</sup> See Turville-Petre (1966), 353.

<sup>54</sup> See Ursula Dronke (1965), 154, and Turville-Petre (1966), 354.

<sup>55</sup> Baetke (1964), 93.

<sup>56</sup> Baetke (1964), 45. Baetke sees this as an example of the worship of the dead.

<sup>57</sup> Baetke (1964), 87–8.

Yngvi/Ing.<sup>58</sup> It has also been pointed out, finally, that when Baetke states without qualification that Ing never was a Germanic *Kultgott*,<sup>59</sup> he seems not to recognize the nature of the information given about Ing in the Old English Runic Poem (to which he nevertheless refers), where every detail associates Ing with some aspect of a known cult.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, while Baetke has performed a valuable service in making us treat with great caution the view that Scandinavian kingship was sacral in this "god-sprung" sense, he cannot be said to have refuted it beyond all doubt, and even if he had, this would not, of course, preclude the possibility that Scandinavian kingship was originally bound up closely with pagan religious belief and practice.

Remembering that our chief purpose, at present, is still to establish a definition of the expression "sacral kingship", we may now turn to a brief consideration of the two well-known stories in which St Óláfr (1015-1030) is linked with his earlier, heathen namesake Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr (the Elf of Geirstaðir), also known as digrbeinn (Thick-leg), a ninth-century king of Vestfold. After dreaming of an ox which he interpreted as representing and foreshadowing a pestilence, this earlier Óláfr ordered his subjects to place him in a burial mound after his death, but not to sacrifice to him. After his death, however, sacrifices were brought to him in a time of famine, and that was how he came to be called Geirstaðaálfr. Years later, a man calling himself Óláfr digri (the Stout) appeared in a dream to a certain Hrani, telling him to remove from the burial mound at Geirstaðir, among other things, the dead man's belt, which he must then place around Ásta, the pregnant

<sup>58</sup> Baetke (1964), 112 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Baetke (1964), 141; 157, note 3.

<sup>60</sup> See Ursula Dronke (1965), 154. The Runic Poem is edited by Bruce Dickinson in *Runic and Heroic Poems of the Old Teutonic Peoples* (1915), 12-23. For Ing, see 20-1.



wife of Haraldr grenzki in Upplönd, who would then give birth to her child. Her child was none other than St Óláfr. This story, which is thought to be as old as the twelfth century,<sup>61</sup> gives in Baetke's opinion an example of the cult of the dead, perhaps even of ancestor-worship, but not of the worship of a king; it does not, in his view, indicate any belief in the sacral or special nature of kings.<sup>62</sup> Baetke quotes the story from *Flateyjarbók* (late fourteenth century), but does not consider another story also found in *Flateyjarbók* and in other manuscripts, which Turville-Petre discusses in his chapter on kingship in *Myth and Religion of the North*.<sup>63</sup> This story is also discussed by Turville-Petre in his review of Baetke,<sup>64</sup> and by Anne Holtsmark in hers.<sup>65</sup> In this story, St Óláfr, when riding past the burial mound of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr, was asked by one of his courtiers if he had been buried there. He replied, "Never did my soul have two bodies, and it never will have — neither now nor on the day of resurrection." The courtier said, "People have said that when you came to this place before, you exclaimed: 'Here we were, and here we go'." The king, who was obviously deeply distressed at the heretical and superstitious implications of the courtier's remarks, replied: "I never said that and I never will." The age and provenance of this second story are not known, but it may come from Styrmir Kárason's *Life of St Óláfr* and thus date from around 1220.<sup>66</sup> According to Turville-Petre, it "can hardly be a medieval, Christian invention".<sup>67</sup> Although apocryphal, both these stories, as Turville-Petre says, "... show that the belief in the reincarnation of kings was not far from the minds of Icelanders and Norwegians, even if they were Christian".<sup>68</sup> They might

<sup>61</sup> See Turville-Petre (1966), 353, with references.

<sup>62</sup> See Baetke (1964), 39-47.

<sup>63</sup> Turville-Petre (1964), 194-5.

<sup>64</sup> Turville-Petre (1966), 353.

<sup>65</sup> Anne Holtsmark (1965), 83.

<sup>66</sup> See Turville-Petre (1966), 353, with references.

<sup>67</sup> Turville-Petre (1964), 195.

<sup>68</sup> Turville-Petre (1964), 194.

also suggest, if only the question of the king's divine origin could be answered with greater certainty, that the concept of the incarnate god was not foreign to pagan Scandinavian ideas of kingship.

Another form of sacral kingship, according to Ström, is the medieval idea of kingship by the grace of God, according to which the king was regarded as the representative of God on earth.<sup>69</sup> This form of kingship is too well known to require discussion here, and has in any case recently been admirably and briefly discussed in Scandinavian terms by Erik Gunnes.<sup>70</sup> It needs to be mentioned here, however, partly as an element in the background of our definition of sacral kingship, and partly because it has been thought, by Baetke and others, to have influenced the Scandinavian traditions in such a way as to give what these scholars regard as the erroneous impression that sacral kingship existed in pre-Christian Scandinavia.<sup>71</sup> In the last part of this paper, I shall review the discussion of whether the concept of the king's luck, which many regard as an important element in Scandinavian sacral kingship, can be said to date from the pre-Christian period.

First, however, I shall briefly consider one sense in which, as Ström implies, the expression "sacral kingship" is sometimes rather confusingly used, namely sacerdotal kingship, where the king, in his capacity as supposed intermediary between the human and divine worlds, combines priestly functions with his kingly office, without necessarily being regarded, or claiming to be regarded,

<sup>69</sup> Ström (1968), 55.

<sup>70</sup> Gunnes, 37 ff.

<sup>71</sup> This view of Baetke's was first advanced in his *Christliches Lehngut in der Sagareligion. Das Svoldr-Problem. Zwei Beiträge zur Sagakritik* (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologisch-historische Klasse. Band 98. Heft 6. 1952), 50 ff., and has since been developed in various ways by Lars Lönnroth, 'Kroppen som själens spegel — ett motiv i de isländska sagorna', *Lychnos* (1963-64; published 1965), 24-61, and Lennart Ejerfeldt, 'Helighet, "karisma" och kungadöme i forngermansk religion', *Kungl. humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet i Uppsala, Årsbok* (1969-70), 112-75.

as a superhuman or divine being.<sup>72</sup> While it seems to be fairly generally agreed — in spite of what Wallace-Hadrill says in the passage quoted above — that kings did have priestly functions in pagan Scandinavia,<sup>73</sup> not all scholars are agreed that these functions were enough to make the king “sacral”. Although Baetke is not entirely clear or consistent on this point, it is basically his view that before kings can properly be referred to as “sacral” there must be evidence that they were regarded as divinely superhuman in some way<sup>74</sup>, and according to Baetke no such evidence emerges from a study of Scandinavian priest-kingship. From an examination of the tenth-century skaldic poems, *Vellekla* and *Hákonarmál*, Baetke concludes, first, that these poems reflect a belief that fertility and good seasons, which come from the gods, are conditional upon the maintenance of temples and sacrifices, and that this is the duty of the social leader, who will not in all cases be a king. Baetke concludes, second, that in performing this duty the leader is believed to communicate but not to embody or incapsulate the quality of good luck; thus he cannot be regarded as a sacral person.<sup>75</sup> Ström, who

<sup>72</sup> Ström (1968), 55.

<sup>73</sup> See *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* ix (1964), s.v. *Konge*, and Ström (1968), 55. There is no evidence however that kings stood at the head of a national sacerdotal organisation, see Olaf Olsen, *Hørg, hov og kirk* (= *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 1965, published 1966), 56.

<sup>74</sup> See Baetke (1964), 6–7. Herwig Wolfram points out that Baetke is inconsistent in implying at one point (1964, 38) that he believes the sacral element belongs exclusively to the realm of the cult or stands in direct relationship to it, and at another (1964, 54 ff.) in denying sacral status to kings while granting they were cult-leaders; see H. Wolfram, ‘Metodische Fragen zur Kritik am “sakralen” Königtum germanischer Stämme’, *Festschrift für Otto Höfler* II (1968), 473–90; 474, note 6.

<sup>75</sup> Baetke (1964), 61–8. Baetke repeats here, in brief (pp. 67–8), a view he had advanced at greater length in *Das Heilige im Germanischen* (1942), 66–8, 137–8, where he argued, in contrast to Grønbech, that the Old Norse noun *heil* did not mean luck in a secular or magical sense but signified the prosperity communicated by gods to men through the medium of the cult; it was not a quality inherent in a man but came to him from the gods, and the king’s luck was not a magical power, but a gift which belonged together with his sacral position (*sic*: “mit seiner sakralen Stellung”, Baetke, 1942, 138), i.e. with his sacerdotal position. This view of Baetke’s has recently been defended by Ejerfeldt, 113–35, who points out (p. 132) that in Old Icelandic the noun *heil* signifies either a sign or a result of the gods’ good will, never a personal quality, and who argues that the German expression *das Königsheil*, meaning “the king’s (inherent) luck” is a product of modern speculation and not an ancient term. In view of these considerations, and of the fact that the concept of *heil* is admitted by Baetke, Lönnroth (p. 29) and Ejerfeldt to be of ancient, pre-Christian origin, it has not been considered with the words *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* in this paper.

accepts the first but not the second of these conclusions, disagrees with Baetke when the latter suggests that the reason for the sacrificial slaying of the Swedish king Dómalði, described in v. 5 of *Ynglingatal*, was that Dómalði neglected his priestly duties,<sup>76</sup> and not — as might be gathered from a brief statement about Dómalði in ch. 14 of *Ynglinga saga* — that his luck had failed him.<sup>77</sup> Ström's reasons for disagreeing are partly that he regards *Ynglingatal* as having a religious background quite different from that of *Vellekla* and *Hákonarmál*, and partly that, unlike Baetke, he is prepared to admit the possibility that the concept of the king's luck is pre-Christian in origin. Ström's definition of the expression "sacral kingship" is as follows:

In the interests of clarity, it seems legitimate to reserve the term for those forms of kingship which not only endow the king with external religious functions, but also attribute to him characteristics and qualities which set him apart, in a more or less pronounced way, from his ordinary human environment.<sup>78</sup>

Taking into account the various forms of kingship discussed so far, we may now define sacral kingship as follows: a sacral king is one who is marked off from his fellow men by an aura of specialness which may or may not have its origin in more or less direct associations with the supernatural. I use the word "supernatural" rather than the word "divine", partly because of the objections to the latter word raised above, and partly in order to allow for the possibility, not admitted by Baetke, that a king may become sacral through magical, rather than specifically religious, associations;<sup>79</sup> while the phrase

<sup>76</sup> Ström (1968), 58–61, referring to Baetke (1964), 54 ff.

<sup>77</sup> The statement in question — *Stjúpmóðir Dómalda lét síða at honum ógæfu* — is referred to later in this paper, see note 83.

<sup>78</sup> Ström (1968), 55.

<sup>79</sup> A distinction between magical and religious associations is implied in Baetke's remarks on the concept of *heill*, summarised in note 75, and is explicit in his *Christliches Lehngut*, where he writes on the concept of the ruler's luck as revealed in skaldic poetry: "Das ist ein echt religiöse Schicksalsdeutung, die sich von der anderen, magischen, wesentlich unterscheidet" (Baetke, 1952, 52).

"may or may not" allows for the possibility that the king's sacral nature may be thought to derive from what may be called a natural source, such as his family or his own personality, rather than from a supernatural one, such as a god, or supposed magical powers. The tentative nature of the definition is determined by the uncertain nature of the subject, which by now has been amply illustrated.

Returning to the story of Dómaldi, we may note that Ström, who accepts the ascription of *Ynglingatal* to Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, points out that the poet's use in the Dómaldi-stanza of the verb *sóa*, meaning "to sacrifice", and the adjective *árgjarn*, meaning "eager for a good harvest",<sup>80</sup> indicates that in Norway in the late ninth century, when Scandinavia was still predominantly pagan, there was a belief, or the memory of a belief, that a king could be sacrificed for the sake of better weather and a good harvest. *Historia Norwegiae* agrees with *Ynglingatal* that Dómaldi was sacrificed in order to bring fertility, and adds the detail that he was offered to the goddess Ceres, which suggests that the Norse deity in question was a

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De Vries makes a similar distinction, though for different reasons: "Schon die Heroisierung des Königs nach seinem Tode legt eine tiefere, und zwar durchaus religiöse, keinesfalls magische Anschauung nahe ..." (de Vries, 1956, 295). For a recent rejection of the importance of such a distinction, however, and for references to writers who give more weight than Baetke or de Vries to the supposed magical background of sacral kingship, see Chaney, 16, note 36. In *Yngvi und die Ynglinger* Baetke claims that the widespread belief in the idea of a man of luck, by no means specifically related to kingship, belongs within the realm of magic and thus falls "ausserhalb des eigentlich sakralen Bereichs". He goes on: "Wohl können einer sakralen Person wunderbare Kräfte beigelegt werden, aber die Tatsache allein, dass einem Menschen magische Fähigkeiten zugeschrieben werden, macht ihn nicht zu einer sakralen Person. Das Königsheil als Ausdruck oder Ausfluss einer magischen Kraft ... kann für sich allein eine sakrale Stellung der nordischen Könige überhaupt nicht begründen" (Baetke, 1964, 38). This is not said against the background of a firm definition of the word "sakral", as Wolfram, *loc. cit.*, points out, and it is difficult not to agree with Wolfram that here we have an example of Baetke dismissing from consideration whatever militates against his own view.

<sup>80</sup> The stanza may be quoted, from *Heimskringla* 1, 32, as follows: *Hitt vas fyrr | Jöld ruðu | sverðberendr | sinum dróttni, | ok landherr | af lífs vonum | dreyrug vöpn | Dómaldar bar, | þás árgjörn | Jóta dolgi | Svía kind | of sóa skylði.* "It happened in days of yore that the sword-bearers reddened the ground with the blood of their lord; and the host of the land bore bloody weapons away from the dead Dómaldi, when the people of the Swedes, eager for a good harvest were obliged to sacrifice the enemy of the Jutes (their king)."

fertility goddess, most probably Freyja.<sup>81</sup> The question of whether there ever really was a king called Dómalði who died in the manner described in *Ynglingatal* is impossible to answer and in any case irrelevant to our purpose; we are not looking, in the first instance at least, for particular kings or particular events, but for early attitudes to kingship among the peoples of Scandinavia. Ström, as I have said, does not accept Baetke's suggestion that the poet of *Ynglingatal* saw priestly negligence on Dómalði's part as the reason for his sacrifice. If I read Ström correctly, he is suggesting here that Baetke has made the same mistake in relation to Dómalði as Snorri has (perhaps) made in relation to Óláfr trételgja, the burning of whose corpse is recorded in v. 29 of *Ynglingatal*; he has been misled by his knowledge of the historical background to *Vellekla* and *Hákonarmál* — a background of conflict between paganism and Christianity, in which bad weather and famine could easily be blamed on neglect of sacrifices — into assuming that negligence in regard to cult-practice was what Þjóðólfr understood to be the cause of Dómalði's death.<sup>82</sup> Ström seeks instead to explain the sacrifice of Dómalði in terms of the concept of the king's luck, and in doing so has in mind not only Snorri's statement in ch. 14 of *Ynglinga saga* that "Dómalði's stepmother saw to it that ill-luck was brought upon him by magic",<sup>83</sup> but also the frequent references to luck in the Icelandic Family Sagas and Kings' Sagas, and the word *fortuna* in the fourth-century comments of Ammianus Marcellinus on kingship among the Burgundians:

Apud hos generali nomine rex appellatur Hendinos, et ritu veteri potestate deposita removetur, si sub eo fortuna titubaverit belli, vel segetum copiam negaverit terra. Ut solent Ægyptii casus eius modi suis assignare rectoribus.

<sup>81</sup> Ström (1968), 53-4. For a brief account and bibliography of the *Historia Norvegiae*, see Anne Holtmark in *KLNM* vi (1961), 585-7.

<sup>82</sup> Ström (1968), 60-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Stjúpmodir Dómalda lét stða at honum ógæfu*. See *Heimskringla* 1, 30.

Nam sacerdos apud Burgundios omnium maximus vocatur Sinistus, et est perpetuus, obnoxius discriminibus nullis, ut reges.<sup>84</sup>

This passage, together with the story of Dómalði, was referred to by Grønbech in his discussion of the concept of the king's luck in his *Lykkemand og Niding*, which first appeared in 1909.<sup>85</sup> In this book Grønbech drew attention to three closely inter-related concepts on which, he claimed, ancient Germanic culture was based. These were "frith", honour and luck. "Frith" is a modern form, used by Grønbech's English translator, of the Old English word *friþ* (corresponding to Old Norse *fridr*) which is generally translated as "peace", but which, according to Grønbech, conveyed in pagan times less of the submissiveness suggested by the word "peace", and more of will, and signified the mutual inviolability, the mutual love best described as a feeling of oneness, experienced by fellow-kinsmen; the keynote of frith, he maintained, was the safety and security that went naturally together with a profound sense of family feeling.<sup>86</sup> Honour, in Grønbech's view, was the soul of the family,<sup>87</sup> and luck was its life;<sup>88</sup> luck was the power in every member of the family which enabled him to uphold his sense of frith and honour; it was at once conditional upon these other two qualities, and the precondition for them.<sup>89</sup> Luck, according to Grønbech, was not thought

<sup>84</sup> *Rev. Gest.* xxviii, v, 14. I cannot agree with Wallace-Hadrill, p. 15, that this passage excludes the possibility that the Burgundian king, the *Hendinos*, was a priest. The fact that, according to this passage, the *Sinistus* is the highest priest of all among the Burgundians leaves open the possibility that the *Hendinos* may have had priestly, if not "high-priestly", status. This is recognized by Ström (1968), 66, note 26, who regards the distinction between the *Hendinos* and the *Sinistus* as pointing to a division of what was originally a single office.

<sup>85</sup> This is the first volume of *Vor Folkeat i Oldtiden*, the other three volumes of which first appeared in 1912. An English translation of the whole work, *The Culture of the Teutons*, appeared in two volumes in 1932. A revised Danish edition, which is the one referred to in this paper, appeared in two volumes in 1955. For Grønbech's reference to the passage quoted here from Ammianus, see Grønbech (1955) I, 114-5, and II, 345.

<sup>86</sup> See Grønbech I, 32, 50.

<sup>87</sup> See Grønbech I, 89 ff. "Ære er ættens sjæl."

<sup>88</sup> See Grønbech I, 133 ff. "Lykke er ættens liv."

<sup>89</sup> See especially Grønbech I, 127-9.

of as being bestowed upon or withdrawn from a man by an agency external to himself or his kin, such as chance or fortune, but was felt to be an indwelling, inborn quality, emanating from the individual, manifesting itself in his words and deeds; a man's luck depended on the power of his will.<sup>90</sup> At its best, it appeared in the characters and personalities of generous and victorious kings; at its worst, in those who, as a result of certain failings or wrongdoings of their own, were deprived of both frith and honour, and had thus become social outcasts, or *níðingar*.<sup>91</sup>

Since Grønbech's book is such a praiseworthy attempt at empathy, it is unfortunate that his account of the luck-concept is not always consistent with the testimony of the sagas, where luck is not always seen as depending on the will-power of the individual. As Ström points out, it is not uncommon in the sagas for a man to lose his luck, or to fall victim to ill-luck, through circumstances apparently unrelated to his character or personality and beyond his control.<sup>92</sup> Loss of luck is often attributed to magical or supernatural causes. This was the case with Dómalði, as we have seen, and also with Grettir Ásmundarson and Gísli Súrsson — two characters who are for the most part held up for our admiration in the sagas of which they are heroes.<sup>93</sup> This, however, need not mean, according to Ström, that the ancient concept of luck was not, in other respects, much as Grønbech imagined it to be.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> See especially Grønbech I, 118, 134.

<sup>91</sup> For Grønbech's view of the concept of the king's luck, see especially Grønbech I, 112 ff.

<sup>92</sup> See Ström (1968), 56-7.

<sup>93</sup> This may be illustrated by Glámr's words to Grettir in ch. 35 of *Grettis saga*: *Þú hefir frægr orðit hér til af verkum þínum, en heðan af munu falla til þín sekiðir ok vígaferli, en flest öll verk þín snúask þér til ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis*. "Up to now you have won fame by your deeds; but from now on outlawries and manslaughters will fall to your lot, and almost all your deeds will turn to your misfortune and lack of luck." And by the saga's final comment on Gísli (ch. 36): *Lýkr þar nú ævi Gísla, ok er þat alsagt, at hann hefir inn mesti hreystimaðr verit, þó at hann væri eigi í öllum hlutum gæfumaðr*. "Thus Gísli's life comes to an end, and it is everywhere agreed that he was the most valiant of men, though he was not in all things a man of luck."

<sup>94</sup> See Ström (1968), 57.



Ström also refers to an earlier work of Baetke's — *Christliches Lehngut in der Sagareligion* (1952) — in which Baetke claims that *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja*<sup>95</sup> — the Old Norse words for "luck" which have associated themselves most readily with kings and kingship — reflect medieval Christian ideas rather than ancient and pagan ones, and thus have nothing to tell us about pre-Christian notions of sacral kingship.<sup>96</sup> Baetke re-asserts this view in *Yngvi und die Ynglinger*, making on the one hand the valid point, which as far as I know has not yet been adequately answered, that since these words are frequently used with reference to Icelandic and Norwegian farmers in the sagas, there is little reason to associate them exclusively with kingship, and on the other hand the point that when these words *are* applied to kings, they are used above all in relation to Christian monarchs, such as Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr, and thus probably point to the charismatic gifts with which kings were endowed according to medieval Christian notions.<sup>97</sup> Lars Lönnroth, taking his cue from the earlier of these two works of Baetke's, has sought in an article published in 1965 to explain the concept of the king's luck, as it appears in the sagas, by reference to the medieval notion of kingship by the grace of God.<sup>98</sup> It is against the background of Lönnroth's views in particular that Peter Hallberg, in a review article published in 1966, raises the following questions: if the *concepts* denoted by the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* are of medieval Christian provenance, is this also true of the words themselves? And if not, then what did these words mean before the coming of Christianity to the North?<sup>99</sup>

In an attempt to answer the first of these two questions, Hallberg has investigated the frequencies of the words

<sup>95</sup> For a brief discussion of the concept of *heill*, see note 75 above.

<sup>96</sup> Baetke (1952), 50 ff.

<sup>97</sup> Baetke (1964), 19–20.

<sup>98</sup> Lönnroth, 29.

<sup>99</sup> Peter Hallberg, 'Medeltidslatin och sagoprofa. Några kommentarer till Lars Lönnroths studier i den isländska sagalitteraturen', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* LXXXI (1966), 258–76. See 271 ff.

*gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* in various kinds of Old Norse-Icelandic narrative prose and has reached some interesting conclusions. After a systematic perusal of an enormous body of material — amounting in all to 2,172,000 words — Hallberg shows that the frequencies of the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* are markedly low in religious texts on the one hand — that is, Bishops' Sagas and hagiographical translation literature — and in *Sturlunga saga* — the sagas of contemporary history — on the other. In contrast, Family Sagas, Kings' Sagas, and secular translation literature have noticeably high frequencies. In hagiographical translation literature, Hallberg points out, there is not a single *gæfumaðr* to be found among a multitude of holy men and women. It is difficult not to agree with Hallberg that, if the words in question had been thought to reflect the concept of Christian grace, their occurrences would have been far more frequent in religious texts. Hallberg also points out that in texts where the word-frequencies in question *are* high — they are highest of all, in fact, in the secular translation literature — most of the occurrences are to be found in the dialogue placed in the saga-characters' mouths, rather than in narrative passages. From this, and from the fact already noted that the frequencies in question are low in the sagas of contemporary history and in Bishops' Sagas, Hallberg draws the not unreasonable conclusion that the saga-authors of the thirteenth century regarded these words, and the concepts conveyed by them, as less typical of their own time, the Christian period in which they were writing, than of the past times with which they were for the most part dealing. There is also the fact, pointed out by Hallberg, that these words are highly productive in word-formation, and show a rich variety of compounds. Thus Hallberg concludes that "the group of words in question is deeply rooted in a native Scandinavian world of ideas".<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Hallberg (1966), 272.

Ström has followed up Hallberg's investigation of the prose with a brief examination of *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* in Old Norse-Icelandic poetry. He is not discouraged by the fact that these words occur much less frequently in poetry than in prose; the abstract meanings of the words, he claims, makes them ill-suited to the metaphorical mode of expression characteristic of skaldic poetry.<sup>101</sup> In view of this, we should not conclude from the fact that there are virtually no examples of these words in the surviving poetry of the purely pagan period<sup>102</sup> that they were unknown in such meanings as "luck" or "fortune" to pre-Christian Scandinavians. Ström leaves aside occurrences of these words in the later Christian poetry as unimportant for the question of whether they are pagan or Christian in origin, and concentrates on the poetry dating — or arguably dating — from the period of transition from paganism to Christianity, that is, the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. In this poetry, neither *gæfa* nor *hamingja* are in evidence; there are, however, four instances of the use of the word *gipta*. In two of these, the word is used in unambiguously Christian contexts;<sup>103</sup> in one, it is used in a purely secular context;<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ström (1968), 62–3.

<sup>102</sup> The one occurrence of the word *hamingja* recorded in *Lexicon Poeticum* (second edition, 1931, reprinted 1966) is in *Vafþrúðnismál* 49, where it seems to have the meaning of "attendant Norn", "guardian spirit" (see also Hans Kuhn's interpretation of the word in Neckel/Kuhn, *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius* II, 1968, 88). *Vafþrúðnismál* is thought to be either of pagan or of antiquarian origin, see *Nordisk Kultur* VIII: B (1953), 33. Neither of these views would favour a dating of the poem to the period of the Conversion, the period in which Ström is principally interested here.

<sup>103</sup> The passages in question are, first, the surviving half-strophe of Þorleifr jarlsskáld's *drápa* on Sveinn tjúguskegg: *Opt með ærna giptu / oðlings himins roða | Jóta gramr enn ttri | Englands rauð branda*: "Often, carrying with him the ample luck of the ruler of heaven's suns, the glorious ruler of the Jutes reddened sword-blades in England"; and second, the fragment of a poem by Þorbjörn díarskáld, presumably on the subject of a saint, which runs: *Hgreiðar vas hlæðir / hlunns í skirnar brunni, | Hvítakrists sás hæsta, | hoddsviptir, fekk giptu*: "A loader of the launching-roller's high wagon (i.e. of a ship), a swift mover of gold (i.e. a generous man) was he who received White Christ's highest luck in the well of baptism." See Ström (1968), 63, note 19, and Finnur Jónsson (1912), 141, 144. The readings given here are those of E. A. Kock, *Den norsk-islandske skaldediktningen* I (1946), 73, 74.

<sup>104</sup> Björn Hítðælakappi, lausavísa 9: *Sátt við, sveinn enn hvíti, | sviptr audi ok giptu | — ádr vas auðs við hríðir | ofunduðr — í Sólundum*: "You were on your guard, pale young warrior, when deprived of wealth and luck in Sólundir; the enemy of gold (i.e. the generous man) was earlier involved in battles." See Ström (1968), 63, note 20; Finnur Jónsson (1912), 302; Kock (1946), 143.

and in one, according to Ström, its use suggests that the word could be used in a religious context *before* the coming of Christianity. This is the statement attributed to Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld in *Hallfreðar saga* about a change in the *gipta* of men. "There was a time," he says, "when I was well able to sacrifice to the quick-thinking ruler of Hlíðskjálf himself (i.e. to Óðinn); there is a change in the *gipta* of men."<sup>105</sup> From this half-strophe, and from the context in which it is quoted in *Hallfreðar saga*, Ström concludes that Hallfreðr's meaning is as follows: earlier on, in the days when he was able to make sacrifices, his luck came from Óðinn; now, however, it seems to be coming from elsewhere — either from the new god, the King of Heaven, or (possibly) from the earthly king, Óláfr Tryggvason, who is preaching the Christian faith. It is most unlikely, according to Ström, that a reluctant convert like Hallfreðr would have used a word meaning "Christian grace" in relation to his favourite god, Óðinn, the giver of the gift of poetry, whose worship he was so unwilling to abandon. These conclusions of Ström's about the poetry, as he himself points out, support rather than contradict those of Hallberg about the prose.<sup>106</sup>

The conclusions of these two scholars about the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* may nevertheless be contrasted with those of Lennart Ejerfeldt in his *Helighet, "karisma" och kungadöme i forngermansk religion*, which was originally written as a chapter in a thesis submitted in 1962, but which has since been published with an Appendix documenting more recent contributions — including those of Lönnroth, Hallberg and Ström — to

<sup>105</sup> The half-strophe may be quoted from Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Vatnsdæla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga* (1939), 157: *Fyrr vas hitt, es harra | Hlíðskjálfar gatk sjálfan, | skipt es á gumna giptu, | gedskjótan vel blóta.*

<sup>106</sup> Ström (1968), 63–6. But the possibility that the poetry attributed to Hallfreðr in *Hallfreðar saga* may date from a period much later than that of the Conversion, as Bjarni Einarsson has argued, should not be overlooked. See Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur* (1961), 192, where the author suggests that the half-strophe in question may show the influence of Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli* (c. 1153).

c. 1970.<sup>107</sup> (This study and an article by Herwig Wolfram published in 1968,<sup>108</sup> which Ejerfeldt discusses in his Appendix, provide convenient starting-points for answering the questions raised by the first and last sentences of the passage quoted here at the outset from Wallace-Hadrill — questions relating to Romano-Germanic contact in the pre-Viking period, which considerations of space will not allow me to treat here.) As far as *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* are concerned, Ejerfeldt, taking his cue, like Lönnroth, from Baetke's work of 1952, claims that Old Norse *gipta* is a kind of "translation-borrowing" from Old English *giefu*, "gift", often used as a translation of Latin *gratia*, "(gift of) grace". He points out that the earliest Norse poets known to have used the word *gipta* were Christian, and had links with England. As for *gæfa*, which is not recorded until the mid-twelfth century, this word, according to Ejerfeldt, may also show the influence of Old English *giefu* and is perhaps to be regarded as derived from the adjective *gæfr* which in the *Harmsól* of Gamli kanóki, dating probably from the latter half of the twelfth century, has the meaning of "gracious", "benedictive". In Ejerfeldt's view, there is no evidence that words meaning "gift" and related (like *gipta* and *gæfa*) to the verb "to give" had the meaning of "luck" or "charismatic luck" in pre-Christian times; the use of the Old English word *giefu* in the sense "(gift of) grace" is probably to be linked with Wulfila's rendering of the Greek word χάρισμα as *giba* in Gothic, and the use of words with the basic meaning of "gift" to express the concept of "grace" is perhaps to be explained by the use of the word *donum* or *donatio* for that concept in pre-Vulgate Latin translations of the Bible. Since *gipta* and *gæfa* were soon superseded in the meaning of "grace" by the word *náð* in Old Norse, this meaning, which Ejerfeldt sees as their original one, underwent, according to him, a process of

<sup>107</sup> See note 71 above.

<sup>108</sup> Referred to in note 74 above.

secularization which made it possible for the saga-writers of the thirteenth century to use the words for what they regarded, in a speculative, antiquarian way, as ancient, pre-Christian concepts.<sup>109</sup> With regard to *hamingja*, Ejerfeldt, while accepting that the word probably developed from an earlier *ham-gengja*, meaning "one who walks in a covering" and is thus synonymous with *hamhleypa*, "one who travels in a(nother) shape", nevertheless rejects the view that the noun *hamr*, which has the basic meaning of "covering", "shape", "garment", and which forms the first element in the nouns *hamingja*, *hamhleypa*, also had the meaning of "caul (of luck)" in ancient times.<sup>110</sup> According to Lily Weiser-Aall, whom Ejerfeldt quotes, the words *hamr* and *hamingja* did not develop associations with such physical objects as the afterbirth or the caul until the late middle ages, and did so partly as a result of foreign, learned influence.<sup>111</sup> The word *hamingja* thus has nothing to do with birth, and cannot be taken as meaning "luck" in any kind of inborn, hereditary sense; the original meaning of the word, according to Ejerfeldt, was most probably *alter ego*, *Doppelgänger*. Ejerfeldt thus finds it hard to explain why the word *hamingja* is used in the translation literature of the twelfth century — notably *Rómverja saga* — to render the Latin *fortuna*; but the equation of *hamingja* and *fortuna*, he believes — whatever the reason for it — explains why the word *hamingja* is so often used with such meanings as "luck" and "fortune" in the saga-literature of the thirteenth century.<sup>112</sup>

It may finally be mentioned that Hallberg, without referring specifically to Ejerfeldt, has recently re-asserted and developed his conclusions of 1966, with a far weightier

<sup>109</sup> Ejerfeldt, 134-44, 166-8.

<sup>110</sup> Ejerfeldt, 135, 160-2, 168-9. For a statement of the view in question, see Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*<sup>2</sup>, 1 (1956), 222-4.

<sup>111</sup> Ejerfeldt, 160-1, 168-9; Lily Weiser-Aall, *Svangerskap og fødsel i nyere norsk tradisjon. En kildekritisk studie* (Småskrifter fra Norsk Etnologisk Granskning 6-7, 1968), 175 ff., 157 ff.

<sup>112</sup> Ejerfeldt, 162, 169.

body of statistical evidence and a fuller discussion of the problems of meaning and origin raised by the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja*, in a paper delivered at the First International Saga Conference in 1971 and now (1973) published.<sup>113</sup> In this paper he suggests that the use of *hamingja* to translate *fortuna* in *Rómverja saga* is because the word had, in accordance with its etymology, a greater element of personification than the words *gipta* and *gæfa*; the latter word is used in *Rómverja saga* to render the words *cursus* and *fata*. More generally he claims that the rendering of *fortuna* by *hamingja* simply exemplifies a translator's normal situation: a translator has to find in his native language the closest equivalents to the words of the original, and if he chooses to render *fortuna* by *hamingja*, for instance, this need not mean, of course — as Ejerfeldt would doubtless agree — that the concepts denoted by *fortuna* and *hamingja* are identical, or that they have the same background. It does suggest, on the other hand, that the meaning of *hamingja* came close to that of "luck" or "fortune" at an earlier stage than Ejerfeldt would allow. Hallberg does not deny that there is an element of antiquarianism in the way the words *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* are used in the sagas — this is implied, after all, in his argument that the saga-authors of the thirteenth century considered these words more appropriate to ancient times than to their own — but he sees this, unlike Ejerfeldt, as a confirmation that the words and meanings in question are ancient and Scandinavian in origin. He finds no clear evidence in the sagas of an unmistakeable connection between the words *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* and Christian concepts, or even for their acquisition of Christian shades of meaning with the passage of time. By a fortunate coincidence, it is in a context of kingship (not, of course, the primary

<sup>113</sup> Peter Hallberg, 'The concept of *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja* in Old Norse Literature', *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference* ... 1971 (issued by the Viking Society, 1973), 143–83. I am most grateful to Dr Hallberg for allowing me to make use of his paper in advance of its publication.

subject of his paper) that Hallberg sums up an important part of his discussion of the various ways in which these words are used in the sagas. He is replying to Baetke's contention, referred to above, that, since these words when applied to kings are used above all of Christian monarchs — Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr —, it is altogether likely that they reflect Christian ideas. He says this:

The two Óláfrs, the missionary kings, were looked upon by the saga authors as ideal heroes, having good fortune in spite of their final death in battle. The *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* connected with them concern their careers as rulers, their overcoming of enemies and such matters. There is nothing especially Christian about those concepts. If they are native Scandinavian concepts, as I contend, and besides fairly neutral in relation to definite religious systems — they mean success in life, but can be provided by Óðinn, by God, or by some other, more undefined power — if it is so, what would then be more natural than that popular Christian kings and heroes should be endowed with plenty of that fortune? The *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja* — however deep rooted in a heathen past — could fit the Christian hero excellently.<sup>114</sup>

In the first part of this paper it was suggested that in view of the uncertain state of our knowledge of early Scandinavian kingship a rather more tentative style than has traditionally been used for discussing it might profitably be employed; and that "sacral" was for various reasons preferable to "divine" as an adjective referring, predicatively or otherwise, to the nouns "kings" and "kingship". In the second part of the paper, which ended with a tentative definition of the expression "sacral kingship", the way was prepared by an examination of some of the senses in which this expression has been used; and it was shown in particular that Baetke's arguments against the view that ancient Scandinavian kingship was sacral in any kind of "god-sprung" sense were, if not acceptable in all respects, at least strong

<sup>114</sup> Hallberg (1971/3), 161-2.



enough to justify the tentative style advocated earlier and the tentative nature of the proposed definition of "sacral kingship". In the last part, which took as its starting-point Folke Ström's discussion of the story of Dómaldi in relation to the concept of the king's luck, a survey was made of recent opinions for and against the view that the concept of luck as reflected in *gipta*, *gæfa*, *hamingja*, was a native Scandinavian concept, dating from pre-Christian times; and it was hinted that the words *gipta*, *gæfa* and *hamingja*, as they are used in the sagas, indicate one way in which kings *may* have been regarded as "sacral" in pre-Christian Scandinavia. More definite statements could perhaps be made on this if a thorough investigation were made of the extent to which these words are used with reference to kings in the sagas, and of the nature of the contexts in which they are so used. The basis for such an investigation has been laid by Peter Hallberg in the two studies referred to above.

It will have been noticed that this paper is sub-titled "A review of *some* recent writings", and it is inevitably selective and incomplete. I hope nevertheless that it will serve as an introduction and may help to stimulate further exploration and discussion of the difficult subject of early Scandinavian kingship.

## THE NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF SOURCE-REFERENCES IN THE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

By W. MANHIRE

### I

ONE of the more prominent verbal features of the Sagas of Icelanders is the way in which they refer to traditions or writings which support and verify certain narrative details. Such references are frequently to poetry (usually quoted) which may or may not preserve historical facts, sometimes to other written sagas or histories, and sometimes to real or apparently real oral traditions. References to oral tradition are usually formulated in what seem to be standard phrases: *svá er sagt, er þat sagt, frá því er sagt, þess er getit, svá segja menn, er þat sumra manna sögn*, and so forth. Some of the "facts" introduced by such conventional phrases no doubt represent genuine tradition (though the historical value of such tradition is a different matter), while others seem to be manneristic or rhetorical. What is clear, however, is that the authors of the sagas were often concerned to substantiate the truth of their stories; and that even those phrases which might loosely be classed as mannerisms either lay claim to the status of genuine source-references, or have their origins in such references.

Source-references are survivals from the historical tradition which to a greater or lesser extent must have shaped the attitudes of saga-authors. Ari Þorgilsson typifies and provides a model for the historical approach. In what has survived of his writing we are confronted with a careful and honest mind, concerned to establish the authenticity of almost every fact recorded. The very first sentence of *Íslendingabók* — if we discount

the preface — includes four references to sources. Three of these are to oral informants; one is to a written saga, probably Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*.<sup>1</sup>

Ísland byggðisk fyrst ýr Norvegi á dögum Haralds ens hárfagra, Halfdanarsonar ens svarta, í þann tíð — at ætlun ok tólu þeira Teits fóstara míns, þess manns es ek kunna spakastan, sonar Ísleifs byskups, ok Þorkels fǫðurbróður míns Gellissonar, es langt munði fram, ok Þóriðar Snorradóttur goða, es bæði vas margspök ok óljúgfróð, — es Ívarr Ragnarssonr loðbrókar lét drepa Eadmund enn helga Englakonung; en þat vas sjau tegum [vetra] ens níunda hundraðs eptir burð Krists, at því es ritit es í sögu hans. (ÍF 1 4)

Such allusions are common in *Íslendingabók*. By example, Ari indicates his procedure at the outset: he will be concerned wherever possible to substantiate the detail of his history, to 'authenticate' his facts as exactly as he can. It is notable in the passage quoted that he is not content merely to enumerate his informants, but wishes as well to establish their particular qualifications. They are credited variously with long memory, wisdom, and trustworthiness: all faculties which might be supposed to indicate their suitability for the role which Ari assigns them. The care involved in Ari's use of the source-reference is most apparent when we find him tracing pieces of information along a chain of informants to an original source:

En þat vas, es hann tók byggva landit, fjórtán vetrum eða fimmtán fyrr en kristni kvæmi hér á Ísland, at því es sá talði fyrir Þorkeli Gellissyni á Grœnlandi, es sjalfr fylgði Eiríki enum rauða út. (ÍF 1 14)

Svá kvað Teitr þann segja, es sjalfr vas þar. (ÍF 1 15)

Markús Skeggjasonr hafði lǫgsögu næstr Sighvati ok tók þat sumar, es Gizurr byskup hafði einn vetr verit hér á landi, en fór með fjögur sumur ok tuttugu. At hans sögu es skrifuð ævi allra lǫgsöggumanna á bók þessi, þeira es váru fyrir vart minni, en hónum sagði Þórarinn bróðir hans ok Skeggi faðir þeira ok fleiri spakir menn til þeira ævi, es fyrir hans minni

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslensk Fornrit* (= ÍF) 1 xxii ff.

váru, at því es Bjarni enn spaki hafði sagt, fǫðurfaðir þeira, es munði Þórarin lǫgsögumann ok sex aðra síðan. (*ÍF* I 22)

When Ari uses a comparatively vague phrase — later to become conventional — such as *svá er sagt*, he nevertheless has a particular informant in mind, whom he names:

En svá es sagt, at Haraldr væri sjau tegu vetra konungr ok yrði áttáðr . . . Svá sagði Þorkell oss Gellissonr. (*ÍF* I 6)

En svá es sagt, at þat bæri frá, hvé vel þeir mæltu . . . Þenna atburð sagði Teitr oss at því, es kristni kom á Ísland. (*ÍF* I 16-17)

The importance Ari attached to a careful depiction of his sources is clear enough, as is his method. His approach is continued — though blessed with rather more imagination and narrative craft — in the historical writing of Snorri Sturluson, where the practice of alluding to authorities is occasionally complemented by some helpful theorizing. In his preface to *Heimskringla* Snorri is plainly in admiration of Ari and his conscientious citation of source-material:<sup>2</sup> and his own citation of Ari, in all its detail, gives some indication of the practical and imitative form his approval is to take. Like Ari, Snorri is frequently able to ascribe information to particular sourcemen:

Haraldr konungr gaf Steigar-Þóri þar at veizlunni mǫsurbolla. Hann var gyrðr með silfri ok silfrhadda yfir ok gyllt hvárt tveggja ok fullr upp af skírum silfrpenningum. Þar fylgðu ok tveir gullhringar ok stóðu mǫrk báðir saman. Hann gaf honum ok skikkju sína, þat var brúnn purpuri, hvít skinn með, ok hét honum miklum metnaði ok vináttu sinni. Þorgils Snorrason sagði svá, at hann sá altárisklæðit, þat er gǫrt var ór mǫttlinum, en Guðrǫðr, dóttir Guthorms Steigar-Þórissonar, sagði, at hon kvað Guthorm, fǫður sinn, eiga bollann, svá at hon sá. (*ÍF* xxviii 101)

At one point in *Heimskringla* Snorri makes reference to Eiríkr Oddsson, laying some stress on those facts

<sup>2</sup> This is true of many subsequent writers who make reference to Ari. Cf. G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (1953), 96 ff.

(including Eiríkr's own attitude to sources) which make him a reliable authority:

Hallr, sonr Þorgeirs læknis Steinssonar, var hirðmaðr Inga konungs ok var við staddr þessi tíðendi. Hann sagði Eiríki Oddssyni fyrir, en hann reit þessa frásögn. Eiríkr reit bók þá, er kǫlluð er Hryggjarstykki. Í þeiri bók er sagt frá Haraldi gilla ok tveimr sonum hans ok frá Magnúsi blinda ok frá Sigurði slembi, allt til dauða þeira. Eiríkr var vitr maðr ok var í þenna tíma lǫngum í Nóregi. Suma frásögn reit hann eptir fyrirsögn Hákonar maga, lends manns þeira Haraldssona. Hákon ok synir hans váru í ǫllum þessum deilum ok ráðagörðum. Enn nefnir Eiríkr fleiri menn, er honum sögðu frá þessum tíðendum, vitrir ok sannreyndir, ok váru nær, svá at þeir heyrðu eða sá atburðina, en sumt reit hann eptir sjálfs sín heyrn eða sýn. (ÍF XXVIII 318-9)

Snorri makes it plain, too, that his own attitude to sources is a critical one, and however this works out in practice he is concerned to parade the intention:

En þó er miklu fleira óritat hans frægðarverka. Kæmr til þess ófræði vár ok þat annat, at vér viljum eigi setja á bæktr vitnisláusar sögur. Þótt vér hafim heyrt ræður eða getit fleiri hluta, þá þykkir oss heðan í frá betra, at við sé aukit, en þetta sama þurfir ór at taka. (ÍF XXVIII 118-9)

Generalized source-references are not common in Snorri's work. Phrases such as *svá er sagt* — perhaps owing to the admirably specific nature of most source-references — seem often to introduce tradition which, if not apocryphal, may at least be doubtful:

Þat er sögn manna, at þá er fram leið at andláti konungs, at þá var Haraldr nær ok fátt manna annat. Þá laut Haraldr yfir konunginn ok mælti: 'Því skírskota ek undir alla yðr, at konungr gaf mér nú konungdóm ok allt ríki í Englandi.' Því næst var konungr hafiðr dauðr ór hvílunni. (ÍF XXVIII 171)

Verse is sometimes used as specific evidence to back up general expressions:

Svá er sagt, at í ǫllum ferðum þessum hafi Haraldr áttar átján fólkorrostur. Svá segir Þjóðólfr:

Þjóð veit, at hefr háðar  
 hvargrimmligar rimmur,  
 rofízk hafa opt fyr jöfri,  
 átján Haraldr, sáttir. (ÍF xxviii 82)

Snorri's chief reservoir of reliable information was the poetry which described and commemorated particular events, and his preface to *Heimskringla* makes the position clear. When we come to the Sagas of Icelanders, the different way of treating source-references is at once apparent in the use of poetry. Verses — genuine or not — are used in *Íslendingasögur* to express the feelings of characters or to advance the action. They inhabit the narrative and not its historical framework, and no longer have explicit significance as evidence for the events described in the surrounding prose. The situation is similar with regard to other source-references. Only rarely are source-men named,<sup>3</sup> though references to other sagas are not infrequent. Discussion of the more general references (*svá er sagt, er eigi getit*, etc.) has been largely concerned to determine whether or not these denote an oral tradition. Knut Liestøl has argued that they represent "the oral tradition upon which they [the sagas] are based",<sup>4</sup> while Walter Baetke has argued the contrary case:

Auch in den Isländersagas haben wir es ohne Zweifel mit stereotypen Wendungen zu tun, die ihrem realistischen Erzählstil entsprechen; durch solche scheinbar objektiven Hinweise suchen sie die Echtheit ihrer Geschichte zu beglaubigen. Die Formeln *þat er sagt, svá er sagt*, kommen in manchen Sagas so häufig vor, dass ihnen nicht einmal so viel Gewicht beigelegt werden kann; sie dienen einfach zum Übergang oder zur Einleitung eines neuen Abschnittes und rücken in eine Reihe mit Floskeln wie: *Nú er frá því at segja*,

<sup>3</sup> Only *Bjarnar saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Grettis saga* name particular informants. *Grettis saga* instances Grettir as a kind of informant, as well as referring to the work of Sturla Þórðarson. Most of these references have been called in question by Baetke. Cf. T. M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (1964), 111-2, for a bibliographical and critical discussion of the debate.

<sup>4</sup> *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas* (1930), 33.

*nú er þar til at taka.* Dass sie keinen Zeugniswert besitzen, wird dadurch bestätigt, dass sie sich auch in solchen Sagas finden, die unzweifelhaft Dichtungen sind.<sup>5</sup>

The logical implications of the final sentence are dubious,<sup>6</sup> but the critical extreme which Baetke embraces is evident.<sup>7</sup> In 1966 Theodore M. Andersson attempted to define a middle ground by providing a more reasoned survey of the textual evidence available in volumes II–XII of the *Íslensk Fornrit* series.<sup>8</sup> His survey makes important statements about the narrative and rhetorical consequences of many of these references, but it proceeds very much from a concern to determine what facts if any can be demonstrated about oral antecedents (“obvious references to written sources” and “references to other known sagas” are excluded from consideration). To this end Andersson attempts to categorize all references which seem to him oral into the genuine and the spurious; and after very close analysis he arrives at percentages: 24.7 per cent of references are genuine (or, if the purely “manneristic” references of *Reykðæla saga* are excluded, 39.5 per cent). These figures, however, are questionable in some degree because of an underlying procedural assumption — that those references which involve stylistic or narrative effects are unlikely to be genuine.<sup>9</sup> The significant objection is that Andersson attributes to saga-authors habits of mind which seem more appropriate to twentieth-century novelists: there is no reason why source-references should not be “genuine” and rhetorical at the same time. A particular instance will illustrate the

<sup>5</sup> *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas* (1956), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Andersson, *The Problem*, 109, for a discussion of Baetke’s “essential syllogism”.

<sup>7</sup> It should be said that Liestøl’s position is not so extreme: “Of course this may in time have become a mannerism” (*The Origin*, 34).

<sup>8</sup> ‘The Textual Evidence for an Oral Family Saga’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* LXXXI (1966), 1–23, hereafter cited as ‘Textual Evidence’.

<sup>9</sup> And vice versa. Cf., for example, the following statement: “It is more difficult to dismiss these passages as formulaic or rhetorical. There is not much unusual in the circumstances that requires excusing or invites emphasis and they serve no transparent narrative function which would justify their inclusion” (‘Textual Evidence’, 12–13).

dangers. Andersson quotes the following sentence from *Fóstbræðra saga* which introduces the quarrel between Þorgeirr and Þormóðr: *Svá segja sumir menn, at Þorgeirr mælti við Þormóð, þá er þeir vǫru í ofsa sínum sem mestum.* He comments thus: "The emphasis in this case is on a crucial moment. Þorgeirr is led by his vanity to challenge his sworn brother Þormóðr and this causes a separation which is fateful for the rest of the story. Þorgeirr has reached the watershed of success and from this moment his luck begins to wane. The author emphasizes the importance of the moment and the height of Þorgeirr's arrogance, something out of the ordinary and calculated to startle the reader, by documenting it from tradition."<sup>10</sup> Yet the ensuing quarrel, set forth in dialogue, is succeeded by a verse which is attributed to Þormóðr. The situation is similar to that which has already been noticed in the work of Snorri, for the verse is prefixed by the statement: *Þormóðr víkr á nokkut í Þorgeirsdrápu á misþokka þeira í þessu ærendi* (ÍF VI 152). If the verse is genuine (and there seems no reason to doubt it), Andersson's observations on the emphasizing function of the initial reference remain valid; but they do not constitute any sort of argument that the reference is spurious.

At the risk of quibbling, three further objections should be noted. First, expressions such as *svá er sagt* must have been liable to considerable disruption in the process of transmission. It seems unlikely that scribes dealt with them in a spirit of great reverence, and many of these expressions may have been deleted or added for various reasons. Second, there is no reason to suppose that expressions with *segja* or *geta* refer solely to oral tradition, as opposed to written. And, third, it is impossible to know what proportion of a saga's oral sources is directly acknowledged in its text. A number of sagas make reference to written sources, but they do not by

<sup>10</sup> 'Textual Evidence', 9.



any means list all such sources.<sup>11</sup> Oral references in the *Íslendingasögur* must be similarly incomplete. These considerations do not invalidate Andersson's conclusions, but they do suggest that the evidence on which his figures are based is not necessarily representative. It is possible, however, to examine the artistic effects of source-references without reference to the debate about oral antecedents; and it is with such an examination that the rest of this essay is concerned.

## II

"Artistic effects" can rarely be made the subject of generalization. Response to any work of art is at best subjective, and each reader will bring different aesthetic and moral assumptions to bear on narrative details which draw their life from quite different contexts, local and general. All the same, some generalizations will be made below, and it is necessary to emphasize at the outset that they hardly represent the variety upon which they draw. For the sake of convenience (but at the risk of some repetition) I have divided source-references into two categories: (i) those which allude apparently or in fact to tradition; (ii) those which allude to the absence of tradition.

(i) The chief *narrative* function of source-references, and the one most often termed manneristic by commentators, is transitional. *Svá er sagt* and the like are commonly used to link episodes in a saga; they denote, that is, the conclusion of one narrative section and the commencement of another. In this sense their role is humble but not unimportant, for the transitions of time and place which they accomplish can be vital to the unimpeded flow of action.<sup>12</sup> Andersson has listed a large number of these,<sup>13</sup> and it will be sufficient here to

<sup>11</sup> *Gunnlaugs saga*, for instance, refers by name to *Laxdæla saga*, but makes no mention of *Hálfræðar saga*, with which it seems to have a direct relationship. See *Gunnlaugs saga orms tungu*, ed. P. G. Foote (1957), xviii.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., however, note 25 below.

<sup>13</sup> 'Textual Evidence', 5-7.

provide instances from two of the sagas from which he has not drawn evidence.

Svá er sagt, at þat gerðisk nú til tíðenda, at Örlygr á Örlygsstöðum tók sótt. (*Eyrbyggja saga*. ÍF iv 87)

Þat er sagt frá Hrapp, at hann gerðisk úrigr viðreignar; veitti nú nábúum sínum svá mikinn ágang, at þeir máttu varla halda hlut sínum fyrir honum. (*Laxdæla saga*. ÍF v 39)

Baetke is right to point out<sup>14</sup> that the function of such references is analogous to other purely transitional phrases like *nú er at segja*. Indeed, a number of translators mirror the ambiguity of the Icelandic in such cases by using English expressions which also have a compositional function: "the story goes that", "the tale runs thus". According to Baetke, transitional references are frequent in the more fictional sagas, and a brief examination of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* partly confirms his judgement. There almost all the source-references are of this nature; if they can any longer be described as references to tradition, they must be classed as manneristic.

Many references to tradition have a function which is rhetorical, not compositional. They often accompany unusual claims or extravagant details which might seem excessive to a reader. Thus physical feats are sometimes authenticated by "what men say":

Svá segja sumir menn, at átta jósu þeir við hann, áðr en lauk; var þá ok upp ausit skipit. (*Grettis saga*. ÍF vii 55)

and sometimes the more romantic extravagances are qualified:

Engan tók Hrefna mann eptir Kjartan. Hon lifði litla hríð, síðan er hon kom norðr, ok er þat sagn manna, at hon hafi sprungit af stríði. (*Laxdæla saga*. ÍF v 158)

It is not difficult to detect in each of these passages the hand of an author who found it necessary to contend with a largely pragmatic audience. Indeed, Andersson sets

<sup>14</sup> See pp. 174-5 above.

down six further passages from *Laxdæla saga*, all of which make excessive statements in the context of source-references.<sup>15</sup>

When saga-authors introduce or dismiss their characters or pass judgement on their moral and physical accomplishments, they often make an appeal to tradition or to popular knowledge. It is especially when these judgements are very favourable that such appeals are made:

Hallr, sonr Guðmundar, var þá á tvítugs aldri; hann var mjök í kyn þeira Laxdæla. Þat er alsagt, at eigi hafi verit alvaskligri maðr í öllum Norðlendingafjórðungi. (*Laxdæla saga*. ÍF v 136)

The appeal to tradition can be used specifically as evidence for a subsequent authorial judgement. It is so with the story of Unnr in djúpúðga's migration to Iceland:

[Unnr] hafði brott með sér allt frændlið sitt, þat er á lífi var, ok þykkjask menn varla dæmi til finna, at einn kvenmaðr hafi komizk í brott ór þvílíkum ófriði með jafnmiklu fé ok foruneyti; má af því marka, at hon var mikit afbragð annarra kvenna. (*Laxdæla saga*. ÍF v 7)

It seems probable that authors were not always willing to commit themselves entirely to the descriptions they set down, and felt some qualification to be necessary:

Gunnarr Hámundarson bjó at Hlíðarenda í Fljótshlíð. Hann var mikill maðr vexti ok sterkr, manna bezt vígr; hann hjó báðum höndum ok skaut, ef hann vildi, ok hann vá svá skjótt með sverði, at þrjú þóttu á lopti at sjá. Hann skaut manna bezt af boga ok höfði allt þat, er hann skaut til; hann hljóp meir en hæð sína með öllum herklæðum, ok eigi skemmra aptr en fram fyrir sik; hann var syndr sem selr, ok eigi var sá leikr, at nokkurr þyrfti við hann at keppa, ok hefir svá verit sagt, at engi væri hans jafningi. (*Njáls saga*. ÍF xii 52-3)

Gunnarr's first appearance in *Njáls saga* is marked by a description of his physical prowess; in a general sense,

<sup>15</sup> 'Textual Evidence', 8-9.

this information is necessary preparation for the scene in which he is slain. In particular, the information about his skill with bow and arrow gives credence to his later statement, *Líf mitt liggir við . . . því at þeir munu mik aldri fá sóttan, meðan ek kem boganum við* (ÍF XII 189). Emphasis is thus placed on certain factors which will be important for the unfolding action; and indeed the passage is invested with a certain retrospective irony. Yet the description is an idealizing one. Gunnarr seems very much the nonpareil: and however strongly the author wishes to stress his virtues, he is also concerned not to be held responsible for claims which might be thought excessive. His appeal to what men say stresses certain facts, but it also qualifies them.

Source-references are an efficient and unobtrusive means of inviting the reader to pay attention to certain details in the text. At its simplest, this function is seen in *Vatnsdæla saga* (ch. 9), where the magnitude of Haraldr's victory at Hafrsfjörðr is stressed by the allusion to its surviving fame:

Fundinum lauk svá, sem mǫrgum er kunnigt ok fullfrægt er orðit, at Haraldr konungr fekk ágætan sigr ok varð síðan einvöldugr yfir öllum Nóregi. (ÍF VIII 25)

We find a more subtle instance in the account of Óláfr feilan's wedding (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 7), where we encounter a description of Unnr's physical appearance — a description which is highlighted by an appeal to tradition:

Eptir þat stóð Unnr upp ok kvazk ganga mundu til þeirar skemmu, sem hon var vǫn at sofa í; bað, at þat skyldi hverr hafa at skemmtan, sem þá væri næst skapi, en mungát skyldi skemmta alþýðunni. Svá segja menn, at Unnr hafi verit bæði há ok þreklig; hon gekk hart útar eptir skálanum; fundusk mǫnnum orð um, at konan var enn virðulig. (ÍF V 12-13)

The function of this reference is made plain a few sentences later. Unnr is found dead in the morning, *uppi við hægendin*, and the response of the wedding-guests is

intended to guide the reader's: *þótti monnum mikils um vert, hversu Unnr hafði haldið virðingu sinni til dauðadags*. We are invited to relate her bearing and stature at the wedding to her subsequent death, and to respond to the manner in which she faces death as a domestic equivalent of the way in which many saga-characters face rather more violent fates. The unexpected focus on Unnr's physical appearance and demeanour — stressed as it is by a source-reference — serves to affirm her individuality and substantial presence: thus her death seems all the more immediate, and (on a first reading, anyway) unexpected.

The function of emphasis is not restricted to local detail. References to tradition can also be used to draw attention to factors which assume more general importance in a saga. Theodore M. Andersson has pointed, for instance, to three passages which occur early in *Bandamanna saga*, each of which alludes to tradition in order to stress the multiplying wealth of Oddr Ófeigsson.<sup>16</sup> One of the saga's major preoccupations — wealth, and the ways in which it determines the behaviour of men — is thus brought to the fore.

Whether source-references reflect genuine tradition or not, their major effect is to attest the "historicity" of the sagas. References can relate to large narrative sections (one manuscript of *Gunnlaugs saga* improbably cites Ari as the source for the story) or to quite minor details. Even those references which may be counted manneristic play their part in this effect, not in a precise fashion but simply by their presence. This applies also to references which have a local rhetorical function: because the elements of narrative are interdependent, the authentication of one detail carries over to others. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, for example, the encounter between Þorgeirr and Butraldi is substantiated by a relatively minor detail. We are told that both men independently

<sup>16</sup> 'Textual Evidence', 10. And cf. note 23 below.

seek shelter at the house of a certain Þorkell, and that they meet at supper:

Frá verðgetum er sagt vandliga: Tveir diskar váru fram bornir; þar var eitt skammrifsstykki fornt á diskinum hvárum ok forn ostr til gnættar. (*FF* VI 144)

The immediate scene is the occasion for social and psychological observation which verges on the comic, and the source-reference, as Andersson observes, "signals the exact and detailed description of the confrontation between Þorgeirr and Butraldi".<sup>17</sup> Yet this appeal to a real or supposed tradition about the supper-fare authenticates the subsequent conflict between the two men, in which Butraldi is slain. A reader will naturally suppose that if the author has access to traditions which enshrine such small particulars he can hardly lack access to traditions which record the larger events. Many source-references occur, sometimes in clusters, towards the end of a saga. They often accompany or play some part in genealogical tailpieces, and like the latter they anchor the sagas at their close in a world of historical fact. Further, because such references constitute some part of the reader's final impression of a text, they retrospectively vouch for the whole of a narrative. Such an intention is plain in *Grettis saga*, where a postscript discusses Grettir's unexampled success as an outlaw, and attributes opinions on it to Sturla Þórðarson. Flosi sets sail at the close of *Njáls saga* accompanied by a reference to "what men say", and *Viga-Glúms saga*<sup>18</sup> concludes with these words:

Þat er [mál] manna, at Glúmr hafi verit tuttugu vetr mestr hofðingi í Eyjafirði, en aðra tuttugu vetr engir meiri en til jafns við hann. Þat er ok mál manna, at Glúmr hafi verit bezt um sik allra vígra manna hér á landi. Ok lýkr þar sögu Glúms.

<sup>17</sup> 'Textual Evidence', 9.

<sup>18</sup> Ed. G. Turville-Petre (1960), 51/19-23.

To what extent such references may be genuine is a matter of doubt. *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Egils saga*, and *Grettis saga* all devote some space to a consideration of the exhumed bones of their chief characters — it is difficult to sort the conventional from the truthful in such cases, but that they have an air of historicity is unquestionable.<sup>19</sup>

A related effect is to be found in references to other written sagas.<sup>20</sup> These, too, confirm the serious historical intentions of an author, but they also serve as bibliographical guides, referring the reader elsewhere for fuller information, or remind him (an effect perhaps unique to the sagas) of knowledge of men and events which he already possesses.<sup>21</sup>

(ii) In many cases *Íslendingasögur* make reference to an absence of information. Phrases which herald such statements are based on negatives — *er eigi getit*, *eigi eru fleiri nefndir*, *eigi vitum vér*, *engi önnur sannendi hafa menn til þess*, *er eigi frá sagt*, and so forth — and for this reason they may be termed “negative references”. Like those expressions which introduce surviving traditions, negative references are frequently manneristic, though in this case they seem to be narrative habits lacking a compositional function. This is especially true of statements about the uneventfulness of a journey: *Ok er ekki sagt af hans ferðum, fyrr en hann kom austr á Jaðar* (*Grettis saga*. *ÍF* VII 134); *Ekki er getit um ferð þeira, áðr þau koma á Kambsnes til Þorleiks Hóskuldssonar* (*Laxdæla saga*. *ÍF* V 101). It seems probable that these negative references relate primarily to a lack of interesting or important detail — authors seem to feel a need to account for periods of time in which nothing happens. Analogous phrases which elsewhere accompany

<sup>19</sup> A striking exception — and one which suggests the dangers of generalization — is *Hrafnkels saga*, which contains no source-references of any kind. The saga makes frequent use, however, of a related historical device — the practice of explaining place-names in terms of narrative events.

<sup>20</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson lists some of these references in *Dating the Icelandic Sagas* (1958), 76–7.

<sup>21</sup> An effect also made possible by genealogical lists.

the description of such journeys confirm the judgement: *var þaðan af allt tíðendalaust um þeira ferð* (*Eyrbyggja saga*. ÍF IV 145); *Flopi fór þá frá Þvátta, ok er ekki um hans ferð at tala, fyrr en hann kom heim til Svínafells* (*Njáls saga*. ÍF XII 353). Sometimes the connection is made clear within a single sentence: *Er þá ekki sagt frá ferð hans, at til tíðenda yrði, áðr hann kom á Sandnes heim ok lét flytja til bæjar herfang þat allt, er hann hafði heim haft . . .* (*Egils saga*. ÍF II 49).

As rhetoric, negative references have an important emphasizing function, and their use is rather more sophisticated than is the case with the straightforward allusions. By admitting to a lack of information, an author is able to draw attention to those facts which he *has* recorded. In *Grettis saga*, a conversation between Grettir and his brother Þorsteinn is reported, in which Þorsteinn predicts that he will one day avenge Grettir. Grettir's reaction is sceptical, but the author chooses to conclude the conversation with these words: *Eigi er þá getit fleira um viðtal þeira* (ÍF VII 138). Evidently, we are to believe that the conversation was longer, but that nothing more of it has survived. In consequence, speculation is invited as to why this part of it, and not some other, should have been remembered: the answer comes to hand at the end of the saga when Þorsteinn does avenge Grettir. The negative reference thus concentrates attention on the exchange between Grettir and Þorsteinn, and gives Þorsteinn's words the dramatic force and structural interest of prophecy. In *Njáls saga* a similar effect is encountered when the author describes the seating arrangements at the wedding of Gunnarr and Hallgerðr:

Gunnarr hafði marga fyrirboðsmenn, ok skipaði hann svá sínum monnum: Hann sat á miðjan bekk, en innar frá Þráinn Sigfússon, þá Úlfr augoði, þá Valgarðr inn grái, þá Mörðr ok Runólfr, þá Sigfússynir; Lambi sat innstr. It næsta Gunnari utar frá sat Njáll, þá Skarpheðinn, þá Helgi, þá Grímr, þá



Höskuldr, þá Hafr inn spaki, þá Ingjaldr frá Keldum, þá synir Þóris austan ór Holti. Þórir vildi sitja yztr virðingamanna, því at þá þótti hverjum gott þar, sem sat. Höskuldr sat á miðjan bekk, en synir hans innar frá honum; Hrútr sat utar frá Höskuldi. En þá er eigi frá sagt, hversu qðrum var skipat. (ÍF XII 88-9).

Again attention is directed to the facts which the author has chosen to record. Richard M. Allen rightly notes that the scene

presents in tableau the sides whose strife will fill the second half of the saga, the Njálssons and their kinsmen, the Sigfússons and theirs. Valgarðr the Grey is at the feast who later with his son Mörðr will scheme to bring death upon the Njálssons; Mörðr indeed will join in the attack against Gunnarr himself. Men are present here who themselves or their sons will ride to the burning of Njáll. There is a pervasive dramatic irony at Gunnarr's wedding, for the audience knows as the characters cannot what will be the outcome of the divisions so neatly suggested by the seating arrangements.<sup>22</sup>

It need only be added, by way of agreement, that the author of *Njáls saga* has a predilection for such symbolic tableaux — cf., for instance, chs. 121 and 154. A somewhat different irony — based on the gap between events and the comments on them — is found in *Egils saga*, when at the Gulapíng Egill defeats Atli in a duel over his wife's inheritance. The fight is a substantial business — Egill eventually bites through Atli's windpipe in order to sustain his claim — and the subsequent comment, *Ekki er getit, at þá yrði fleira til tíðenda á því þingi* (ÍF II 211), although it suggests that affairs have been restored to some kind of uneventful normality, comes close to being comic tautology. The result, anyway, is again to direct the reader back to what *has* happened — in this instance so that he should see that it is a great deal.

<sup>22</sup> *Fire and Iron* (1971), 102-3. Ian R. Maxwell has also pointed this out: "... The main impression is difficult to avoid. Gunnarr is sitting between the house of Njáll and its inveterate enemies to be ..." *Saga-Book* xv (1962-5), 29.

Irony and comedy are in fact a common effect of these references, and it is no doubt the negative element which makes this possible. In *Egils saga*, King Aðalsteinn entrusts to Egill a gift of silver for his father, compensation for the death of Þórólfr. Egill, however, retains the silver for himself: *en ekki er þess getit, at Egill skipti silfri því, er Aðalsteinn konungur hafði fengit honum í hendr, hvárki við Skalla-Grim né aðra menn* (ÍF II 151). The negative reference here is an emphasizing one; however, when Skalla-Grimr dies, a similar reference appears whose function is not merely one of emphasis: *ekki er þess getit, at lausafé væri lagt í haug hjá honum* (ÍF II 175). A somewhat mordant wit is at work here — the distinction between “It is said that no money was put in the mound with him” and “It is not said that any money was put in the mound with him” is a nice one — and the statement derives much of its force from the play made with a conventional source-reference.<sup>23</sup> In *Bolla þáttr Bollasonar* the same device is used (*er ekki getit, at hann sé með gjöfum í brott leyst*); and the irony is also found beyond the sagas, in *Snorra Edda*, for example, where after Þórr’s encounter with Skrímir Snorri says: *er þess eigi getit, at Æsirnir bæði þá heila hittask*.<sup>24</sup>

The pervasive effect of negative references is again to attest the historicity of saga-material — cf. the remarks made above, pp. 183-5 — and, in concert with positive references, the cumulative effect can be thoroughly persuasive. The author who stresses the historicity of the information he records is one thing, but the author who

<sup>23</sup> References to this silver play a large part in *Egils saga*; his own avarice and his sense of the power of money are often evident. At the close of the saga (ch. 85), having been prevented from disrupting the *alþingi* by scattering Aðalsteinn’s silver from the Lawrock, Egill hides the silver. It is never discovered, and the saga gives an account of several traditions about its hiding-place. Source-references not only focus one “theme” of the saga, they also involve the reader in active guesswork, so involving him directly in the implications of Egill’s avarice. If he is willing to judge Egill’s behaviour, as he is invited to do, he must also judge his own disposition.

<sup>24</sup> If the statement is inverted, making the source-reference a positive one (*er þess getit, at eigi bæði Æsirnir þá heila hittask*), the comedy — if any remains — seems a much more primitive business.

also admits to a few factual lacunae, however minor, implicitly verifies the rest of his information, and his own reliability as a serious historian:

Ekki er frá því sagt, hversu mikit fé hann fekk í hellinum, en þat ætla menn, at verit hafi nökkut ... (*Grettis saga*. *ÍF* VII 216)

An author's reliability can seem even more remarkable when he refers to double traditions about a matter:

Þórólfr Mostrarskegg kvángaðisk í elli sinni ok fekk þeirar konu, er Unnr hét; segja sumir, at hon væri dóttir Þorsteins rauðs, en Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði telr hana eigi með hans börnum. (*Eyrbyggja saga*. *ÍF* IV 12)

Such occasional uncertainties, genuine or not, present the image of an author who would not willingly mislead on points of detail. Certainly the reader is not likely to question his integrity when he makes reference to real or supposed traditions.

### III

Source-references have various functions in Sagas of Icelanders. They can be compositional and rhetorical devices, and even mannerisms, though their chief effect is to attest the historicity of saga-content. Their number is not excessive, except in one saga,<sup>25</sup> and their formulation involves some linguistic variety, as even the minimal illustrations above will show. This qualification is important, for too many allusions to tradition might have resulted in a lack of narrative interest. Such is the

<sup>25</sup> This is *Reykðæla saga*, in which Andersson has counted over one hundred source-references. Whether these are largely mannerisms, as both Baetke and Andersson believe (cf. 'Textual Evidence', 5), or are the marks of an author who seriously wishes to record the truth as he knows it (cf. Dietrich Hofmann, 'Reykðæla saga und mündliche überlieferung', *Skandinavistik* 11, 1972, 1-26), the effect is plainly unfortunate. The references prove too great a burden for the (often minor) details to which they are attached; the text is overloaded, and narrative flow and forward movement are impeded. Certainly there is no sense in *Reykðæla saga* of that *verðandi* which Einar Ól. Sveinsson singles out for approval in *Njáls saga* (*Njáls Saga. A Literary Masterpiece*, 1971, 91).

case in Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, where the number of source-references distorts the shape of events and deprives them of individual life. The methodology limits the possibilities for narrative art — though Ari, it must be added, should hardly be censured for failing to achieve what he never intended. Saga-authors must have had access to rather more sources, both oral and written, than they acknowledge; but acknowledgement of all the available traditions would have sacrificed "life" and narrative interest to a rigid historical method. That the sagas frequently achieve formal and dramatic interest justifies speculation as to what further transformations the reference to sources may have undergone.

One of the difficulties faced by an author who adopts a narrative technique based largely on objectivity is the necessity to make judgements; the reader's response to character and event must somehow be guided, and if the narrator is to remain "effaced", then some means of replacing the omniscient commentator must be found.<sup>26</sup> The solution in the sagas is to use dramatic opinion: characters react to events, or comment on them; and frequently the "voice of the countryside" is heard:

Víg Gunnars mæltisk illa fyrir um allar sveitir, ok var hann mǫrgum mǫnnum mjök harmdauði. (*IF* XII 191)

The reader is likely to have made his own judgement on Gunnarr's slayers by this stage in *Njáls saga*, but this popular judgement, which is also the author's will confirm him in it.

There is some evidence that such a use of opinion to persuade the reader to certain conclusions about events is derived from the habit of alluding to sources. Gunnarr's heroic defence is described earlier in the chapter by his attackers — *Mikinn ǫldung hófu vér nú at velli lagit, ok hefir oss erfitt veitt, ok mun hans vörn uppi, meðan landit*

<sup>26</sup> Source-references are sometimes used to enable judgements (cf. p. 179 above). The paradox is that while such a device commends an author's impartiality and reliability, it inevitably betrays his controlling presence.

*er byggt* — and is also recorded in a verse attributed to Þorkell Elfaraskáld. The juxtaposition is not unique. Opinion is often found in the sagas side-by-side with source-references:

Þá er þeir bræðr létu ór læginu, kom upp hjá skipinu hrosshvalr. Kormákr skaut til hans pálstaf, ok kom á hvalinn, ok sökkðisk. Þóttusk menn þar kenna augu Þórveigar. Þessi hvalr kom ekki upp þaðan í frá, en til Þórveigar spurðisk þat, at hon lá hætt, ok er þat søgn manna, at hon hafi af því dait. (*ÍF* VIII 265-6)

In this passage from *Kormáks saga*, particular opinions are reported in combination with an allusion to tradition. We learn first of the response of the characters immediately involved in the incident (they recognize Þórveig's eyes), next of the reports of Þórveig's illness, and finally of the conclusions of men who must be the author's contemporaries. It will be seen that opinion and tradition here amount to almost the same thing, and that distinctions between the two are not simple.<sup>27</sup> Each judgement confirms the other, and any differences relate primarily to points of view: the use of opinion is dramatic and contemporary with the saga's fictional world, whereas the source-reference breaks the illusion of this fictional world by introducing the author into the narrative. Such examples could be multiplied, but a second from *Laxdæla saga* will suffice:

Kjartan fastaði þurrt langaföstu ok gerði þat at engis manns dæmum hér á landi, því at þat er søgn manna, at hann hafi fyrstr manna fastat þurt hér innanlands. Svá þótti monnum þat undarligr hlutr, at Kjartan lifði svá lengi matlauss, at menn fóru langar leiðir at sjá hann. Með slíku móti váru aðrir hættir Kjartans umfram aðra menn. (*ÍF* V 138)

The author draws on opinion and tradition to make his judgement; there is no sense that he makes any distinction between the two. Andersson counts this

<sup>27</sup> The ease with which tenses are mixed in the sagas does not make such distinctions any the easier. And in a sense any distinctions are academic — today's popular opinion is tomorrow's tradition, and so forth.

passage spurious as tradition — however this may be, its construction is typical of others which suggest that much of the opinion in the sagas is either a dramatic extension of traditions available to authors, or has features derived from such a process of extension. A mere change of tense, to take a brief example, would transform the following dramatic assessment of Grettir Ásmundarson into a retrospective judgement endowed with all the trappings of a source-reference:<sup>28</sup>

... var þat þá almælt, at engi væri þvílíkr maðr á öllu landinu fyrir áfs sakar ok hreysti ok allrar atgørvi sem Grettir Ásmundarson. (*ÍF* VII 122).

To make more of such similarities would be a fruitless endeavour. Some case might be made for the view that diverging opinions described in the sagas are analogous to statements about double traditions, but such thinking leads rapidly to a world of fancy: one of Njáll's silences, for instance, is hardly comparable to a statement about the absence of tradition. The evidence for a general similarity, however, must not be dismissed lightly, even though it is merely inductive. Objectivity is the chief characteristic of saga-style and may perhaps be attributed ultimately to the example of the first Icelandic historians. If this is so, it is to be expected that elements of historical method have survived in some form in the new contexts. On a superficial plane, source-references survive unchanged in *Íslendingasögur*, although it is clear that new artistic and compositional functions have been gathered to them. It is not altogether impossible that they also survive in less evident forms. It may be that they play a larger part in the formulation of saga-style than is usually recognised — certainly a transformation from historical device into dramatic opinion ensures that narrative objectivity is not set desperately at risk.

<sup>28</sup> Many source-references can be transformed in such a manner, and with similar results. Cf., e.g., the passages from *Laxdæla saga* quoted p. 179 above.

## THE DREAMS OF *FLÓAMANNA SAGA*<sup>1</sup>

By RICHARD PERKINS

THE dream as a literary motif must be known in the literatures of all ages. And nowhere can it be more common than in the literature of medieval Iceland.<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Henzen (*Träume*, 75) calculates that there are 250 dreams in the Old Icelandic sagas, while Georgia Kelchner (*Dreams*, 3) speaks of 'five hundred and thirty dream references' in Old Norse literature as a whole. According to Peter Hallberg (*The Icelandic Saga*, 1962, 81), it has been estimated that there are, on the average, three or four dreams per Family Saga. Now, *Flóamanna saga* is particularly valuable for the study of Old Icelandic dreams. Not only is the motif employed more frequently than in the average Family Saga — on thirteen occasions in all;<sup>3</sup> but the dreams the saga has are of special

<sup>1</sup> Bibliographical abbreviations are listed on pp. 237–8. Quotations from editions of Icelandic works have often been normalized and then without signal. I should like to thank Mrs Venetia Newall, Professor Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Mr Órnólfur Thorlacius, Professor Johan Lange, Professor Knut Fægri, Professor Ian Kirby and Dr D. White, who have all helped me in the preparation of the article. I am especially grateful to Professor Bo Almqvist of Dublin for valuable suggestions for lines of investigation.

<sup>2</sup> The most important general works on dreams in Old Icelandic literature are *Träume* and *Dreams*. Cf. M. Haeckel, *Die Darstellung und Funktion des Traumes in der isländischen Familiensaga* (1934); *KL*, s.v. *Draumar*; P. Hallberg, *The Icelandic Family Saga* (1962), ch. 7. Of more specialized studies, those of S. Larsen ('Antik og nordisk Drømmetro', *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*, 1917) and G. Turville-Petre ('Dreams in Icelandic Tradition', *Folklore*, 1958; reprinted with a postscript in his *Nine Norse Studies*, 1972, 30–51) should be particularly noted. Both these scholars suspected the influence of the *Somniale Danielis* on the dream stories in Old Icelandic literature. The *Somniale* (on which, see *KL*, s.v.) is an alphabetic catalogue of dream-symbols with brief interpretations (e.g. "To have a long beard, that denotes courage and power"). Since his paper of 1958, Turville-Petre has actually come across a fragment of an Icelandic version of the *Somniale* written about 1500. This he has edited in *Nordica et Anglica Studies in Honor of Stefán Einarsson* (ed. A. Orrick, 1968, 19–36; cf. G. Turville-Petre, 'Dream Symbols in Old Icelandic Literature', *Festschrift Walter Baetke*, 1966, 343–54). We can now look for evidence of the influence of the *Somniale* on Old Icelandic literature with much more assurance.

<sup>3</sup> The large number of dreams in *Fló* led its editors in *Orig.* (II, 631) to suggest an identification of it with the 'Drauma saga' mentioned on f. 79r of Perg. 4to No. 2 in the Royal Library in Stockholm (cf. *Den store saga om Olav den hellige*, ed. O. A. Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 1941, 886).

interest for the derivative elements they contain or for the intricate interpretations offered. I propose in this paper to consider the dreams of *Flóamanna saga* in their entirety.

The text of *Flóamanna saga* is found in two major redactions. The shorter of these (referred to hereafter as *SV*) is preserved in a large number of late paper manuscripts, the longer (called *LV*) exists only fragmentarily (chs. 18-25) in the vellum AM 445 b 4to and in a copy of it, part of AM 515 4to. As argued in *Orig.* (II, 630 ff.), by Björn Sigfússon ("Tvær gerðir Flóamannasögu", *Saga*, 1958, 429-51)<sup>4</sup> and by myself (*Thesis*, \*87 ff.), *LV* on the whole represents a more original text of the saga and *SV* differs from it largely as a result of abbreviation. When, then, quotations from the saga are given, these come normally from *LV*. On the other hand, *LV* is by no means always superior to *SV* and variants from *SV* are occasionally given where they could well be more original or are otherwise of special relevance.<sup>5</sup> Further, for the first two dreams of the saga (in chs. 15 and 16), *LV* is defective and *SV* has to be relied on. Page and line references to *LV* are given according to *Fornsögur* (pp. 168-85; the only printed edition of this version as a continuous text); *SV* is referred to according to *Fló*, 1932. The actual text of the quotations is quoted from *Thesis* on the other hand with minor differences of normalization. Square brackets enclose editorial emendations. Angle brackets in *LV* are used where AM 445 b 4to is damaged and matter has to be supplied either by conjecture or from *SV*. Round brackets in *LV* contain variants from *SV*.

<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of his article (p. 429), Björn writes: "Hér skal t.d. ekki andmælt beint þeirri ríkjandi skoðun, að hinn aðaltextinn að Flóamannas., B-gerðin [i.e. *LV*], muni víða orðinn eitthvað orðfleiri en frumsagan var." One wonders if Björn implies that there are reasons to believe that *LV* has been lengthened, and what those reasons might be. I have noted signs which suggest, if anything, that *LV* itself may have been shortened (cf. pp. 199, 214 and note 32 below).

<sup>5</sup> It must be regarded as a coincidence that a disproportionately large number of cases where *SV* seems superior to *LV* (see e.g. pp. 209, 228 and 232 below) are found in the dreams of the saga.



The text of *SV* given differs slightly and occasionally from that of Finnur Jónsson in *Fló*, 1932 for reasons I hope soon to present elsewhere. Two of the divergences are commented upon in notes 8 and 9.

The dreams of the saga will be considered in four sections.

### Section A. *The Auðun dreams*<sup>6</sup>

Þorgils örrabeinsstjúpr, the hero of *Fló*, makes a journey to Norway in his youth. While in Víkin in Norway, he befriends a certain Auðun and later helps him to bury his dead mother who has been described as *margkunnandi á fyrnsk[u] ok fróðleik*. Auðun rewards Þorgils with a sword and a kirtle: he says that he may reclaim the sword from him, but in that case he will give him another good weapon. Later, in Caithness, Þorgils undertakes to fight a duel against a *berserkr*, Surtr járnhauss, who has demanded the hand of Guðrún, the sister of a local jarl. The following night, Þorgils has a dream (*SV*, 22/23-23/5):

Um nóttina eptir, dreymdi Þorgils at Auðun, vin hans, kæmi at honum ok mælti: "Þú sefr en jafnt mun vera sem þú vakir.<sup>7</sup> Þú skalt á hólmi ganga við berserk þenna, því at þér unnum vér sæmdar. En Surtr<sup>8</sup> þessi er bróðir minn ok er hann mér þó ekki

<sup>6</sup> On the appearance of living persons in dreams in general, see *Träume*, 53-5 and *Dreams*, 62-6. Henzen makes the point that it is particularly people who, like Auðun, are endowed with supernatural abilities who appear in dreams; cf. the way the witch-like Þorbjörg visits Þormóðr in a dream in *Fóstbr*, ch. 11.

<sup>7</sup> These words seem to mean that the dream will have the same value of reality as if the dreamer were awake. Similar statements are found in *Fóstbr*, chs. 11 and 24; *Olafs saga hins helga*, ed. O. A. Johnsen (1922), 2; *Hallfreðar saga*, ch. 10 (*IF* VIII, 191-2); *Laxd*, ch. 31.

<sup>8</sup> My textual investigations have suggested that the *berserkr*'s name in the original of the saga was not *Svartr* (the form of the name in, for instance, *Fornsögur* and *Fló*, 1932) but *Surtr* (see *GhM* II, 58). It is true that *Svartr*, in addition to being an ordinary personal name, is particularly used of thralls and berserks. But *Surtr* (occasionally spelt *Svartr*; see e.g. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1931, 12, variants) appears as a giant-name and could therefore have been intended here. Cf. E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn och fingerade namn* (1905-15), Supplementband (1931), s.v. *Surtr* and *Svartr*.

parfr. Er hann ok it mesta illmenni. Þess spyrir hann jafnan, þá er hann hefir hátt hólmgöngur, þann er hann skal berjaz við, hvárt hann hafi sverðit Blaðin;<sup>9</sup> en ek gaf þér þat en þú skalt fela þat í sandi ok seg honum at þú vitir eigi hjölt þess fyrir ofan jörð.”<sup>10</sup> Eptir þat hvarf Auðun í burt. Þorgils vaknar . . .

The following night, Þorgils dreamt that his friend Auðun came to him and said: “You are asleep but things shall be just as if you were awake. You shall duel against this *berserkr* because we gladly let you reap the honour. But this Surtr is my brother and he brings no good to me. He is also the most wicked of men. When he is to fight a duel, he always asks the person he is to fight against whether he has the sword Blaðinn. But that is the sword I gave to you and you shall bury it in the sand and tell him that you do not know of its hilt above the ground.” After that, Auðun disappeared. Þorgils wakes up . . .

Þorgils follows Auðun’s advice, gains a victory over Surtr and marries Guðrún. (She eventually bears Þorgils a son, Þorleifr, but before he returns to Iceland he gives her away to his friend Þorsteinn.) Later in the saga Auðun again appears to him (SV, 23/29-24/4):

Eina nótt kom Auðun at Þorgilsi ok heimti at honum sverðit Blaðin — “en ek mun fá þér fyrst öxi en innan lítils tíma gott sverð.” Þorgils kvað hann víst hafa skyldu sverðit. Auðun

<sup>9</sup> The first element of the name of this sword is doubtless related to *blað* in the sense of “blade” rather than “leaf” (cf. H. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 1914, 43 and 54). As for the second element of the name, my investigations have suggested that the original of the saga is more likely to have had *Blaðin* (nom. *Blaðinn*) here and at *Fló*, 1932, 23/9 and 30, rather than *Blaðni* (nom. *Blaðnir*), the form which is found in the main text of earlier editions. It is true that the ending *-nir* is found in a number of weapon names (e.g. *Gungnir*, *Eimnir*; cf. Finnur Jónsson, ‘Maskuline Substantiver på *-nir*’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 1919, 302 ff.). But a form *Blaðinn* is equally feasible. A parallel would be e.g. Óðinn’s raven *Muninn*: if, as seems likely, Alexander Jóhannesson (*Die Suffixe im Isländischen*, 1928, 47; *Isländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 1956, 665) is right in deriving the name from *munr*, “mind”, with the sense “der gedächtnisgute”, so *Blaðinn*, formed with the same suffix from the noun *blað*, could mean “sword with a good blade”. This, of course, would not be very far removed from any meaning which could be given to *Blaðnir*.

<sup>10</sup> A play on the two senses of the words *fyrir ofan jörð*: Þorgils intends them in the sense “above the ground”; his opponent, however, takes them in the sense “on the face of the earth, in the world”. Other duellists using magic swords employ similar tricks; see *Þiðreks saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1961), 300; *Norske folkeviser*, ed. A. Liestøl (1964), 92-7; *Danmarks Fornviser*, ed. E. von der Recke (1927-9), 1, 27.

bað hann hafa þökk fyrir ok gaf honum fingrgull. En er Þorgils vaknaði, var sverðit burtu ok þótti honum sviþr at.<sup>11</sup>

One night, Auðun came to Þorgils and claimed the sword Bláðinn from him — “but I will give you first an axe and within a short time a good sword.” Þorgils said he should certainly have the sword. Auðun thanked him for that and gave him a gold finger-ring. And when Þorgils awoke, the sword had gone and he felt the loss of it.

Þorgils now sails to Ireland. Here he enters a *jarðhús* and finds there, in addition to two beautiful women, some blue cloth, two gold rings and a good sword. He carries off these objects and the women to his ships but is pursued by a band of warriors. He and his men are able to put out to sea, however. One of the pursuers now steps forward and makes a long speech in a language they do not understand. Then the elder of the two abducted women explains in Norse that she is *vikversk at móðurkyni* and we understand that she is related to Auðun. She says that it is her son, Hugi jarl, who has spoken and that he is demanding that Þorgils put herself and her daughter ashore. If he does this, then he will best enjoy the treasures he has won. Otherwise, the sword might carry a curse (*þungi fylgir sverðinu*). Þorgils heeds her advice, delivers the women to the jarl and takes possession of the sword (afterwards called *Jarðhússnautr*). This turns out to be magically efficacious and is Þorgils's prized possession until old age.

Stories where heroes fight duels with magic swords which they have borrowed are found elsewhere, not only in Icelandic sagas, but also in continental Scandinavian

<sup>11</sup> Various critics or translators (e.g. Henzen, *Träume*, 63; Nijhoff, *Beschouwing*, 146; Å. Ohlmarks in volume 5 of *De isländska sagorna*, 1962-5) have taken *sviþr* in the sense of “glimpse of something disappearing”. And Henzen regards this *sviþr* as a “Traumwirklichkeitsbeweis”, evidence that what has happened in the dream is reality (a motif he notes in other sagas). But Fritzner (s.v. *sviþr*, 1) gives no other example of *sviþr* in this sense followed by *at*; further, the examples he does give all refer to the *sviþr* of a *person*. A meaning “(sudden) loss” (Fritzner, s.v. *sviþr*, 3: “Savn som forarsages ved ens Fjernelse”) fits the context better; cf. *Ól mest* 11, 46: *mér þykkir næsta sviþr at brautför ykkarri*.

ballads; see, e.g., *Gísl*, 5; *Gunn*, 17 f.; A. Drachmann, *De navngivne Sværd i Saga, Sagn og Folkeviser* (1967), 19-20. Of special interest here, however, is a story in *Reyk*, chs 18 and 19, where the person from whom the sword is borrowed actually appears to the duellist in a dream: Þorsteinn varastafr, *hólmgöngumaðr mikill*, challenges Hallr frá Sandfelli to a duel for the hand of his daughter Þorkatla. Hallr tells Þorkell Geirason of his plight and the latter undertakes the duel. Hallr now has the sword *Skefilsnautr* taken from the grave-mound of a certain Skefill sverð, a Norwegian who has been killed not long before and who was nicknamed after a particularly good weapon he owned. This he gives to Þorkell ok *kvað þat bíta mundu*. Þorkell goes to the *hólmganga* and succeeds in killing his opponent. Afterwards, despite Hallr's protestations, Þorkell insists on returning the sword to Skefill's *kuml*. The following night, Skefill appears to Þorkell in a dream and praises him for having borne the sword so nobly. He also tells him: *En ef þú hefðir eigi viljat, at aþtr hefði verit borit sverðit, þá myndir þú hafa goldit þess í nokkuru . . .* (cf. the elder woman's warning of a possible curse on *Jarðhússnautr* in *Fló*). But since Þorkell has behaved so well, he will give him the sword. When Þorkell wakes, he finds he has the sword and this he carries for the rest of his life. The set of similar elements we find in both *Reyk* and *Fló* is probably isolated enough to suggest borrowing from one saga to the other. *Reyk* was probably written about the middle of the thirteenth century and at any rate almost certainly before *Fló*. (While *Reyk* gives to the *Sturlubók*-redaction of *Landnámabók*, *Fló* takes from it.) If we do posit a direct connection, then *Fló* must be regarded as the borrower rather than the lender.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In *Hallfreðar saga*, ch. 10 (*IF* VIII, 191-2), Óláfr Tryggvason appears to Hallfreð in a dream the night before he is to fight a duel and gives him advice.

Section B. *The Þórr dreams*<sup>13</sup>

In ch. 18 Þorgils returns to Iceland and marries his second wife, Þórey Þorvarðsdóttir. In ch. 19 he is involved in a quarrel with the powerful Ásgrímur Elliða-Grímsson and gets the better of him. Ch. 20 begins by announcing Þorgils's conversion to Christianity and, in the next five chapters, we find an account of Þorgils's various dealings with the god Þórr. We learn of confrontations between the abandoned god and Þorgils, of the temptations and trials the former inflicts on the latter for his loss of faith, of Þorgils's steadfastness and of his final repulsion of the god. There is more of what may be called "the religious element" elsewhere in the saga, including for instance Þorgils's general aura of piety and Þórey's celestial vision in ch. 23. The sources for such elements are, on the whole, different from those drawn on elsewhere in the saga. Among works by Icelanders, we note here special similarities to Oddr Snorrason's saga of Óláfr Tryggvason and what we know of a saga about the same king by Gunnlaugr Leifsson.<sup>14</sup> Further, we observe the influence of ecclesiastical writings (both native and foreign), saints' lives, vision literature and, in one case, the Bible itself. It is the overall impression left by these features which more than anything else gives *Fló* its idiosyncratic position among *Íslendingasögur*

<sup>13</sup> On gods in dreams in general see *Träume*, 55-8, and *Dreams*, 45-52. In both these works this series of dreams in which Þórr appears is given special attention.

<sup>14</sup> Both Oddr's and Gunnlaugr's sagas were originally written in Latin but are now known only in Norse translation. On the difficult question of their preservation, see *KL*, s.v. *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* with references. Gunnlaugr's work presents particular problems since it exists only as sections of *Ól mest* (compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century) and certain other works. Which parts of *Ól mest* belong to Gunnlaugr's work has been investigated by Bjarni Aðalbarnarson in *Om de norske kongers sagaer* (1937), 92 ff. His conclusions have not gone undisputed (cf. e.g. A. Holtsmark in *Nordisk tidsskrift*, 1937, 615). Even so, it may be pointed out that three of the four passages from *Ól mest* referred to in what follows (the exception is *Ól mest* II, 112-3), together with the two passages from *Flateyjarbók* (I, 446; 452 ff.), are considered by Bjarni to have belonged to Gunnlaugr's saga. And *Ól mest* II, 112-3, was regarded as part of Gunnlaugr's work by P. Munch, Finnur Jónsson and Björn M. Ólsen (cf. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *op. cit.*, 117-8). For the general literary background to Oddr's and Gunnlaugr's works, see L. Lönnroth's 'Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga', *Samlaren* (1963), 54-94.

of its own age. This is, however, a subject to which I hope to give special attention elsewhere. Here the discussion will be of the dreams in which most of Þorgils's encounters with Þórr take place, and of Þórey's vision-dream before her death in Greenland (see *Section C*).

The beginning of ch. 20 tells of Þorgils's conversion. The saga continues (*LV*, 170/20-26, cf. *SV*, 32/17-33/1):

Ok er hann hafði við kristni tekit, þá dreymdi hann einhverja nótt at Þórr kæmi at honum með illiligu yfirbragði ok kvað hann sér brugði[z] hafa<sup>15</sup> — "ok hefir þú illa ór ráðit, valit mér þat ór þínu fé er þú áttir verst til. Þú kastaðir silfri því í fúla tjörn er ek átta ok skal ek þar í móti koma." "Guð mun mér hjálpa," segir Þorgils, "ok er ek þess sáll er okkat félag sleit." And when he had accepted the Christian faith, then he dreamt one night that Þórr came to him with fearful countenance and said that he had failed him — "and you have taken a bad course of action: you have picked out the worst of your property for me; you threw that silver which I owned into a filthy pond and I shall repay you for that." "God will help me," says Þorgils, "and I am happy that our partnership is broken."<sup>16</sup>

When Þorgils wakes, he goes out and finds that his prize boar (*töðugöltr*) has been killed. He refuses to let its flesh be used but has it buried. Soon Þorgils dreams again (*LV*, 170/28-31, cf. *SV*, 33/3-8):

Enn barz Þórr í draum Þorgils ok sagði at sér yrði eigi meira fyrir at taka fyrir nasir honum en töðugelti hans. Þorgils segir: "Guð mun því ráða." Þórr hét þá at gera honum fjárskaða. Þorgils kva[z] eigi um þat hirða.

Again Þórr appeared to Þorgils in a dream and said that he would have no more difficulty in suffocating him than his home-field boar. Þorgils said: "God will decide that." Then Þórr threatened to cause him loss of property. Þorgils said he did not care about that.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Flateyjarbók* I, 446, where the Þrændir say of Freyr: *þykkir honum vér sér hafa brugðizt*.

<sup>16</sup> H. Ljungberg, *Den nordiska religionen och kristendom* (1938), 125, thinks that Þorgils's confrontations with Þórr represent the intellectual struggle of a heathen before his final acceptance of Christianity. I doubt whether the author of the saga intended to represent Þorgils's conversion in any such way. It was rather immediate and complete. As E. Vesper (*Christen und Christentum in den isländischen Sagas*, typewritten Leipzig thesis, 1950, 104) writing about Þorgils's dreams remarks: "um seelische Konflikte handelt es sich dabei nicht, sondern um die vom Verfasser konstruierten verschiedenartigsten Situationen in denen ein Christ sich zu bewähren hat."

Þorgils wakes and the next night an old ox of his dies. The following night he himself sits over his livestock. And in the morning when he comes in, he is bruised all over and it is clear that he and Þórr have had dealings. But after that, no more of his cattle die. Þorgils's Christian constancy has temporarily prevailed.

Stories in which potential or new converts to Christianity are confronted in dreams by the former objects of their faith are found in other sources. In *Ól mest* (I, 285 ff.), Þorvaldr brings the bishop Friðrekr to Giljá where, on three successive days, the holy man sprinkles water on the stone where Koðrán's *ármaðr* lives. The nights after these three days, the *ármaðr* appears to Koðrán in dreams (cf. Þorgils's three initial nocturnal encounters with Þórr) and complains that the bishop has been throwing boiling water over his home. In the first dream, the *ármaðr* begins with the words *Illa hefir þú gert . . .* (cf. *Fló: ok hefir þú illa ór ráðit . . .*) and, in the second, he is described as *illiligr i ásjónu* (cf. *Fló's með illiligu yfirbragði*). Koðrán is unmoved by his lamentations and soon afterwards has himself baptized. In *Ól mest* (II, 112-3) Þórr appears to Sveinn after the latter's conversion, *heldr ófrýnligr ok daprligr*, and begs him to remove his image from the temple which he knows the home-coming Finnur (Sveinn's brother) will destroy. Sveinn refuses. In *Bárð* (353) the half-god Bárðr visits his son Gestr in a dream the night after he has been baptized and says: *Illa hefir þú gert* (cf. Þórr's opening words in *Fló*) *er þú hefir látit trú þína, þá er langfeðgar þínir hafa haft . . .* He then deprives him of his sight and next day Gestr dies.

Of Þórr's reference to Þorgils throwing his (Þórr's) silver into a *ful tjörn*, Finnur Jónsson (*Fló*, 1932, 73) remarks: "dette er ikke antydnet i det foregående og lidet forståeligt." Certainly there has been no mention of Þorgils's action in what goes before. Three explanations seem possible. The first is an omission due to textual corruption. The second is an oversight on the part of the

saga author. The third is that the reference by Þórr is intended to suffice as notice that the event had taken place. If this last explanation obtains, we have here a literary device which must be rare in sagas. Þorgils's actions are, on the other hand, perhaps easier to understand than Finnur Jónsson suggests. What Þórr presumably refers to is some act of hostility by Þorgils towards his old religion. Like Hákon jarl in *Færeyinga saga* (ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, 1967, 44), the heathen Þorgils would give gifts (including silver) to his deity. After his conversion, however, and like certain other Christian converts in the sagas of the missionary kings, he seems to have reacted violently against his old religion. We may compare the way Þórhallr breaks down his old temple in *Ól mest* (II, 186) and Óláfr Tryggvason burns Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr with, it seems, her gold and silver in *Flateyjarbók* (I, 452 ff.). In connection with the *tjörn*, we think perhaps of the *hylr djúpr* into which another object consecrated to a heathen god (Freyfaxi) is thrown (*Hrafn*); and, when it is described as *fúl*, perhaps of the *fúl mýrr* (*Edda*, 233) and *it fúlasta fen* (*Rómverja saga*, ed. R. Meissner, 1910, 305) into which particularly malicious wrongdoers are thrown.

Further details in this first set of confrontations with Þórr may have been suggested to the author of *Fló* by other works. In *Ól mest* (II, 186), Þórr is driven out of his temple by the newly converted Þórhallr and vengefully kills a horse before fleeing north to Siglunes. When Þórr tells Þorgils that it will be just as easy to kill him as his boar, he is not uttering empty threats: not only is Gestr killed in *Bárð* for his change of faith, but Þiðrandi seems to suffer the same fate for the same reason in *Ól mest* (II, 148). And Nijhoff (*Beschouwing*, 60, 146) is perhaps right in thinking that when Þorgils comes in "bruised all over" (*viða blár*) after his nocturnal struggle with Þórr, the author is reducing the god to a revenant: in *Eyrbyggja saga* (*ÍF* IV, 146), Þórir viðleggr, after a struggle with a



lead shepherd, comes into his farm *víða orðinn kolblár*.<sup>17</sup>

Some time after his initial series of confrontations with Þórr, Þorgils receives an invitation from Eiríkr rauði to join him as a colonist in Greenland. He decides to accept and takes, among others, his wife Þórey, her foster-brothers Kolr and Starkaðr, some other of Þórey's foster-relations and also Þorgils's son Þorleifr (see p. 194 above) who has recently arrived from Norway. Þorgils's daughter by Þórey, Þórný, has to be left in Iceland because of illness. Just before he sets sail Þorgils has a bad dream (LV, 172/4-19, cf. SV, 35/7-36/4):

dreynir hann at maðr kemr at honum, mikill ok rauð-skeggjaðr,<sup>18</sup> ok mælti: "Ferð hefir þú ætlat fyrir þér ok mun erfíð verða." Draunmaðrinn sýndiz honum greppligr ok mælti til hans: "Alla stund hefir þú mér verit gagnstæðligr, þóttú værir heiðinn maðr, en oss er mikill missir orðinn at siðaskipti þínu. Áðr var allt fólk leitandi til várs trausts ok fulltings ok ertu sem þeir er oss vilja þyngst ok mun illa faraz ef þú vill eigi aptr til mín hverfa um átrúnað; mun ek þá enn um sjá yður ráð." Þorgils kvaz aldri hans umsjá vilja hafa; það hann burt draga[z] ok skiljaz viðr sik sem skjótast; — "tekz ferð mín sem Guð vill," hugðiz hann svara í svefninum. Síðan þótti honum Þórr færa sik á hamra nökkura, þar sem sjóvar-straumur brast í björgum. Ok nú segir Þórr: "Í slíkum stormi skaltu vera ok þó lengi í vólki vera ok kveljaz í vesöld ok háska nema þú geriz minn maðr." "Nei! Nei!" segir Þorgils. "Far þú (SV omits: þú) burt, inn leiði fjándi! Sá mun mér hjálpa sem alla leysti með sínum dreyra ok á líta ferð vára."

... and he dreamt that a large, red-bearded man came to him and said: "You intend to make a journey and it will be a difficult one." The dream-man had a fierce appearance and said to him: "Although you were a heathen, you have always been hostile to me, but your change of faith has been a great loss to us. Before everyone sought our help and support and you are as those who bear us the greatest ill-will. And it will go

<sup>17</sup> Compare also the way Þórr kills Þorgils's livestock with the way Glámr kills horses in *Grettis saga*, ch. 35 (IF VII, 118).

<sup>18</sup> A red beard was, of course, originally one of Þórr's attributes (see e.g. *Eir*, ch. 8). In Icelandic and Norwegian folk-traditions the Devil has inherited this trait (see P. Sluijter, *IJslands Volksgeloof*, 1936, 60; *KL*, s.v. *Djævel*, *Folkl.*). According to medieval notions, a man with a red beard was not to be trusted; cf. *Fms*, xi, 428: *þat er mitt ráð, at þú trúir aldrei lágum manni ok rauðskeggjuðum*.

badly for you unless you revert to your faith in me; then I shall still concern myself with your well-being." Þorgils said he never wanted his protection and told him to go away and to leave him as quickly as he might; — "my journey will prosper as God wishes," he seemed to answer in his sleep. Then he thought that Þórr led him onto some cliffs where the tumult of the sea beat against the rocks. And now Þórr says: "In such a storm you shall be and for a long time also be tossed about and you shall be tormented in misery and danger unless you become my man." "No! No!" says Þorgils. "Depart from me, you foul fiend! He who redeemed all men with his blood will help me and he will watch over our voyage."

Þorgils wakes and tells Þórey of his dream and she advises him to abandon the enterprise. "She said that it was not a good portent and said that it was wise that he had little to do with Þórr." Despite her warnings, Þorgils is not deterred and, when a favourable wind comes, he sets sail.

The direct model for the second part of this encounter is clearly the story in Matthew, 4, 8-10, in the Vulgate as follows:

8. Iterum assumpsit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi, et gloriam eorum, 9. et dixit ei: Hæc omnia tibi dabo, si cadens adoraveris me.  
10. Tunc dicit ei Iesus: Vade Satana: Scriptum est enim . .

Although we have no Norse translation of the New Testament, we know various vernacular works which quote Christ's *Vade Satana* in translation and they may be compared with *Far (þú) burt, inn leiði fjándi* in *Fló: Far brvtt, andzskoti* (HMS 1, 76); *Flyðu, fiandi* (*Postola sögur*, ed. C. Unger, 1874, 747; cf. 760); *far i brott andskoti* (*Stjórn*, 146).

There can be extremely few instances in the Family Sagas where an element from the Bible has been so completely taken over. Knut Liestøl (*The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, 1930, 157) says that this is the only example he knows. Stefán Einarsson (*Mélanges de linguistique et de philologie. Fernand Mossé in memoriam*,

1959, 126) allows for more instances than this and suggests, not very convincingly, that *Laxd* may contain an Old Testament element. Turning to Oddr Snorrason's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, however, we find considerable influence from Bible stories and here, as in *Fló*, stories of Christ are adapted to fit the hero. In Oddr's work, for example, Ástriðr and Óláfr flee abroad from the persecutions of Hákon jarl, just as Mary and Jesus flee abroad from Herod. When Óláfr is carried off into Estonia (Oddr, *Óláfs*, 22 ff.), the author himself compares the story of Joseph's fate in Egypt. In Matthew, 17, 1-9, we are told how Christ, taking three favoured disciples, goes to pray. As he prays, they see his appearance change and his clothes shine like light. Two men speak with him, Moses and Elias. As they go down from the mountain, Christ tells his disciples not to divulge what they have seen before the Son of Man has risen from the dead. In Oddr, *Óláfs* (152-3), Óláfr takes his trusted friend Þorkell dyrðill into a wood. There Óláfr prays and a great light then shines over him. Þorkell sees him with two men dressed in white. Later, on the way out of the wood, the king commands Þorkell not to tell anyone of this incident while he lives. For further examples of Biblical borrowings in Oddr's work, see G. Indrebø, *Fagrskinna* (1917), 159-61.<sup>19</sup>

We find in *Fló* a similar borrowing from the Bible where the hero's experiences are modelled on those of Christ. As this motif is used in *Fló*, it suggests not only a more general likening of Þorgils to Christ, but also of his adversary, Þórr, to the Devil. The first of these inferred comparisons, interesting though it is, must be left aside, but the second, the equation of Þórr and the Devil, may be given some attention.

The demonization of the heathen gods was, of course, an important part of the propaganda of the early and

<sup>19</sup> Bjarni Aðalbarnarson (*Om de norske kongers sagaer*, 1937, 85) argues that Biblical stories were connected to traditions about Óláfr Tryggvason before Oddr wrote his saga.

medieval Christian church. It found its justification in e.g. Psalms 95, 5: *Quoniam omnes dii gentium dæmonia*. That an identification of the pagan deities with the Devil or devils was frequently made by missionaries working in early Germany has been amply documented by H. Achterberg in his monograph *Interpretatio Christiana* (1930; see particularly 169-76). No doubt English, German and native missionaries working in pagan Scandinavia adopted the same approach and were quick to couple the gods of Ásgarðr, particularly Þórr, with the demons of their own religion. After the year 1000, however, the influence of the Church in Iceland grew apace and there is little evidence to suggest that belief in Þórr, Freyr, and if he ever had many devotees, Óðinn, did not wane rapidly. When in his *Die Religion der Nordgermanen im Spiegel christlicher Darstellung* (1936, 72 ff.), Rudolf Schomerus points to a number of examples in Icelandic sources of what he calls the "Dämonisierung und Verächtlichmachung der heidnischen Götter", these can hardly be regarded as the active propaganda of an insecure religion, but are rather to be taken as the half fossilized teachings of a well-established Church, well on the way to becoming stock motifs. We must look here rather for the largely literary influence of international hagiographic writings on the Icelandic works under discussion. Of particular interest in this connection are stories, like the one in *Fló*, where, it seems, the Devil assumes the form of a heathen god to tempt or deceive the good Christian. The theme is found, for example, in Oddr, *Óláfs* (131 ff.), where we are told how *sa uvinr allz mannkyns diofullin . . . bregðr . . . asek mannligri syn. til þess at hann mætti þa auðuelligar suikia menn*. Disguised as Óðinn, he visits Óláfr's court and leaves poisoned food for him. Óláfr is not tricked and at the end tells his men that . . . *sia diofull havi verit með asionu Odins*. On another occasion (Oddr, *Óláfs*, 173-4) the king is sailing along the coast of Norway, when a man standing on a

cliff (*ahamre einum*) hails him and asks for passage. This the king grants him. The man, who has a red beard, starts telling stories and eventually to preach heathendom. Finally, laughing, he jumps overboard and the king remarks: . . . *Se nu huersu diarfr diofullin var. er hann geck isyn við oss.* The author of *Fló* could have got the idea of the red-bearded Þórr on the cliff and in the ship (see below) from this story.

In discussing literary sources for Oddr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, Lars Lönnroth (*Samlaren*, 1963, 71-2) mentions a possible model for tales like these two. This consists of excerpts from the Life and Dialogues of St Martin by Sulpicius Severus. In the Icelandic version, the relevant passage reads as follows (*HMS* I, 569):

Dioflar como oc stundom at freista hans [St Martin] i ymsom lic(i)om, oc allra oftast i like Þors eða Oþens eða Freyio. En Martinus hafði crossmarc at scildi víp allre freistne þeira. En hann kende þa, i hverionge likio(m) sem þeir varo, oc nemndi hvern þeira a namn oc fec hveriom þeira þa qveðio, er (þeir) varo verþer: Þor callaði hann heimscan, en Oþen deigan, en Freyio portcono.

Lönnroth sees this as an amalgamation of two passages of the Latin:

(i) *Frequenter autem diabolus, dum mille nocendi artibus sanctum virum conabatur illudere, visibilem se ei formis diversissimis ingerebat. Nam interdum in Jovis persona, plerumque Mercurii, persæpe etiam se Veneris ac Minervæ transfiguratum vultibus offerebat: adversus quem semper interritus, signo se crucis et orationis auxilio protegebat* (Migne, *PL* xx, col. 172).

(ii) *Jam vero dæmones, prout ad eum quisque venisset, suis nominibus increpabat. Mercurium maxime patiebatur infestum; Jovem brutum atque hebetem esse dicebat* (Migne, *PL* xx, col. 210).

It is not at all unlikely that the author of *Fló* knew these passages either in Icelandic or Latin form. The cult of St Martin was widespread in Iceland in the middle ages: at least ten churches were dedicated to him and church

decorations frequently included pictures from his life (see *KL*, s.v. *Martinus. Island*). Even if he did not know this particular passage it seems reasonable to assume the indirect influence of some such text on the saga.

As soon as Þorgils and his companions are out of sight of land, their favourable wind drops and they are becalmed. After a time, their supplies of food and water begin to run low. Then, one night, Þorgils has a dream (*LV*, 172/29-173/3, cf. *SV*, 36/12-16):

Eina nótt dreymir Þorgils at sá sami maðr kæmi at honum ok mælti: "Fór eigi sem ek gat? Því at þú hefir neitat mínu fulltingi ok ásjá. Má enn vera at betriz um hag þinn ef þú vill mik þýðaz." Hann kvez þat aldri vilja, þótt líf hans lægi við; bað óvin á brott dragaz ok koma aldri optar ok vaknar hann eptir þat.

One night, Þorgils dreamt that the same man came to him and said: "Did it not go as I said, for you have refused my help and protection? It may still be that your lot will improve if you will do homage to me." He said that he would never do that, even though his life were at stake. He told the devil to leave him and never to come again. And after that, he woke up.

Autumn comes. The expedition is still at sea and its position is critical. Certain men suggest that they should pray to Þórr for a favourable wind but this Þorgils strictly forbids. Then he has a further dream (*LV*, 173/9-18, cf. *SV*, 37/4-13):

Þá dreymdi Þorgils enn eina nótt at inn sami maðr kæmi at honum ok mælti svá: "Enn sýndir þú hverr þú vart mér, þar eð menn vildu mik þýðaz. Hefi ek nú beint fyrir<sup>20</sup> yðr, því at margir eru skipverjar þínir at bana komnir ok enn muntu höfn takaz á vii. nóttu fresti ef þú vill mik athyllaz." Þorgils segir: "Þótt ek taka aldri höfn, skal ek þér aldri gott gera ok ef þú kemr optar, skal ek gera þér nökkura skömm." Hann segir: "Þótt þú gerir mér ekki gott, þá gjaltu mér þat er ek á ok þú hefir mér heitit." Þorgils hrakti hann með mörgum orðum ok við þat fór hann á brott.

<sup>20</sup> *Orig* (II, 644) emends *beint fyrir* ("helped") to *seinat fyrir* ("delayed"). But we must accept the reading of both *LV* and *SV* and assume that Þórr is being ironical (cf. *Geschichten*, 115 note).

Then Þorgils dreamt again one night that the same man came to him and spoke as follows: "Again you showed how you were disposed to me when men wished to do me homage. Now I have given you my help, for many of your crew are at death's door, and you shall still come to harbour in seven nights' time if you will do me homage." Þorgils says: "Although I never get to harbour, I shall never do you good; and if you come again, I shall humiliate you in some way." He says: "Even though you never do me good, then pay me that which is mine and which you have promised me." Þorgils abused him with many words and at that he went away.

Þorgils wakes and realises that Þórr has been referring to an old ox he has on board. This was a calf when he gave it to him. Þorgils decides to throw the animal into the sea. One of the party, Þorgerðr, who is plainly still a heathen, demands to buy the animal for provisions and says it is not surprising that things go badly when "our Þórr" (*Þórr várr*) is so disgraced. Þorgils is firm in his resolve and the animal goes overboard.

Various features of this story have parallels elsewhere. One thinks first of Freyfaxi's fate in *Hrafn* (ch. 15): here an animal which, like the ox in *Fló*, has been consecrated to a god is wilfully destroyed with what seems to be almost Christian zeal. As the horse is taken up onto the cliff, Þorgeirr remarks: . . . *mun þat nú makligt, at sá taki við honum er hann á*.<sup>21</sup> Þorgils is probably wise in refusing to let the animal be used as food, for meat given by or belonging to the gods is seldom as wholesome as it might be. In the story of Óðinn's visit to Óláfr Tryggvason already mentioned (Oddr, *Óláfs*, 134), food left behind by the god is lethal enough to kill a dog; it is thrown into the sea. In *Eir*, ch. 8, Þórr sends a whale to Karlsefni's followers who are short of provisions. They eat it but are immediately sick. When Þórhallr veiðimaðr tells them that *inn rauðskeggjaði* has provided the food, they throw it into the sea (so in *Hauksbók*) and pray to God. Finally, when Þorgerðr remonstrates against the

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jón Helgason's remark on this statement in *Hrafn*, 49.

treatment Þórr is getting, she reminds one of the many stereotyped staunch heathens in the sagas of the missionary kings (e.g. Þórhildr in *Ól mest* 11, 186) who protest at and fear the consequences of degrading the old gods.

### *Section C. Þórey's celestial vision*

After Þorgils's dream at *LV*, 173/9-18, the expedition spends another three months at sea. Then, a week before the beginning of winter, they are wrecked in a bay on the desert coast of Greenland and are iced up. They erect a hall (*skáli*) for themselves and begin to build a boat. Þórey bears a son, who is called Þorfinnr, but is ill and confined to bed. During the winter, half the expedition is killed off by plague, and when they begin "to walk again" (*at ganga aftur*), Þorgils has their bodies burnt. Spring comes and they are still iced up and have to spend a second winter in the place. Then, one night, during their second spring there, Þórey has a dream (*LV*, 175/22-8, cf. *SV*, 41/6-13):

Þat er enn eittthvert sinn, sem optar bar at, at Þórey segir draum sinn Þorgilsi, at hon þóttiz sjá fögr heruð ok menn fagra ok bjarta — "ok vænti ek," segir hon, "at vér leysimz heðan í burt ór ánauð þessarri." Þorgils segir: "Góðr er draumr þinn ok þó eigi ólíkari at viti meir til annars heims hluta ok muntu eiga fyrir höndum fagra staði ok munu dýrðligir (*SV*: helgir) menn hjálpa þér fyrir gott (*SV*: hreint) líf þitt ok mannaunir."

It happened once again, as it often happened, that Þórey told Þorgils of her dream, that she seemed to see a fair country-side and radiant and beautiful people — "and I anticipate," she said, "that we shall be delivered from this present distress." Þorgils says: "Your dream is good, but it is not unlikely that it is more an intimation of things of the Other World and there you have in store fair places, and glorious (*SV*: holy) men will help you for your good (*SV*: pure) life and your trials."

This dream adumbrates Þórey's death later in the same chapter. One day Þorgils goes off and leaves Þórey at the



hall with his steward, Þórarinn, and his thralls. When they return, they find Þórey stabbed but the infant Þorfinnr still sucking her. The thralls have murdered her and absconded with the boat Þorgils has been building.<sup>22</sup>

Although Þórey's dream and its interpretation are told in no more than a couple of sentences, the tone and vocabulary of these make clear the influence of that special branch of medieval religious writing, the literature of the vision. Similar motifs and wording to those used here are common in literature of this type, whether translated or native. With the *fögr heruð* and *fagrir staðir* of *Fló*, 175/23 and 27, we may compare the *fagrt herað* of *Mar* (965), the *grænan stað miok fagran ok biartan* of *Mar* (1163) and the *fagrir staðir oc vellir blomgaðir* of the Icelandic version of Gregory's *Dialogues* (HMS I, 250). Men of shining appearance (*bjartir menn*) are, of course, common elements in descriptions of Paradise (see e.g. *Mar*, 536) and expressions such as *hreint líf* (cf. *hreinflífi*) and *mannraun* are part of the stock vocabulary of saints' lives. In connection with Þorgils's prophecy, we should note that in the native *Rannveigar leizla* (see *Bysk* II, 243 ff. and III, 167 ff.) Rannveig is helped in the Other World by three *helgir menn*. And we should also note that part of Þorgils's interpretation in *SV*, *ok munu helgir menn hjálpa þér fyrir hreint líf ok mannraunir*, bears alliteration, a feature of style in Old Norse vision literature as well as in saints' lives (cf. e.g. *Bysk* III, 170).

Visions of the Other World must be rare in the "secular" literature of medieval Iceland. We might

<sup>22</sup> In a paper read to the First International Saga Conference in Edinburgh in 1971, Régis Boyer discussed 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* on Old Icelandic Literature'. Boyer drew attention to three different tales in the *Dialogues* which "tend to prove, one after the other, that 'people who are going to die know certain things'". For example, "the monk Gerontius on his death-bed sees 'men in white', one of them engaged in writing the names of certain monks (who, of course, will die in the order in which he has written their names)". We seem to have a similar motif in *Fló*, and elsewhere in the saga there is evidence of the influence of the *Dialogues*.

perhaps compare *Eiríks saga víðförla* (*Flateyjarbók* 1 30-38). Eiríkr, the son of Þrándr after whom Þrándheimr is said to be named, sets out to find *stað þann, er heiðnir menn kalla Óðáinsakr, en kristnir menn jörð lifandi manna eða Paradísum*. After crossing India and passing through the mouth of a dragon, he comes to a:

fagrt land, grösín hvít sem purpuri við sætum ilm ok miklum blóma, ok flutu hunangslækir um alla vega landsins. Þetta land var langt ok slétt. Sólskin var þar, svá at aldri var þar myrkt ok aldri bar skugga á. Logn var þar í lopti, en lítill vindr á jörðu, til þess at þá kenndi inn sæta ilm heldr en áðr.

In this land, he comes to a tower hanging in the air. There he finds rich furnishings, a table laid with dishes of silver, abundant food and sumptuous beds. Eiríkr sleeps and dreams a *bjartr drengr* appears to him and tells him he is his guardian angel. The place he has found, the angel says, is *jörð lifandi manna*, which, however, *er sem eyðimörk til at jafna við Paradísum*. The angel discourses on various subjects. This vision convinces Eiríkr of the truth of Christianity and he returns to Norway to spread the faith. But while *Eiríks saga* was originally classified as a *fornaldarsaga* by Rafn, its especially "learned" character has led later editors and critics to exclude it from that genre (see e.g. *KL* iv, col. 500). And probably the only other example of a vision of the Other World actually in an *Íslendinga saga* is in ch. 30 of *Gísl*: Gíslí dreams that his good dream-woman takes him to a splendid house where there are benches covered with cushions and luxurious furnishings. She tells him that here he shall enjoy riches and contentment. This episode may be based on a verse not composed by the author of the saga himself. We may finally note the possible influence of *Grænlendinga saga*, ch. 6 (*ÍF* iv, 259-60) on the episode in question. In *Lýsufjörðr* in Vestribyggð in Greenland, the recently dead Þorsteinn (killed by a plague) speaks to his wife Guðríðr. He tells her that he has come to *góðir hvíldarstaðir*. Although the similarities

are not very great, the two stories have certain elements in common and there is evidence that *Grænlandinga saga* influenced *Fló* in other parts of the saga.

*Section D. Þorgils's and Þorleifr's proleptic dreams*

After Þórey's death and the escape of the thralls, Þorgils and his companions (now only Þorleifr, Kolr, Starkaðr and Þorfinnr) have to spend yet another winter in the same bay. During this time, they are able to make a skin boat (*húðkeipr*) and, when spring comes and the ice clears somewhat, they are able to get away. They reach the otherwise unknown Seleyjar (so *LV*; *SV*: Seleyrar) and winter there. In the spring they move on again and one day come to a place where there are steep cliffs (*björg nökkur brött*); here they beach their vessel and pitch their tent. They now have almost no provisions. Next morning they discover that their *húðkeipr* is missing and Þorgils, fearing a slow death for his son Þorfinnr, hands the boy over to his companions to be killed. They refuse, and when they eventually tell Þorgils that the boy is still alive, he thanks them for what they have done. Then, next morning, Þorgils tells them of a dream he has had (*LV*, 178/21-7, cf. *SV*, 45/12-18):

.. ok um morguninn segir Þorgils draum sinn: "Ek þóttumz vera," sagði hann, "á Íslandi á Alþingi ok þótti mér sem vit Ásgrímr toguðum eina hönk ok allr lýðr horfði á ok hann missti hankar[in]nar." Þorleifr segir: "Þar muntu enn koma til Íslands, faðir minn," sagði hann, "ok skipta málum við Ásgrím ok mun þat vel ganga (*SV*: ok mun þér þat betr ganga)." "Slíkt má vera," sagði Þorgils, "þótt nú þykki eigi líkligt, ok er vel ráðit."

.. and in the morning, Þorgils tells his dream. "I thought myself to be," said he, "at the Alþingi in Iceland. And it seemed to me as if Ásgrímr and I were pulling at a hank and everybody looked on and he lost the hank." Þorleifr says: "Then you will get back to Iceland, my father," he said, "and will have a law-suit with Ásgrímr and that will turn out well (*SV*: and that will go better for you)." "So it may be," said

Þorgils, "although it does not seem likely at the moment; and that is well interpreted."

This dream, together with at least the fourth and fifth dream in this sequence, belongs to a type to which W. Henzen devotes special attention in *Träume* (44-9) and to which he gives the name "Der Redensart- und Wortwitztraum". These terms need special explanation. Although the difference between the "metaphor dream" ("Redensarttraum") and the "pun dream" ("Wortwitztraum") is not always clear, a distinction should be made between them. In the former the concrete action of the dream is interpreted in terms of the set figurative expression it illustrates. For example, in *Laxd*, ch. 74, Þorkell dreams that his beard is so large that "it spread over the whole of Breiðafjörðr". His wife Guðrún takes this as meaning that he will "dip his beard into Breiðafjörðr" (*drepi skeggi í Breiðafjörð niðr*); although not attested elsewhere, *at drepa skeggi niðr í e-t* (literally: "to dip one's beard into something") may be taken as a figurative expression meaning "to drown in something" and later Þorkell does drown in Breiðafjörðr. In *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (*ÍF* XI, 311-2), Þórhaddr dreams . . . *at mér þótti tungan svá löng í mér, at ek þóttumk krækja henni aftur í hnakkann ok fram í munninn þórum megin*, "... that I thought my tongue was so long that I thought I twisted it around the back of my neck and into my mouth on the other side." Steinn interprets this as meaning: . . . *at þér mun tungan um höfuð vefjask í helzta lagi; e-m . . . tungan um höfuð vefz* clearly means "a person's words are his death" (cf. *ÍF* XI, 242, note 3). The first of Þorgils's dreams in this sequence is a particularly transparent and rather artless example of this type. In a "pun dream" a play on words with double meaning or a play on like-sounding words is involved. In *Sverris saga* (ed. G. Indrebø, 1920, 46), Sverrir dreamt that he saw a human body grilling in a great fire. He interpreted this as meaning that his enemy, Erlingr, *tók mjök at eldaz*

— *at eldaz* means both “to be kindled” and “to grow old”. In a dream in *Bysk* (II, 202), Guðmundr góði interprets *erkibyskup*, “archbishop”, as *erkibýsn*, “great portent”. And in Icelandic tradition of later times, it was unlucky to dream of a woman called Ingibjörg since her name could be interpreted as *engin björg*, “no salvation” (see Jónas Jónasson, *Íslenzkir þjóðhættir*, 1945, 416). The fifth dream in this series, Þorleifr’s dream, may be regarded as an example of a “pun dream”. For further examples, see *Träume*, loc. cit.; *Víga-Glúms saga*, ed. G. Turville-Petre (1960), 75-6.

Porgils’s first dream is, then, a “metaphor dream”. In their concrete sense the expressions *at toga hönk*, *at missa hankar* refer to a game played in medieval Scandinavia and described by Saxo in his *Gesta Danorum* (ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder 1931, 118-9). Two opponents sat on the ground opposite each other with the soles of their feet pushed together. Leaning forward, they both grasped a ring of rope or wattle (*hönk*) and pulled (see Pl. I). The winner was the one who pulled the *hönk* out of his opponent’s hands or pulled him up onto his feet. There seems to have been a variation of the game in which the opponents stood (see *Nordisk kultur* XXIV, 1933, 23). The game was still being played in Gotland at the end of the nineteenth century under the name *att drägä hank* and a variation of it, using a stick instead of a *hank*, is known from the present century (see Pl. I; cf. *GhM* II, 208-9; Ólafur Davíðsson, *Íslenzkar skemtanir* (1888-92), 129-30; Björn Bjarnason, *Nordboernes legemlige Uddannelse i Oldtiden* (1905), 140-1; *Nordisk kultur* XXIV (1933), 21; *KL*, s.v. *Dragkamp*). Modern Icelandic has two figurative expressions taken from this sport: *að toga hönk við e-n um e-ð* means “to contend with somebody over something”; and *að toga hönkina úr greipum e-s* “to get the better of someone” (see Halldór Halldórsson, *Íslenzk orðtök*, 1954, 256-7). Similar expressions must have existed in Old Icelandic.

With this dream explained, it should be noted that it and Þorleifr's interpretation of it present a problem within the context of the subsequent plot of the saga. The only formal law-suit in which Ásgrímr and Þorgils are involved in the saga as we know it can hardly be described as a success for Þorgils. For some technical reason he is forced to abandon a suit against Ásgrímr for plotting to take his life (*fjörráð við sik*) and has to let the matter drop (*LV*, 183/13-21, *SV*, 67/12-23). How this is to be explained is difficult to say. It is true that Þorgils emerges from the law-suit with honour and the quarrel between him and Ásgrímr is peacefully concluded; but this is hardly the outcome that Þorleifr's prediction (at least in *SV*) would lead us to expect. It is conceivable that the words *at skipta málum við Ásgrím* are used in a less specific sense and refer not only to the law-suit but to the whole quarrel between Þorgils and Ásgrímr in which Þorgils can be said to get the upper hand. Or they might possibly refer to Þorgils's successful rivalry with Ásgrímr in the suit for Helga's hand (see next dream), which is discussed at the Alþingi (see *SV*, 62/7). But there are a number of reasons why such explanations are unsatisfactory<sup>23</sup> and the most likely solution here is either an oversight on the part of the author or faulty textual preservation.

A parallel to this dream is a dream which Haraldr harðráði has before fighting the Battle of Niz against the Danes under Sveinn Úlfsson. This is found in four medieval manuscripts, *Morkinskinna* (ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, 207), *Hulda*, *Flateyjarbók* (IV, 139) and *Hrokkinskinna* (cf. *Fms* VII, 312). The text of *Morkinskinna* is as follows:

Konungr var þá kátr ok mælti: "Dreymdi mik í nótt," segir hann; "mér þótti sem vit Sveinn konungr fyndimk ok heldim á

<sup>23</sup> In *GhM* (II, 113) *skipta málum* is translated "have Retssager at afgjøre", in *Orig* (II, 652) as "have a suit", and in *Geschichten* (119) as "in Rechtsstreit geraten"



Plate 1. *Hankdragning* in Lau, Gotland (early twentieth century).  
Photograph: M. Klintberg (Nordiska museet, Stockholm).



Plate 2. *Angelica archangelica* (Voss, Norway). Reproduced by kind permission of Fru Dagny Tande Lid, Oslo.



einni hönk ok togaðim ok dró hann af mér hönkina." Þar ræddu menn misjafnt of draum konungs ok réðu svá flestir at Sveinn konungr myndi þat hafa er þeir sviptuz um. "Vera kann, herra!" sagði Hákon, "at svá sé sem þeir ráða, en vænna þætti mér at Sveini konungi myndi áhankaz (*Flateyjarbók* adds here: er hann hafði hönkina)." "Þat þykki mér líkliga," segir konungr, "at svá sé, ok þannig er betr ráðit."

We see that the majority of Haraldr's followers interpret the dream in the same way as Þorleifr interprets Þorgils's dream in *Fló*: Sveinn pulled the *hönk* from Haraldr and this bodes ill for the latter. Hákon Ívarsson offers a more subtle and optimistic interpretation. Since Sveinn has the *hönk* (cf. the *Flateyjarbók* addition), he "will get tangled up" (*Sveini . . . myndi áhankaz*). We must assume that *e-m áhankaz* has some such meaning as "someone gets entangled" in its concrete sense and "someone gets the worst of something" in its transferred sense (cf. Cleasby-Vigfusson, 41; Geir Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 1910, s.v. *á-hankast*). In the battle after Haraldr's dream, Sveinn and his army are forced to flee. The story of Haraldr's dream could well have been known to the author of *Fló*, and elsewhere in *Fló* there is evidence of influence from the Saga of Haraldr harðráði.

Next night, Þorgils has a second dream (*LV*, 178/27-33, cf. *SV*, 45/18-46/5):

Aðra nótt dreymdi hann enn ok sagði enn Þorleifi. "Ek þóttumz vera," segir hann, "heima í Traðarholti ok var þar fjölmennt mjök ok sá ek álpt eina ganga eptir gólfinu ok var hon blíð (*SV*: blíðari) við aðra en mik. Þá hrista ek hana ok var þá betr (*SV*: var hon þaðan af miklu betr til mín)." "Þar muntu," sagði Þorleifr, "kvángaz ok mun kona þín vera ung ok muntu í fyrstunni missa ástar hennar ok mun þó vel dragaz."

The second night, he (i.e. Þorgils) dreamt again, and again told Þorleifr what he had dreamt. "I thought myself to be at home at Traðarholt," says he, "and there were very many people there. And I saw a pen walking along the floor and she was kind (*SV*: kinder) to others than (to) me. Then I shook her and then things were better (*SV*: from then on, she was much

better towards me)." "That shows you shall marry," said Þorleifr, "and your wife will be young and, to begin with, you will not have her love; but yet things will improve."

Later in the saga, Þorgils sues for the hand of the considerably younger Helga Þóroddsdóttir. His rival is Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson. Helga herself favours Ásgrímr but her father prefers Þorgils and, after various incidents, the girl is given to the latter (ch. 30). To begin with, Helga is sullen and wilful. But after a veiled hint of stern treatment from Þorgils, the relationship between the two improves (*geraz nú góðar samfarar þeira*).

Dreams where animals represent human beings are common in Old Icelandic literature (see *Träume*, 34-9). They owe their origins to a belief in *fylgjur* or fetches. According to this superstition, an individual, apart from his material body, also possessed a "soul" or *fylgja* which in most cases was only visible to dreamers or those with special powers. The appearance of a *fylgja* in prophetic dreams like this is a particularly common motif. It often takes the form of a woman but more frequently of an animal, whose kind depends on the nature of the person to whom it belongs. In *Atlamál*, for instance, the powerful and ruthless Atli appears in one of Kostbera's dreams as a fierce bear, while in *Völsunga saga* (ch. 26) Guðrún dreams of Sigurðr as a hawk whose feathers are the colour of gold. The connection between the swan and the beautiful young woman is a common one in Scandinavian folklore and further afield (see H. Holmström, *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet*, 1919; *Handwörterbuch*, s.v. *Schwan*). For example, at the beginning of *Völundarkviða*, three valkyries come dressed in swan's feathers to three brothers. Possibly we may point to a definite source for this dream in *Fló*. At the beginning of *Gunnl* (ch. 2), Þorsteinn Egilsson dreams that a beautiful pen (*álpt*) rests on the roof of his farm. An eagle flies down from the mountains and chatters gently (*blíðliga*) to her. Another eagle comes from the south and the two male

birds fight and kill each other. The pen remains sad and dejected until a falcon comes from the west. The falcon behaves gently towards her (*lét blítt við hana*) and finally they both fly off together. The swan represents Þorsteinn's daughter, Helga, who is wooed by two suitors (Gunnlaugr, Hrafn) who duel and kill each other. She later marries the less distinguished Þorkell. It will be noted that in both *Gunnl* and *Fló* the pen symbolizes a woman called Helga. It is difficult to set a *terminus ante quem* for *Gunnl*, although most critics put it before 1300 (so *KL*, s.v. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*). The dream in *Gunnl* seems to be well integrated into the saga and outlines its subsequent plot very clearly. If one of the sagas has been influenced by the other, it seems preferable to regard *Fló* as the borrower rather than the lender.

The third night, Þorgils has a dream which is found only in *LV* (178/33-179/5):

Ina iii. nótt dreymdi Þorgils enn at hann þóttiz vera heima í Traðarholti — "ok kerti v. váru á kné mér," sagði hann, "ok fölski á inu mesta. Ok enn dreymdi mik at kona kæmi at mér ok kvað mik kominn í tún sitt — 'ok þykki mér illa er þér hafið etit egg Þorfinns,' — ok hon segir mér at sveinar hennar hefði tekit skip vart." Þorleifr segir: "Þar munu vér í burtu komaz."

The third night Þorgils dreamt again that he was at home in Traðarholt — "and there were five candles on my knee," he said, "and ash (*fölski*) on the largest of them. And I dreamt again, that a woman came to me and said that I had come into her household (*tún sitt*) — 'and it seems bad to me that you have eaten Þorfinnr's egg (eggs?).' — and she told me that her servants had taken our boat." Þorleifr says: "Then we shall get away."

Although no detailed interpretation is given of the first part of this dream, its meaning is clear. The five candles are the lives of Þorgils and his four companions. The largest (least burnt) of them represents the life of his son Þorfinnr; its flame is about to be or, more probably, has been extinguished. Later in the saga (*SV*, 59/11-12),

Þorfinnr dies while still a child, before Þorgils (and the others) return home to Traðarholt from Greenland.

A flame, especially of a candle, is a well-known symbol for life in pagan and, more particularly, Christian tradition (see e.g. *Handwörterbuch*, s.v. *Lebenslicht*). In Greek myth the Fates appear to Meleager's mother and announce that her son will only live as long as a certain brand on the hearth remains unburned. She takes the brand from the fire, puts it out and hides it in a chest. Years later, the Furies instruct her to throw the brand into the fire. She does so and her son dies immediately (see R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 1960, I, 264 ff.). This story bears a striking resemblance to that of Norna-Gestr in *Flateyjarbók*, I, 397-8. While Norna-Gestr is still in his cradle, a *völva* decrees that he shall live only as long as a candle he has with him remains unburned. At his baptism three hundred years later, the candle is lit and Norna-Gestr dies. The same motif is further found in a variant of the *Märchen* known as 'Der Gevatter Tod'; see J. Bolte and G. Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- u. Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, I (1913), 377 ff. and especially 388; a version of this seems to be known in Iceland (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten*, 1929, 32). Of particular interest is one of Gísli's dreams in *Gísl*, ch. 22. The hero enters a hall where his friends and kinsmen are drinking. There are also seven fires there, some of which are very low, while others burn brightly. Gísli's good dream woman tells him that these fires represent the part of his life he still has left and he in fact lives for another seven years. In *Fló* we have, as here, the multiple number of flames, the dream framework and, in the second part of Þorgils's dream, a dream-woman. The author of *Fló* could have known *Gísl* (according to *KL*, written between 1240-50) and could well have got the idea of this dream from it (cf. also page 210 above). On the other hand, the "Lebenslicht" symbol is probably too common to reach any certain conclusion on this point.

Attention must be given to the word *fölski*. In the translation of the passage in *Orig* II, 653, this is rendered by "thief", a word defined by *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as " 'an excrescence in the snuff of a candle' . . . which causes it to gutter and waste". While such a meaning undoubtedly fits the context in *Fló*, the standard dictionaries of Old and Modern Icelandic offer no other example of the word used of a candle. Its normal sense, of which Fritzner gives a number of examples, is "the pale white or grey layer of ash spread over embers (whether still glowing or burnt out)". One may at least suspect, therefore, that the meaning given to the word by the translator in *Orig* is one based on the context rather than on knowledge of similar usage elsewhere in Icelandic. This being the case, one may further suspect that the word *fölski* is used here in a slightly strained sense and that, as elsewhere in this series of dreams, a pun on it is intended (cf. the remarks below on the word *bára* in Þorleifr's dream at the end of this sequence). Now it is interesting that there is another dream in Old Icelandic literature where a word *fölski* appears. In *Sturl* I, 150-1, Sighvatr Sturluson dreams that he is sitting at a feast at his home and that *hestr rauðr sem hann átti er Fölski hét* comes into the hall and asks why he has not been invited. He then devours all that is on the tables. About this dream, Sighvatr declaims a verse in which Fölski is mentioned. The story presents a slight problem: as B. Kahle (*Indogermanische Forschungen*, 1903, 160) remarks: "Man sieht nicht recht ein, warum ein rotes Pferd nach der weissen Asche benannt wird"; the root-element of *Fölski* is related to *fölr*, "pale, greyish, yellowish". Kahle's tentative explanation is that *fölski* frequently covers ashes which are still alive and thus red. This seems somewhat tenuous, however, and Finnur Jónsson (*LP*, s.v. *Fölski*), who notes that Fölski is red only in the *prose* of *Sturl*, argues that "navnet viser, at hårene — på sine steder ialfald — har været gråagtige,

som det ofte er tilfældet". But whether we regard the horse as red or grey, its appearance clearly bodes Sighvatr's death at the Battle of Örlygsstaðir a few months later. And parallels to both *raudir* and *fölvir hestar* boding death in dreams are to be found elsewhere in Icelandic sources. Red is the colour of blood and can symbolize a violent death. In *Vatns* (ch. 42), Þorkell silfri dreams that he is riding a red horse down through Vatnsdalr. He himself interprets this dream optimistically, but his wife, Signý, takes a different view — *kvað hest mar heita, en marr er manns fylgja, ok kvað rauða sýnask, ef blóðug yrði*. She then correctly predicts her husband's death. Commenting on this passage, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (*Vatns*, III, note 2) writes: "Sjálfsgat er . . . réttast að bæta ekki um draumráðningu Signýjar húsfreyju, en ef þessi draumur væri frá síðari tímum, mundi það að ríða rauðum (en þó einkum bleikum) hesti vel getað táknað feigð eitt sér, án þess þörf væri að hugsa sér hestinn sem fylgju." And the last statement here with reference to *fölvir hestar* is backed up by Finnur Jónsson (*LP*, s.v. *fölvir*), who states that "i folketroen betyder 'bleg, ɔ: gul, hest' (som man drømmer om) altid ens nærførestående død". Here we remember that the dead Helgi rides a *fölvir jör* in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (*Edda*, 160) and that *fölvir* is particularly the colour of the dead. It would seem then that *fölski* is not only the word for "white ash", but also the name for a horse (of a particular colour) which symbolizes death. It may therefore be suggested that the author of *Fló* has taken advantage of this double meaning to introduce a pun. It is true that he may have strained the sense of *fölski* somewhat by using it of a candle; but the word would make it quite clear that the largest candle was either about to go out or had gone out. It is also true that it is normally the doomed person himself who dreams of the *raudr* or *fölvir hest*; but the *fölski* in Þorgils's third dream is so unambiguously connected with the candle which represents Þorfinnr's life that its significance would have been quite

obvious. We seem to have here, then, a further adumbration of Þorfinnr's death from *blóðspýja* at *SV*, 59/11-12.

To turn to the second part of the dream, we may first ask who the woman who appears to Þorgils is. She says that her *sveinar* have taken the boat (Þorgils's *húðkeipr*, cf. p. 211 above). Immediately after Þorleifr's dream at the end of this series, Þorgils and his men hear a great shout telling them to take their boat; they go out and see *konur ii. er tekit höfðu skipit* (*LV*, 179/20-2; cf. *SV*, 47/4-6), (Þorleifr's interpretation of the dream may refer partly to these events.) It is reasonable to assume that these are *tröllkonur*. In two other sagas (*Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 2; *Grims saga loðinkinna*, ch. 1), we hear of *tröllkonur* stealing boats (cf. *Beschouwing*, 137). Assuming that *tröllkonur* are referred to, one might guess that the woman in the dream is the queen of the *tröllkonur* and that the *tún* she refers to is her stronghold. We may compare *Jökuls þátttr Buasonar* (*ÍF* XIV, 47-59) where the troll *Skrámr* lives in the wastes of Greenland and is *konungr yfir öllum óbyggðum*. His cave, like the place Þorgils is now situated (see p. 211 above), is near *björg brött* (*ÍF* XIV, 54). On the other hand, the woman in Þorgils's dream may also have affinities with the *fylgja*-like *draumkonur* who appear in dreams in various sagas (e.g. *Gísl*; cf. p. 210 above). The author of *Fló* may here be mixing borrowed elements.

The woman's words, *ok þykki mér illa er þér hafð etit egg Þorfinns* seem to refer to an event which has taken place a little before these dreams (*LV*, 177/18-21, *SV*, 44/3-7). As Þorgils and his men are making their way along the Greenlandic coast, they find some gulls' eggs (*svarbaksegg*), which they boil. They give one of the eggs to Þorfinnr and he eats it "and not all of it" (so *LV*; *SV*: "half the egg"). They ask the boy why and he replies: "You save your food and I will save my food." Nowhere, however, are we told that Þorgils or his companions eat Þorfinnr's egg (eggs?) or part of it (them?). The exact significance of the woman's remark is, then,

by no means clear. The following suggestion may be hazarded. The egg is widely regarded as a symbol of life, fertility and good luck. In *Handwörterbuch* (II, col. 638), a good deal of material is produced from folk-tradition (mainly German) which shows the importance of gifts of eggs to young children for their future lives. Similar traditions are referred to by Venetia Newall in her *An Egg at Easter* (1971, 132-5), including, for instance, the following custom from France: "The child is presented with bread, salt, a match and an egg, with the greeting: 'May your house be full like an egg, may you be good like bread, may you be pure like salt, and here is support for your old age.' Bad luck came if this egg was eaten or broken." Mrs Newall also records egg-giving customs from the Faroes. That at least remnants of such ideas and customs existed in Iceland must surely be beyond doubt. We think, for example, of the troll's *fjöregg*, the breaking of which causes the death of the troll. Could it be, then, that because Þorfinnr does not eat the whole of his egg, or because his adult companions take some of it from him, that his life is cut short (but theirs not)? It is possibly also relevant that in the folklore of a number of peoples to dream about eggs (perhaps paradoxically) bodes bad luck (see *Handwörterbuch* II, cols. 643-4; V. Newall, *op. cit.*, 66-7). Þorfinnr's death later in the saga has already been hinted at in this dream; it seems quite possible that we have here another foreboding of the same event.

Soon Þorgils has a fourth dream (*LV* 179/5-16, cf. *SV*, 46/5-18):

"Enn dreymdi mik," sagði Þorgils, "<at ek væra> heima í Traðarholti. Ek sá á kné mér inu <hægra at> þar váru vaxnir hálm-laukar v. saman (*SV*: fimm hjálm-laukar saman) ok þ<ar> af kvísl<uðu> margir laukar ok ofarlíga yfir höfuð mér bar einn lauk<inn>. Svá var hann hár ok svá var hann fagr at hann hafði gullslit á sér." <Þorleifr segir:> "Sé ek draum þinn. Þar muntu eiga v. börn ok frá þér munu kvíslaz margar ættir ok ótal manna mun frá þér koma. En ek mun eigi á Íslandi



aldr ala ok mun ek ætla ætt mína annarsstaðar. En inn fagri laukur, þar mun nökkurr maðr sá frá þér koma er ágætari maðr mun vera en allir aðrir þínir ættmenn." En þat gekk svá eptir at frá honum er kominn inn helgi Þorlákr biskup.

"I dreamt again," said Þorgils, "that I was at home in Traðarholt. I saw that on my right knee there were five *hálmlaukar* (*SV: hjálmlaukar*) growing together<sup>24</sup> and from them branched off many flowers (*laukar*). And high above my head towered one of the flowers (*einn laukinn*); it was so tall and so beautiful that it had the colour of gold." Þorleifr says: "I understand your dream: you will have five children and many families will descend from you and innumerable men will come from you. But I will not live out my life in Iceland but will propagate my race elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> And as for the beautiful flower, there a certain man shall descend from you who will be more famous than all your other descendants." And that turned out to be so, for from him (i.e. Þorgils) was descended Bishop Þorlákr the Saint.

In ch. 29, after Þorgils's return from Greenland, we are told that Þorleifr leaves Iceland for good. And at the end of the saga (although not in *LV*), we are told that Þorgils has five children by his third wife, Helga, from one of whom Bishop Þorlákr is descended.

This dream may be dealt with under three headings: (a) parallels to it in other works; (b) the play on words involved in its interpretation; (c) a possible identification of the *hálmlaukar* or *hjálm-laukar* which appear in it.

(a) Dreams where a plant or tree represents the progeny of the dreamer are found in a number of sources, foreign and Icelandic. In Herodotus's *Histories* (I, 108; translation by A. de Selincourt, 1954, 57-8), Astyages dreams that "a vine grew from his daughter's private parts and

<sup>24</sup> Or perhaps simply "growing". It is difficult to say whether *saman* goes with *vaxnir* or *fimm*. The majority of previous translators seem to accept the former alternative: thus in *GhM* (II, 115), *SV* is rendered "fem Lögstilke voxne sammen" while Kelchner (*Dreams*, 86) has "five leeks growing out of one stalk"; in *Orig* (II, 653), *LV* is translated "five leek-stalks growing together". In Niedner's German translation, which is based on *SV*, we find simply (*Geschichten*, 120): "(Ich sah, wie ...) fünf Lauchstauden hervorsprossen." Perhaps the order in *SV* speaks more for taking *saman* with *vaxnir* than that in *LV*.

<sup>25</sup> Are we to assume that Þorgils's left knee represents his marriage with Guðrún, Þorleifr's mother, which is not productive as far as Iceland is concerned? Þorleifr thus "propagates his race elsewhere" than Iceland.

spread over all Asia". His daughter gives birth to Cyrus who rises against Astyages and becomes master of Asia. The motif appears in various medieval European romances; cf. R. Mentz, *Die Träume in den altfranzösischen Karls- und Artus-Epen* (1888), 40 and 79; P. Schach, 'Some Parallels to the Tree Dream in "Ruodlieb"', *Monatshefte* (1954), 353-64. In *Ruodlieb* (c. 1030; ed. F. Seiler, 1882, 299), the hero's mother sees a tall luxuriant linden on the top of which Ruodlieb is lying on a couch, surrounded by soldiers ready for battle. A dove places a crown on his head, perches on his hand and kisses him. His mother interprets the dream as prophesying great honour for her son. In Robert Wace's *Roman de Rou* (c. 1160; ed. H. Andresen, 1879, II, 145), the pregnant mother of William the Conqueror dreams of a tree growing from her body which covers the whole of Normandy. The motif would also have been known from iconographical representations of the Tree of Jesse (cf. *KL*, s.v. *Jesse rot och stam* and the references cited there). Of Icelandic writers, Snorri is probably the first to make use of the element, although there are varying opinions as to what his foreign source was.<sup>26</sup> The motif is found in *Hálfðanar saga svarta* (*Hkr* I, 90). Before the birth of Haraldr hárfagri, Ragnhildr, his mother, dreams that she takes a brooch from her tunic and, as she holds it, it takes root and grows into a tall tree. The lower part of the tree is as red as blood, the trunk is a beautiful green and the branches are as white as snow. The tree has many twigs and branches, some growing high up, others low down. The branches are so huge that they spread not only over Norway but much further afield. The dream is given its interpretation in *Haralds saga hárfagra* (*Hkr* I, 148):

Ok þýða menn þat nú, at vitat hafi um tré þat it mikla, er móður hans sýndisk í draumi fyrir burð hans, er inn neztu hlutr

<sup>26</sup> Cf. H. Naumann, 'Die altnordischen Verwandten des Ruodlieb-Romans', in *Edda, Skalden, Saga. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Felix Genzmer*, ed. H. Schneider (1952), 324; Schach, *loc. cit.*; J. de Vries, *Kleine Schriften* (1965), 193.

tréssins var rauður sem blóð, er þá var legggrinn upp frá fagr ok grœnn, at þat jartegndi blóma ríkis hans. En at ofanverðu var hvítt tréit, þar sýndisk þat, at hann myndi fá elli ok hæru. Kvistir ok limar tréssins boðaði afkvæmi hans, er um allt land dreifðisk, ok af hans ætt hafa verit jafnan síðan konungar í Nóregi.

It should be noted that there is a pun on the actual and figurative senses of the word *blómi* and that the author of *Fló* also introduces puns into his version of the dream; see (b) below.

In Icelandic sources later than *Hkr* "tree dreams" are first found in *Harð* (on two occasions: 126-7 and 129). As in *Hkr*, there are puns here on *blómi*. A version of *Harð* (itself probably written in the south-western part of Iceland) must have been in existence before *Fló* (cf. *Harð*, 95 ff.), and since the dream is found in both extant redactions of the work (AM 556 4to and AM 465 4to), it is likely to have been in this older redaction also. If there is some direct connection between *Fló* and *Harð* in this respect, *Fló* is probably the borrower. Secondly, there is a "tree dream" in *Bárð*, ch. 1:

Þá var þat á einni nótt, at Bárðr lá í sæng sinni, at hann dreymdi, at honum þótti tré eitt mikit koma upp í eldstó fóstra síns, Dofra. Þat var harðla margkvíslótt upp til limanna. Þat óx svá skjótt, at þat hrökk upp í hellisbjargit ok því næst út í gegnum hellisgluggann. Þar næst var þat svá mikit, at brum þess þótti honum taka um allan Nóreg, ok þó var á einum kvistinum fegrsta blóm, ok váru þó allir blómamiklir. Á einum kvistinum var gullslitr. Þann draum réð Bárðr svá, at í hellinn til Dofra mundi koma nökkurr konungborinn maðr ok fæðast þar upp ok sá sami maðr mundi verða einvaldskonungur yfir Nóregi. En kvistr sá inn fagri mundi merkja þann konung, er af þess ættmanni væri kominn, er þar yxi upp, ok mundi sá konungr boða annan sið en þá gengi. Var honum draumr sá ekki mjök skapfelldr. Hafa menn þat fyrir satt, at þat it bjarta blóm merkti Ólaf konung Haraldsson.

This dream, while it could well borrow from *Hkr*, also has features in common with *Fló*, including the *gullslitr* motif, not found elsewhere. *Bárð* is a late saga

which borrows from the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Land-námabók* and which may not have been written until well into the fourteenth century. On the whole, the *gullslitr* motif seems better integrated in *Fló* than in *Bárð*. It is possible, then, although by no means certain, that we have here a case of borrowing from, rather than into, *Fló*.

(b) Three puns are involved in the interpretation of this dream:

(1) The *hálmלאukar/hjálmlאukar* which are "growing together" (but cf. note 24) on Þorgils's knee may be seen as the *runnar* (pl.) or, more probably, the *runnr* (sg.), "bush(es)" of his knee (*kné*) (cf. Fritzner's definition of *runnr* (s.v.): "Busk, Klynge af flere Skud, som ere oprundne af samme Rod . . ."). They represent, then, his *knérunnr* (-ar), a word which is used in Old Icelandic for both "lineage" and "degree in descent"; cf. *ÍF* XI, 326: "*Kvelið mik ekki lengr, ella mun ek mæla þat orð, Yngvildr, er uppi mun vera alla ævi í knérunni yðrum ok mun á hrína*"; *Stjórn*, 54: *allt til hinnar sjaundu kynkvíslar ok knérunnns*.

(2) The verb *at kvíslaz* (or *kvísla*) has a double meaning: in its concrete sense it is used of the bifurcations of a plant or tree (e.g. *Heið*, 63: *þat er laukr; höfuð hans er fast í jörðu, en hann kvíslar, er hann vex upp*); in its transferred sense, it can have the meaning "to descend from, to trace one's lineage from" (e.g. *Homiliu-bók*, ed. T. Wisén, 1872, 156: *hefir þaðan kvíslaz síðan allt mannkyn*). Cf. also the noun *kynkvísl*, "lineage", and, as in the quotation from *Stjórn* given in (1) above, "degree of lineage".

(3) There is ample evidence for the word *laukr* (or other Scandinavian forms of it) being used not only of a plant or flower, but also, in a transferred sense, of "an excellent person, paragon". The word may have had this sense in as early texts as the runic inscriptions on the Flóksand knife and certain bracteates (see J. Lange, 'Løg-Laukar', *Sprog og Kultur*, 1963, 1 ff.). In Old

Norwegian *laukr* appears as a male nickname, presumably with a favourable sense (see E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden*, 1920-I, col. 240). I. Aasen (*Norsk Ordbog*, 1873, 426) records the expression *Beste Laukjen i Lagje* and translates "den morsomste Gjæst i Selskabet" (cf. H. Ross, *Norsk Ordbog*, 1895, 467). In Swedish dialect, the word *lök* appears with the sense "bachelor" (A. Torp, *Nynorsk etymologisk ordbok*, 1919, 366) and on Bornholm, the word *løj* can mean "en gevaldig karl (i egne øjne)" (see *KL* x, col. 82). Finally, and most relevantly certain expressions, Blöndal records in *Islandsk-Dansk Ordbog* (1920-4), 478, 999: *laukur ættar sinnar* is translated "en Pryd for sin Slægt" and *ættarlaukur*, "Pryd for sin Familie"; the saying *oft er laukur í litilli ætt og strákur í stórri* is rendered "ofte har ringe Slægt sin Pryd og rig sin Skam", and *betra er að vera laukur í litilli ætt en strákur í stórri*, "bedre sin ringe Slægts Pryd end sin riges Skam". Blöndal also records the poetic *laukur lýða* and translates it "fremragende Mand".

(c) Neither *hálm-laukar* nor *hjálmlaukar* is a word found elsewhere. Mr Örnólfur Thorlacius of Reykjavík has suggested that a form of angelica may be referred to. Among some unpublished material on *Flóamanna saga* with which Professor Þórhallur Vilmundarson of the University of Iceland generously furnished me some years ago, I find the following note on the word *hjálmlaukar* (my translation): "It is not certain what plant is meant. Örnólfur Thorlacius has had the idea that *hjálmlaukar* might be the same word as English *hemlock*, Old English *hemlic*, *hymlice*; cf. *geirlaukr*, English *garlic*. *Hemlock* most usually refers to a poisonous plant (*Conium maculatum*), but is also used of the *Umbelliferae*, in southern Scotland particularly of *Angelica silvestris*, and it seems that this meaning could be intended here."

Now on contextual grounds alone, there are good reasons for thinking that some form of angelica (particularly

*Angelica archangelica*) is referred to in Þorgils's dream:

(i) *Angelica archangelica* can grow to a height of 180 cm in Iceland and *Angelica sylvestris* to a height of 125 cm; here we think of the words *ok ofarlega yfir höfuð mér bar einn laukinn* and also of the trees in the author's model for this dream. Cf. Pl. 2.

(ii) *Angelica* is much branched; cf. the words *ok þar af kvísluðuz margir laukar* and note the pun on *kvísluðuz*; see (b) above.

(iii) *SV* has *hjálm-* as the first element of its name for the plant and the flowers of angelica could be thought of as having the shape of a helmet.<sup>27</sup>

(iv) There is evidence to suggest that angelica was regarded as a symbol of fertility. For example, in Norwegian folk-custom, bride and bridegroom on their way to be married carried branches of angelica in their hands (see N. Lid, *Joleband og vegetasjonsguddom*, 1928, 208). And a riddle-poem, which Ólafur Halldórsson edits in *Fróðskaparrit* (1970), 236-58, and which he thinks could have been known in Iceland as early as the twelfth century, contains a verse of interest in this context:

Mögr er sá inn nítjándi  
er elz fyrir móðurknjám  
ok er í fótaskjóli fæddr.  
Vígnyrum sínum,  
ef verðr viljugr gamall,  
kokar hann í ennitt upp;  
eistum sínum  
kastar hann á alla vega  
ok getr af því börn ok buru.

The answer is an angelica plant. Ólafur (p. 256) compares the following verse about angelica from a collection of riddles by Jón Árnason:

Karl bjó í fjalli,  
átti fjölda barna,

<sup>27</sup> The likeness between the flower of an angelica plant and a piece of headwear is drawn in the Lappish riddle: "En Jomfru sidder ved Kildens Bred med Hætte paa Hovedet?" (see J. Friis, *Lappiske Sprogprøver*, 1856, 115).

honum vaxa eistu  
 fyrir ofan enni;  
 hann er þess verri  
 sem hann lifir leingur.

(v) The plants on Þorgils's knee in *Fló* seem to be growing in a clump (*v. saman*; but cf. note 24). This is a feature of angelica which is stressed not only in the riddle-poem mentioned above (*er elz fyrir móðurknjám ok er í fótaskjóli fæddr*), but also in a similar riddle-verse in *Heið* (70).<sup>28</sup>

There thus appear to be good reasons for thinking that the *hjálmklaukar* (less probably *hálmlaukar*) of *Fló* may be angelica plants. There are two factors, however, which at first sight seem to make this identification less attractive. One is this: in a list of *sáðsheimi* in *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (1848-87), II, 493, a plant called *hjálmr* appears; H. Falk, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* (1925), 127, has argued, probably justifiably, that this is lyme-grass, *Elymus arenarius*; a species related to lyme-grass, *Calamagrostis neglecta*, grows in Iceland and is called in Modern Icelandic *hálmgresi* (cf. *LV's hálmlaukr*). Here we have a plant with a name similar to that in *Fló*. But the plant itself fits the context badly: *Elymus arenarius* grows to a maximum height of only about 80 cm in Iceland; its stem is not branched as those of the plants in *Fló* seem to be. It is difficult to believe that merely lyme-grass (or some related species) can be intended in Þorgils's dream.<sup>29</sup> The second factor which makes one hesitate to connect the *hjálm-* or *hálmlaukar* of *Fló* with angelica is the existence of the well-established and frequently attested word *hvönn* for at least *Angelica*

<sup>28</sup> If the author of *Fló* knew of angelica's "angelic" connotations (cf. *Handwörterbuch*, s.v. *Engelwurz*), this would be a reason for connecting the plant with his pious hero Þorgils and Þorgils's descendant St Þorlákr. The word *angelica* is found in a source as early as Henrik Harpestræng's *Liber herbarum* from the first half of the thirteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> The Modern Icelandic names *garðahjálmgras*, *engjahjálmgras* and *gullhjálmgras* for respectively *Galeopsis tetrahit*, *Galeopsis ladanum* and *Galeopsis speciosa* are modern neologisms based on the Latin (Latin *galea*, "helmet": Icelandic *hjálmur*).

*archangelica*. We should have to assume that *hjálmlaukr* (or *hámlaukr*) was used alongside *hvönn* as a name for angelica or a species of it. But this proposition does not seem at all unlikely. *Hjálmlaukr* (*hámlaukr*) might have been used of *Angelica sylvestris* as opposed to *Angelica archangelica*. Alternatively, the word *hvönn* covers various sub-species of *Angelica archangelica* and *hjálmlaukr* (*hámlaukar*) may be a name for one of these. (That medieval Scandinavians distinguished between these varieties seems likely in view of their age-old cultivation of the plant; cf. K. Fægri, 'Kvanngården, en parkhistorisk relik', *Lustgården*, 1950-1, 5-17.) It should also be remembered that dialectal and local variations are particularly common in the naming of plants; *hjálmlaukr* or *hámlaukr* might be a local name for *hvönn*. And if an alternative name for angelica or a name for a variety of it did exist, it is clear why the author of *Fló* chose to use it here: he wished to make the pun on the two senses of *laukr*, "plant" and "distinguished person".<sup>30</sup>

Possible relationship between *h(j)álmlaukr* and Old English *hemlic*, *hymlice* remains to be considered. Normal phonological developments make neither *hjálmlaukr* nor *hámlaukr* correspond to either of the Old English forms. (The *geirlaukr* = *garlic* equation is a misanalogy; the word for *garlic* appears in Old English with *ġā* (or smoothed reflexes of it) in the second element; the words for *hemlock*, on the other hand, always have *-lic* or *-lice*.) We must not, of course, forget such factors as borrowing and folk-etymology. But it is difficult to see how borrowing could have taken place in this instance. It is true that certain plant-names spread from the British Isles (although from Celtic-speaking areas) to Iceland at an early date (see Helgi Guðmundsson in *Fróðskaparrit*, 1970, 192-205 and

<sup>30</sup> There is, of course, no objection to the use of the element *-laukr* in the name of a plant outside the *Allium*-tribe: according to Björn Halldórsson's *Lexicon Islandico-Latino-Danicum* (1814), 11, 14, *laukr* can be used of "enhver saftfuld Urt"; cf. N. von Hofsten, *Eddadikternas djur och växter* (1957), 50 ff.



the references cited there). If the English word found its way to Iceland, it could well have been folk-etymologized to *hjálmlaukr* (or *hálmlaukr*). But the plant in question here is one which, like the word *hvönn*, is more likely to have been carried *away* from Scandinavia and Scandinavians rather than vice versa. (See further on this point K. Fægri, *loc. cit.*; note that the word *hvönn*, or its plural form, has been borrowed into Lappish and probably also into Eskimo.) On the other hand, borrowing from a Scandinavian dialect into Old English seems even less likely: the Old English forms of the word are found in texts as early as the Épinal, Erfurt and Corpus Glossaries (*hymblicae*; *huymblicae*; *hymlice*) where they mean *cicuta*, "hemlock", rather than "angelica" (see *The Oldest English Texts*, ed. H. Sweet, 1885, 46 and 51). None of the Old English forms of the word recorded in Bosworth and Toller's *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* have *l* in the first syllable. If borrowing had taken place at an early date, one would expect an Old English form *\*helm-lēac*.<sup>31</sup>

The whole question of connection between the Icelandic and English words seems to be problematic. The following ought to be stressed however. For the contextual reasons mentioned above and irrespective of any connection with the English word *hemlock*, there is a good chance that some form of angelica is referred to by *hjálmlaukr* or *hálmlaukr*. Indeed, it is difficult to think of any Icelandic plant which suits the context better. And if this is accepted and if we bear in mind that the English word is of uncertain etymology (cf. C. T. Onions, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1966, 436), it is certainly

<sup>31</sup> In *Naturhist. Tidende* (1946), 10, Knut Fægri writes: "Også i angelsaksisk er det mulig, at vi kan spore et norsk navn på kvanne." This Professor Fægri kindly informs me is a reference to *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft*, ed. O. Cockayne (1864-6), II, 403: "Rudmolin, read Rudniolin . . . a Norse word signifying Red stalked, from *roð*, *red*, *nioli stalk*." But this is somewhat tenuous: it depends on a textual emendation; in Scandinavian loan-words in early English, the sound normally corresponding to Norse *jó* (*jú*) was Old English *eo*, Middle English *ē* (see E. Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-Words in Middle English*, 1900-2, 300).

tempting, although difficult, to see some connection between the words in the two languages.

The last dream in this series (and the saga) is dreamt by Þorgils's son, Þorleifr, and presumably follows immediately after Þorgils's "tree-dream". It is given a substantially different interpretation in the two versions:

(*LV*, 179/16-20) Þorleif dreymdi enn draum ok sagði föður sínum: "Góðan draum hefir mik enn dreynt ok heðan af mun batna ráð várt. Mér þótti sem Þórný, systir mín, gæfi mér osthleif ok væri af b[á]rurnar [*MS*: b[ö]rurnar]." "Vera má," sagði Þorgils, "at hon gæfi ef hon mætti."

Þorleifr dreamt a dream again and told his father: "I have dreamt a good dream again and from now on our circumstances will improve. It seemed to me that my sister, Þórný, gave me a cheese and the rinds were off it." "It may be," said Þorgils, "that she would give if she could."

(*SV*, 46/18-47/4) Þorleifr mælti þá: "Þat dreymdi mik, faðir, at mér þótti Þórný, systir mín, gefa mér osthleif ok váru af bárunar." Þorgils mælti: "Þar mun af it harðasta af kostum okkrum, er af váru bárunar."

Þorleifr then said: "I dreamt, father, that I thought Þórný, my sister, gave me a cheese and the rinds were off it." Þorgils said: "Then the most difficult of our circumstances must be over, since the rinds (*bárun*) were off."

It seems probable that *SV* is here superior to *LV*. No mention has been made of any previous dreams by Þorleifr and the two instances of *enn* in *LV* would therefore seem redundant.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, this is a "pun dream" and Þorgils's interpretation as it appears in *SV* would seem necessary to explain the word-plays involved.<sup>33</sup> These latter are on the words *kostr*, *at vera af* and *harðr*. *Kostr*, in the plural (as here), can have both the sense of "provisions" and "circumstances"; *at vera af* can mean both "to be removed" and "to be past, over"; *harðr*

<sup>32</sup> Or could Þorleifr have had more than this one dream in the original of the saga and shortening have taken place in both *SV* and *LV*?

<sup>33</sup> Þorgils's interpretation of the dream in *LV* and Þórný's role as the giver of the cheese in both versions are interesting and may have some significance. They have possibly something to do with the fact that while Þorgils has been in Greenland and unknown to him, Þórný has been married to Bjarni spaki Þorsteinsson with a large dowry.

has, of course, as in English, both a concrete and a figurative sense. In their real sense then, the words *mun af it harðasta af kostum okkrum* mean: "the hardest part of our provisions (i.e. the rinds of the cheese) will have been removed"; in their transferred sense, in Þorgils's interpretation, they predict the party's deliverance from its present distress: "the most difficult of our experiences (circumstances) will be past". It should be noted that there seems to have been a set expression *inn harðasti (kostr) er af*. In *Þorvalds þáttur tasalda* (ÍF IX, 120), on Þorvaldr's enquiry, Óláfr Tryggvason says he is not sick and Þorvaldr replies: *Þá er þegar nær, er af er inn harðasti*. We observe the masculine *inn harðasti* and remember that *kostr* is often omitted after an adjective and is probably to be supplied (see Cleasby-Vigfusson, 353; cf. *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. C. af Petersens, 1882, 33: *Hákon jarl er alltrauðr undir trína at ganga ok þykkir harðr á annat bord*).

The word *bárur* requires comment. In the context this is obviously intended to be understood as "rinds of a cheese". Now this meaning is not attested elsewhere in Icelandic. The word *bára* most usually has the sense "wave, billow" in Old Icelandic, but in Modern Icelandic it can also mean "ophöjet el. bølgeformet Ujævnhed el. Stribe, i Glas osv., Rifle" (Blöndal, s.v. *bára*, 2). The meaning given to *bárur* in this dream, "the (corrugated) rinds of a cheese", is not, therefore, unduly surprising. The fact it is not found elsewhere with this sense might nevertheless suggest that it is used in a slightly strained sense (cf. the remarks on *fölski* on p. 219 above), and coupled with its reiteration in Þorgils's interpretation of the dream might suggest that some play on it is also intended. Now despite *börrurnar* (= *börurnar*) in LV, I cannot accept Henzen's suggestion (*Träume*, 48; repeated by Nijhoff, *Beschouwing*, 148) that a pun on *bárur* and *barar/börur*, "stretcher, bier" is meant. There is no other evidence that the idea of a stretcher or bier was specifically

connected with that of misfortune or adversity. But it seems possible that the reader is intended to think of a sense "misfortune" which the word *bára* may have had. As noted, the most usual sense of the word in Icelandic is "wave" and it is particularly used of a "large and dangerous wave". From this last sense, it could easily have got the meaning or at least the connotation of "misfortune", "adversity". The Old Icelandic equivalent of "to sail between Scylla and Charybdis" is at *sigla milli skers ok báru* (see Fritzner, s.v. *bára*, 1). And Modern Icelandic has two sayings where *bára* is used with the same transferred meaning (see Blöndal, s.v. *bára*, 1): *sjaldan er ein báran stök*, "a single piece of ill fortune seldom comes alone"; and *þegar ein báran ris, er önnur víð*, "when one adversity comes, a second is certain". Further, with the help of the collections of Orðabók Háskóla Íslands, I have found one example of the word in Modern Icelandic used by itself meaning simply "misfortune, bad luck". This is in a letter from Jóhannes Guðmundsson to Jón Árnason (edited by Finnur Sigmundsson in *Úr fórum Jóns Árnasonar* I, 1950, 192), where it is said of a man who has undergone various misfortunes: *en hann ætlar nú hann muni lifa nokkur ár enn, fyrst hann dró yfir þessa báru*. One further point may be worth making. Professor Turville-Petre has recently discovered and edited an Icelandic version of the *Somniale Danielis* (cf. note 2). The seventy-eighth item of this is as follows: *Ef þú rær í logni, þat er gleði*, "If you are rowing in calm weather, that is for joy". If this piece of dream-symbolism was well known, then the author of the saga could be alluding to it: since there are no more waves (*bárurnar eru af*), then the dreamer is rowing in calm; and rowing in calm, according to the *Somniale*, signifies joy. Even though, therefore, there may not be a play on the word *bárur* in the senses "rinds on a cheese" and "adversities", there could be a play on it in the senses "rinds on a cheese" and "waves". With all this said, it

is difficult not to attach some double meaning to the word *bárur* here.<sup>34</sup>

Þorgils's interpretation of Þorleifr's dream, that the worst of the group's experiences are now over, proves correct. Immediately after the dream, they recover the boat they have missed. Þorgils then kills a wounded polar-bear and they renew their provisions. Soon they rid themselves of Þórr's attentions and their lot further improves. It is not long before they reach civilization, meet Þorgils's old friend Þorsteinn and get to Brattahlíð. They do not stay in Greenland long; the Christian Þorgils and the heathen Eiríkr rauði do not get on well together. After a storm-tossed voyage by way of Ireland and Hálogaland, they return to Iceland and, as far as we know, Þorgils has no more dreams and never leaves that country again.

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This attempt to trace literary models for dream-episodes in *Fló* reveals a curious incongruity in the types of source on which the author drew. Some borrowings fall entirely within the tradition of the *Íslendingasögur*. The two dreams connected with Þorgils's fight with Surtr seem based on similar dreams in *Reykðæla saga*. Þorgils's dream of the swan is probably adapted from *Gunnlaugs saga*. "Metaphor dreams" and "pun dreams" are quite

<sup>34</sup> It is possible that this dream was suggested to the author of *Fló* by a dream in *Sturl* (I, 106): Ok litlu síðar dreyndi Pál Þórðarson; hann þóttiz vera í skykktum línkýrtli. Ok eptir þat, drukknaði hann á Ísafrði ok nokkrir menn við honum. Ok var svá ráðinn draumrinn, at línkýrtill sá væri bárur stórar ok ljósar, er at honum gengi. Here the creases of a white tunic are likened to the *bárur* of the sea.

frequent in Family Sagas older than *Fló*. But alongside such typical elements are others of a different, more "learned", character. In one case the author bases a dream on a story from the Bible, and such a borrowing in a Family Saga must be almost unique. Again, there can be few Family Sagas which, like *Fló*, show the influence of vision literature. The author probably drew upon Oddr Snorrason's and Gunnlaugr Leifsson's sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason, both of which were rich in legendary elements. The heterogeneity of the dream-episodes is reflected in the rest of the saga. Alongside stories of Viking raids and *aptrgöngur*, we find the story of Þorgils breastfeeding his son after his wife's death (*LV*, 176/22-5; *SV*, 43/1-5). A borrowing from *Landnámabók* and a motif from a saint's life are juxtaposed (*LV*, 180/5-27; *SV*, 48/2-49/6). There are sharp differences of tone: for example, Þorgils bisects a berserk with one stroke of his sword (*SV*, 58/23), but a few lines later is saying that he would *várkynna konunum þótt þær ynni brjóstbörn-unum meira en öðrum mönnum* (*SV*, 59/31-3). There is a great difference between Þorgils, the ghost-layer, Viking chief and berserk-beater of chs. 13-19, and Þorgils, the pious, almost saint-like man, with a tenderness and Christian charity rare among saga-heroes, of chs. 20-24. How such disparities of tone and content are to be explained is hard to say. The editors of *Orig.* (II, 629 ff.) had a theory of plural authorship: onto a "Thorgisl's Saga" written c. 1200, whose style "reminds one forcibly of that of the early Bishops' Lives", was superimposed much "spurious matter" by a fourteenth-century paraphrast. But such a theory is difficult to entertain (see *Thesis*, \*III-7), and it is best to regard the saga, as it is now preserved, as the work of a single man. Whatever the solution of the problem, however, it is precisely the curious mixture of "profane" and "learned" elements in *Fló* which gives it a place of special interest among the post-classical *Íslendingasögur*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

- Bárð* *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, ed. Guðni Jónsson in *Íslendinga sögur* III (1946).
- Beschouwing* P. Nijhoff, *De Flóamanna Saga. Een tekst-kritische Beschouwing over de Samenstelling en de Bronnen* (1937).
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- Edda* *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. G. Neckel, revised by H. Kuhn (1962).
- Eiv* *Eiríks saga rauða*, ed. S. B. F. Jansson in *Sagorna om Vinland* (1945), 26-81.
- Flateyjarbók* *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (1944-5).
- Fló* *Flóamanna saga*.
- Fló, 1932* *Flóamanna saga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1932).
- Fms* *Fornmannna sögur* (1825-37).
- Fornsögur* *Fornsögur Vatnsdælasaga Hallfredarsaga Flóamannasaga*, ed. Guðbrandr Vigfússon and T. Möbius (1860). (*Fló* is edited 119-61, 168-85.)
- Fóstbr* *Fóstbræðra saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson in *ÍF* VI (1953).
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- Geschichten* *Grönländer und Färingers Geschichten*, translated by F. Niedner (1929). (*Fló* is translated 86-138.)
- GhM* *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker* (1835-45). (*Fló* is edited and translated into Danish in II, 1-121.)
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- Harð* *Harðar saga*, ed. S. Hast (1960).
- Heið* *Heiðreks saga*, ed. Jón Helgason (1924).
- Hkr* Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson in *ÍF* xxvi-xxviii (1941-51).
- HMS* *Heilagra manna sögur*, ed. C. R. Unger (1877).
- Hrafn* *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, ed. Jón Helgason (1964).
- ÍF* *Íslensk fornrit* (1933—).
- KL* *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid* (1956—).
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- LP* Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, revised by Finnur Jónsson (1931).
- Mar* *Mariu saga*, ed. C. R. Unger (1871).
- Oddr, Óláfs* Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1932).
- Ól mest* *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, I-II (1958-61).
- Orig* *Origines Islandicae*, edited and translated by Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell (1905). (*Fló* is II, 629-72.)
- Migne, PL* *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J. Migne (1844-64).
- Reyk* *Reykðæla saga*, ed. Björn Sigfússon in *ÍF* x (1945).
- Stjórn* *Stjórn*, ed. C. R. Unger (1862).
- Sturl* *Sturlunga saga*, ed. K. Kålund (1906-11).
- Thesis* R. Perkins, *An Edition of Flóamanna saga with a Study of its Sources and Analogues*, unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1971).
- Träume* W. Henzen, *Über die Träume in der altnordischen Sagalitteratur* (1890).
- Vatns* *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson in *ÍF* VIII (1939).



## THE TOPOGRAPHY OF *HRAFNKELS SAGA*

By O. D. MACRAE-GIBSON

**H***RAFNKELS SAGA* is well known to make large use of the topography of the area in which it is set, even though the action placed there is fictitious. Widely divergent views have been expressed, however, on how closely the detailed topography of the saga corresponds with fact, and how far modern place-names represent the author's understanding of the scene. Thus Gordon<sup>1</sup> says that the characters "move in a setting of known places: valleys, farms, roads and even minor natural features described can still be identified today, and most of them are just as the saga says they were" (p. 1); and again "all through the saga . . . the topographical statements . . . agree remarkably with the actual places with the same names as they are now known" (pp. 12-13). S.N., however, says quite the reverse: "Hann [the author] hefur aldrei átt neitt erindi í Hrafnkelsdalinn sjálfan, enda er allt, sem um staðhátta þar er sagt í sögunni, annaðhvort rangt eða gert eftir ágizkunum og lauslegum lýsingum annara manna (t.d. um Grjótteigssel og umhverfi þess)" (p. 69). Others have taken middle positions.

In earlier days, such questions formed part of the general controversy about the reliable historicity of sagas. That

<sup>1</sup> E. V. Gordon, 'On Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða', *Medium Ævum* VIII (1939), 1-32. Other frequently cited works, similarly referred to by an abbreviated form of the author's name, are:

H.S.: Halldór Stefánsson, 'Hrafnkelsdalur og byggð þar', *Austurland, Safn Austfirzkra Fræða* II (1948), 145-72.

J.J.: Jón Jóhannesson (ed.), *Austfirðinga Sögur* (Íslensk Fornrit XI, 1950).

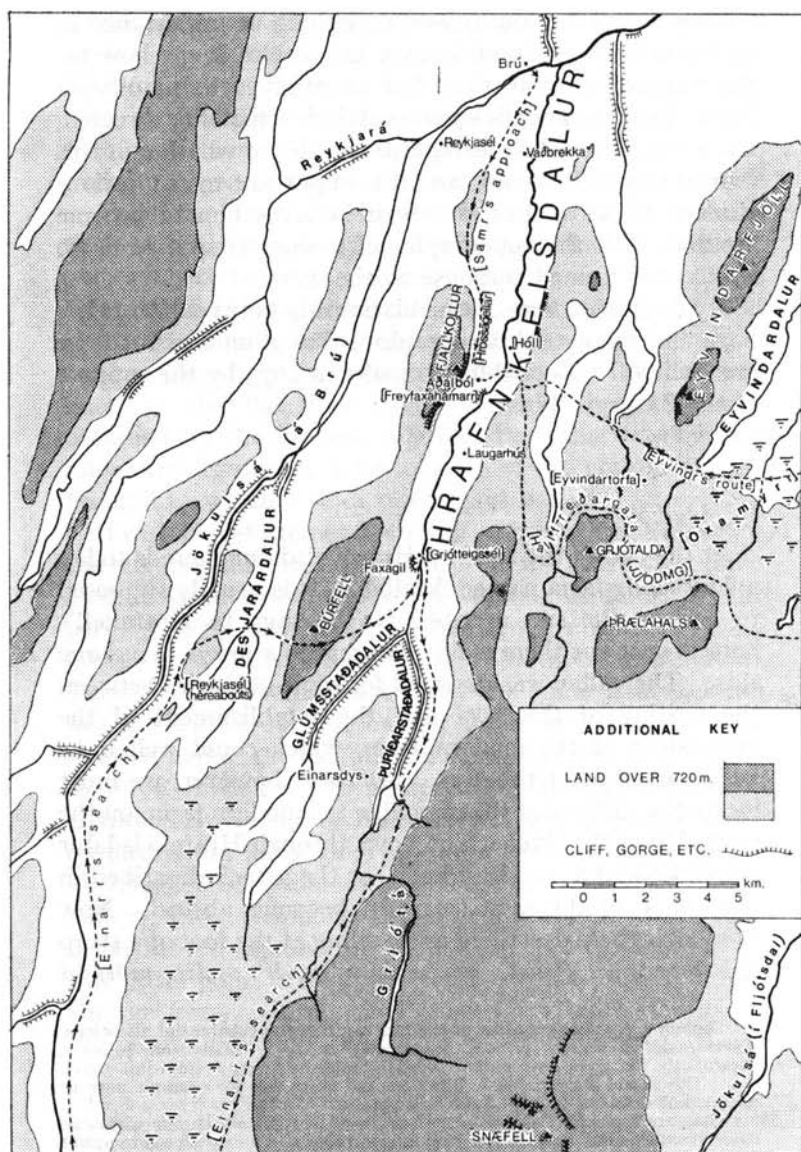
Kälund: P. E. K. Kälund, *Bidrag til en historisk-topografisk Beskrivelse af Island. II Nord- og Øst-Fjærdingerne* (1879-82).

S.G.: Sigurður Gunnarsson, 'Örnefni frá Jökulsá í Axarfirði austan að Skeiðará', *Safn til Sögu Islands og Íslenskra Bókmennta að Fornu og Nýju* II (1886), 429-97.

S.N.: Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkalla* (Studia Islandica, Íslensk Fræði VII, 1940).

S.V.: Sigurður Vigfússon, 'Rannsókn í Austfirðingafjórðungi 1890', *Arbók hins íslenska Fornleifafélags* (1893), 28-60.





Map 2.

is long over,<sup>2</sup> but the questions remain of importance in saga studies.<sup>3</sup> It is of literary interest to know how far the authors, free as they felt themselves to modify or invent incident and dialogue as artistic sensibility directed, felt a similar freedom as regards terrain, or whether in this matter they felt bound; and it is important to any serious student to know how closely it behoves him to become familiar with the topography of a saga area if he is to make an informed response to the work.

My discussion here of the relationship between *Hrafnkels Saga* and the actual topography is based on a visit to the area which I was enabled to make in 1973 by the support of the Carnegie Trust.

## I *Aðalból*

At the end of the road up Hrafnkelsdalur there is today a flourishing farm named Aðalból. It is usually supposed to occupy the site ascribed in the saga to Hrafnkell's homestead; but there is no good reason *a priori* to assume this. The valley was deserted for some centuries between the writing of the saga and the establishment of the antecedent of the modern farm, which could well have been named after the saga. At least, however, we must locate the Aðalból of the saga, like the modern farm, on the west side of the river which flows through Hrafnkelsdalur (Hrafnkelsdalsá, or Hrafnkela), or the attack described in chapter V of the saga (p. 119)<sup>4</sup> becomes absurd. Now Aðalból is there described as standing at the foot of a steep hill-slope: ... *fjallit, er bærinn stendr undir niðri á*

<sup>2</sup> Though a vigorous pleading of the lost cause of the substantial historicity of *Hrafnkels Saga* was printed as recently as 1951: Aðalsteinn Jónsson, 'Hrafnkatla hin nýja og Sigurður Nordal prófessor', *Gerpir* (júní-júlí 1951), 2-9. This scores some palpable hits here and there (see for example note 10 below), but does not in fact shake S.N.'s case.

<sup>3</sup> They are important also to place-names studies, for which one wishes to know how far names may derive from later attempts to locate saga action, but that is not my main concern in this article.

<sup>4</sup> All references to and citations of the saga are as to J.J.

*Aðalbóli . . . þar var brekka brött ofan í dalinn, ok stóð þar bærin undir niðri.* Map 2 shows the steep slope of Fjallkollur, topped by cliffs (unfortunately blurred in the map as printed), and this steep slope continues south, with or without cliff; but to the north the hills are lower, with more gentle slopes, offering no site to fit the saga's description. On the western side of upper Hrafnkelsdalur there are only two sites suitable for a substantial dwelling, places where between the steep slope of the hill and the valley floor there is a considerable area of relatively flat pasturage, sloping gently down from the one to the other, neither too steep for a farmstead and *tún* nor liable to flood as the flat floor itself evidently is. The one is occupied by the modern Aðalból; the other is some five kilometres upstream, a little north of the notable feature Faxagil to which I shall refer again below.

If we look yet further upstream on this side of the valley, the next possible site is beyond the limits of Hrafnkelsdalur as that name is now applied, in Glúmsstaðadalur. A site here, a little south of the modern Hrafnkelsdalur, is favoured by J.J. (p. li and several footnotes there cited). There is of course no reason why the name Hrafnkelsdalur in the saga should not have a wider reference than the modern name; the hill under which the farm stood would then be Búrfell. J.J. accepts that the description in chapter III (p. 106) of Þorbjörn's riding *ofan eptir heraði* requires a site for Aðalból up-valley from the accepted site of Laugarhús<sup>5</sup> (whereas the modern Aðalból is down-valley), and he supports the Glúmsstaðadalur site because it facilitates explanation of the saga's Freyfaxahamarr. The latter point is treated extensively in section II below. On the former Gordon has offered one interpretation of the phrase *ofan eptir heraði* to avoid the difficulty, though

<sup>5</sup> S.G. reports the name in 1872 "skammt fyrir innan Aðalból undir austrhlöð" (p. 454); Kálund in 1879 has no doubt that this is where the saga placed Laugarhús: "Öst for æn, lidt længere inde ved Adalbol, findes under hedeskråningen talrige hustømter, benævnt Laugarhús; navnet vidner om, at sagaens gård af samme navn har stået her" (p. 219).

not one I find easy to understand,<sup>6</sup> and I shall suggest two others below; but in any case I would hesitate to argue on the premise that the author of the saga *must* have understood his Laugarhús to be where the name is later localised. The name clearly implies a hot spring, but although the one at the accepted site of Laugarhús is the best-known in the valley, it is not the only one;<sup>7</sup> and the strengths of springs can vary with time. This one is not at present very conspicuous (I walked over the site without noticing it at all<sup>8</sup>) and it could be that it was similarly inconspicuous when the author wrote, and that his Laugarhús was located at some other spring, then more powerful. However this may be, there are serious difficulties about the Glúmsstaðadalur site. It is a good way from the part of the valley which Hrafnkell could be supposed to have seen and admired as an *eyðidalr* . . . af *Jökulsdal* while riding over Fljótsdalsheiði<sup>9</sup> (chapter II, p. 98), and the eastern side of Búrfell offers no such steep slope as Fjallkollur does, under which to place the farm. Yet more difficulties arise, as will appear, when one attempts to locate Grjótteigssel still further up-valley.

There is also a positive, and it seems to me a determining, argument for a location on the same general site as the modern Aðalból, from a feature not as far as I know hitherto brought into argument on the point: the *graseilar* in which the attackers' horses were left when Sámr and the

<sup>6</sup> "The *herað* here is the *herað* repeatedly mentioned in the saga, Fljótsdals-herað, which stretches northwards down towards the sea. As Hrafnkelsdalr lies on the edge of this *herað*, the way to Laugarhús lies *down along it*" (p. 12, note 3).

<sup>7</sup> See H.S., p. 147.

<sup>8</sup> The only noticeably special feature of the area was that the willow, which elsewhere in the valley grows in prostrate form, or at most as low scrub, here attains the height of a small tree; a fact probably attributable to heating of the soil by the warm water which here, Kálund tells us, "skal . . . þá mæna stæder sive ned fra fjældet" (p. 219). The spot evidently struck S.V. as much more distinctive; he describes it in idyllic terms, well-wooded and with rich flowery grass (p. 37). Possibly the strength of the spring was greater eighty years ago, though he calls it only "*dáltili* hver eða laug" (my italics); or the different months of our visits (his in July, mine in August, when one would expect fewer flowers) may have something to do with our different reports.

<sup>9</sup> Assuming that, whether by emendation or otherwise, the "eftir Fljótsdalsheraði" of the manuscripts can be interpreted as signifying or including the *heiði*.

Þjóstarssynir rushed the farm (chapter V, p. 119). Translators and glossators have interpreted these *grasgeilar* as grassy clefts or gullies, an understanding originated by Kålund: "Fjældet eller halsen, hvorunder gården står, er gennemskåret af utallige småkløfter og furer, deriblandt en større noget fra gården. Dette passer ganske godt til sagaens omtale af smalle græsgroede kløfter (geilar) i lien oven for gården" (p. 219). S.V., p. 39, adds that these gullies were still at his time called *grasgeilar*. They are simply such erosion channels as are common down steep slopes in Iceland, and would probably have been less marked when the saga was written. I do not think they would serve to conceal many horses in; they come to an upper end below the cliff, so hardly run *i heiðina upp*; one would hardly from any of them describe the slope which they traverse as "below"; and the attacking party could not have gained them without coming into view of whatever farmworkers might be abroad at the time. If the author had these in mind he was taking liberties with the actual topography, and a much better interpretation is in fact available. The attackers' route from Brú, as described in chapter V, is indicated on Map 2. If one follows it on the ground, up the gentle northern end of the high ground between Jökuldalur and Hrafnkelsdalur, on south over a rounded height until the land drops slightly to a saddle; then on further, trying to approach the modern Aðalból while keeping below an increasingly rocky and cliff-like face which rises to the right, down which attack would be difficult or impossible, but nevertheless without coming down the slope and into view from the farm, one finds oneself moving along one of two adjacent broad grassy ledges, some four or five metres wide. The surface is somewhat cut up in places (probably less so several centuries ago, since there has been much severe erosion in Iceland since then) but still offers quite easy walking and would be, I am sure, perfectly suitable for ponies. The beautiful peak of Snæfell is ahead, and the

farm, if one keeps away from the extreme valley side of the ledge, is out of sight below the slope. *Grasgeilar* is an excellent term for these ledges (such formations are known to geographers as "parallel roads"); and considered now in the reverse direction from the movement I am describing they certainly run *i heiðina upp*, the *heiði* being the high ground between Hrafnkelsdalur and Jökuldalur, including the saddle which I have mentioned. This interpretation of the *grasgeilar* has not to my knowledge been advanced before,<sup>10</sup> but it imposes itself when the ground is thus traversed.

The existence of a break in the steep slope above Aðalból is evident from the available large-scale map of the area,<sup>11</sup> on which for some two kilometres south of the saddle the space between the 600 metre and 620 metre contours is visibly much wider than between the contours above and below, but its detailed nature cannot be discovered from the map. Indeed, if one is actually standing in the valley (or even on the hills on the other side of the river, though a better view can be had from there), it is difficult to believe just how substantial these ledges are, though a tendency to a ledge structure running across the hillside can be clearly seen. As features offering a route across the face of the slope, concealed from the bottom, they come to an end a little short of a point directly above

<sup>10</sup> It is, however, possible that S.N. understood them in this way. He writes (p. 69) as though perfectly familiar with them, suggesting that they were features of Hrafnkelsdalur which the author of the saga did know accurately, as a by-product of his knowledge of the route to the Alþingi which he ascribes to Sámr: "Ef hann hefur farið þá leið 'yfir brú' [from Fljótsdalur], myndi hann af Fljótsdalsheiði hafa séð fjallið fyrir ofan Aðalból, afstöðu bæjarins og gellarnar, en ekki bæinn sjálfan og grundirnar niður að ánni." I could not myself see from what point of any route over Fljótsdalsheiði to Brú he would have got this view; and Aðalsteinn Jónsson, who as farmer at Vaðbrekka should know, roundly declares that there exists no route to fit the suggestion (*op. cit.*, note 2 above, p. 8). In another connection (p. 30, note 1) S.N. refers to Jón Jóhannesson as his authority, "sem skoðað hefur tóftina [the site of a structure near Faxagil]", so it is possible that he did not closely examine the area, and is conjecturing rather than reporting the view to be had from Fljótsdalsheiði. If, however, he did in fact stand at some point on Fljótsdalsheiði offering a clear view of the hills above Aðalból, but not of the farm itself, I think he would more easily have seen what I call the *geilar* than what Kálund does, though he does not record that he differs from Kálund.

<sup>11</sup> Landmælingar Íslands 1:100,000, sheet 94. I could not indicate it on my reduced map.



the modern Aðalból. By then one has duly emerged *undir fjallit*, with the cliff top of the eastern face of Fjallkollur above, while below a steep slope runs *ofan í dalinn*. There would be plenty of room to leave eighty ponies and twenty men by the hill edge of either ledge, invisible from the valley. Going to the valley edge of the lower ledge, and looking downwards and somewhat up-valley, one sees Aðalból. It took me seven minutes to trot down to it, but assuming men less cautious than I was about a twisted ankle, and a slope less cut up by water erosion than it is now, the author could very fairly have supposed a time of perhaps half that, when he wrote, *Þá bar skjótt at bænum*. If the farm is imagined a little north of its present position, so that the attackers could have got directly over it on the ledges, it could be quicker yet.<sup>12</sup>

I cannot believe that so precise a fit between topographical feature and saga action is fortuitous; the author knew the area well and fitted his story to it expertly, placing his Aðalból on a real, particular farm site, substantially where the modern farm of the same name stands. There is nothing at all like this at the next possible site, further upstream. I had not time to examine the Glúmsstaðadalur possibility, but it looks unlikely from the map that there could be there; in any case a distance of some twenty kilometres would be harder to cover before men were up than ten.

In this case the saga gives sufficient detail for adequate visualisation of the site of the action, without necessarily any actual knowledge of the area. Probably, however, the author expected his readers to know the site (for we shall later meet points at which he seems to rely on their knowledge of the valley); but whether it was already known as Aðalból, or whether he dignified it by a name which in time displaced its former one, we can only guess.

<sup>12</sup> This would also bring Hóll more nearly directly opposite Aðalból (ch. III, p. 100: *gegnir Aðalbóli fyrir austan*), if the usual, and plausible, location of Hóll is correct (see Map 2).

II *Freyfaxahamarr*

If, then, the author made accurate use of actual *grasgeilar* above an actual site for Aðalból, it would be surprising if he placed a quite spurious *hamarr* near it. Not impossible, however, and that is the usual view. Baetke, for instance, observes that "gibt es unterhalb des Hofes Aðalból weder einen Fels noch eine tiefe Schlucht, wie das die Saga voraussetzt; wenn heute ein Fels, der 5-6 km von Aðalból entfernt ist, Freyfaxahamarr genannt wird . . ., so verdankt er diesen Namen zweifellos der Saga".<sup>13</sup> He is using this as an argument against the possible historicity of the killing of the horse, for which nobody would now wish to argue, but plainly takes the fiction to include the topographical feature essential to it.

Faxagil, duly five or six kilometres from Aðalból, was likewise pointed out to me by the family at Aðalból when I enquired for Freyfaxahamarr. There are indeed notable cliffs surrounding and beside the *gil*, though not quite *niðr við ána*<sup>14</sup> (chapter VI, p. 123), and the proposition that here too was the author's Freyfaxahamarr is not to be rejected out of hand. It is certainly too far from Aðalból for the action of chapter VI to be plausible,<sup>15</sup> even if one could accept so hardy an emendation as S.V.'s *þeir leiða nú hestinn [upþ] eftir vellinum [ok upþ í dalinn]* (p. 38), and the author would be placing Hrafnkell's *goðahús* unexpectedly far from his homestead, but all we need suppose is a telescoping by him of two sites, a downstream one providing the *geilar* and an upstream one the *hamarr*. The upstream site is in fact, as I shall suggest, a quite likely location for the Steinrøðarstaðir which *Landnámabók* gives as the historical Hrafnkell's dwelling, and we could then say that it was this site which was in

<sup>13</sup> ed. Walter Baetke, *Hrafnkels saga freysgoða* (Altnordische Textbibliothek, neue Folge 1, 1952), p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> A reservation first made by S.V., if I understand correctly the force of his note 1, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon's "less than a mile" (p. 15) is quite wrong, and must I think reflect misunderstanding of the *mil* of 10 km.: Kálund records Faxagil as "en halv míls vej syd for Adalbol" (p. 219), and S.V. as "¼ mílu inn frá Aðalbóli" (p. 38).

the author's mind when he made Þorbjörn go *ofan* to Laugarhús. The site here fits well Codex D's reference to *hamrar stórir ok fors einn*: a high fall, which must be very impressive in spate, comes down the cliff into Faxagil (though D's *fyrir neðan bæinn* is if anything more difficult than the *niðr við ána* of the other texts). The absence of a *hylr djúpr*, or a pool of any sort, does not automatically disqualify it; the boulders now tumbled about the floor of the *gil* could be the remains of a stone dam, behind which before its collapse a pool would have formed.

If the author indeed expected his readers to know the valley, he would on this supposition be asking them to make very flexible use of their knowledge, but in fact the supposition can hardly be maintained, for the immolation of Freyfaxi, as described in chapter VI (pp. 123-4), really cannot be imagined as performed at Faxagil, wherever placed relative to Aðalból. To get the horse to the top of any of the cliffs here one would have to urge him up some very steep slopes, whereas the saga says that after being led *eptir vellinum* (Gordon, p. 15, makes the natural suggestion that "the *völlr* over which they led him would presumably be the *tún* of the farm and the meadowland by the river"), he was then led *fram á hamarinn*, as though the top of the *hamarr* were level with the *völlr*. This can be combined with a high cliff if the site under Búrfell is accepted for Aðalból, where the whole farm and its *völlr* would be above the gorge of Glúmsstaðadalssá (but surely this, with no easy access to the river, would be a less appealing farm-site than further downstream?); or if the site is moved still further upstream to beyond the gorge, whence the horse could be led down-valley above what becomes a cliff-like face as the river falls away into the gorge (but then the site is hardly at the foot of any considerable hill-slope). We can of course again invoke the hypothesis that the author telescoped features from Glúmsstaðadalur and from Hrafnkelsdalur proper, but in fact the saga action can be interpreted on the assumption

of, at most, much slighter authorial adjustment of the actual topography, if in this particular at least the D form is not taken to preserve what the author wrote.

If one can lead straight from a *vøllr* out on to a *hamarr* the natural assumption is that the *hamarr* is a low one, and we are clearly to suppose the horse actually killed by drowning rather than by precipitation as such. From any plausible position for Aðalból under my *geilar* it would be impossible to imagine the horse led *down*-valley to the death described. But as one moves south, *up*-valley, the *vøllr*, between the steep slope and the actual valley floor, gradually rises, tilts, and narrows. Meanwhile the slope above becomes less steep, until slope and *vøllr* merge into one for some distance, and there is no longer any suitable site for a farm. Now where the *vøllr* is thus rising, the river swings to the west, and has undercut the bank, so that there is a vertical earth face down to the water, up to some five metres high. Obviously progressive erosion of the bank means that this feature will no longer be in just the same place as when the author knew the valley, but it is likely to have existed then as now. From this bank one can easily imagine a horse pushed into the river below. The position is by the natural limit of the Aðalból home pasturage, a very reasonable place for the author to locate the *goðahús*.

There are difficulties in this suggestion, certainly. The saga's *hylr djúpr* at first appears to be one. The river hereabouts wanders down the flat valley floor; in most places it could be comfortably waded when I was there (at a time of low water), and it offers nothing that we would call a "pool" at all. But *hylur* in modern Icelandic, though it often refers to a distinct pool, as under a waterfall, can be used merely of a deeper part of a river, as under the bank.<sup>16</sup> I investigated the depth at my suggested

<sup>16</sup> For guidance as to the semantic limits of modern Icelandic words I am most grateful to Hermann Pálsson, Grétar Harðarson, and Gunnar Snorri Gunnarsson, and to Sheila Coppock who most kindly sought it out from them for me. To Hermann Pálsson, Mrs Coppock and Richard Perkins I am also indebted for valuable criticism of drafts of this article.

spot by wading. I expected to find a rather deeper channel than elsewhere by the shore under the earth face I have described, since this is on the outside of a bend; but I was surprised to find the bottom, a few feet from the bank, going quickly down with a rocky surface to at least waist depth.<sup>17</sup> If, when the author wrote, the bank were a few feet further out (as is likely, since erosion is progressive in such a situation), and if he were thinking of the water as higher (as it certainly must often be), he could well have postulated a *hylr* here deep enough to drown a pony in, pushed in blindfold with a heavy stone tied to its neck.

Another difficulty lies in the word *hamarr*. In size and shape my bank could qualify as a *hamarr* in modern Icelandic, but not in composition: the word implies rock. One would have to postulate here a minor adjustment by the author to make the setting more impressive, or a semantic specialisation of the word since he wrote (it is not in fact common in modern Icelandic at all), or perhaps that there was a rocky outcrop here before erosion caused it to fall into the stream. One or another of these seems possible enough.

The final difficulty is then the direction implied in *ofan eptir vellinum*. Two possibilities suggest themselves. First, if the farm (to which the horses had been brought *heim* before the decision to kill Freyfaxi, in chapter VI, p. 123) is taken to have been built towards the top of the gentle slope on which it was sited, it would in fact have been somewhat down-hill, though up-valley, to my suggested site for the *hamarr*, an implication quite plausibly to be read into the saga's *níðr við ána*. Second, one may wonder if the frequent phrase *ofan eptir* might not have lost all specific sense of the first element, and become equivalent to merely *eptir*. Either suggestion will dispose also of the difficulty about the relative positions

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps more (though I think not much more), but caution prevented me from exploring further.

of Aðalból and Laugarhús. The presumed site of Laugarhús is at present farmed as part of the Aðalból holding; it is not very far up-valley from the farmhouse, and it stands lower above the valley floor. A reader who knew the valley could well think of the track to Laugarhús as leading *down* to the river, across it, and on to the low ground on the other side, rather than as leading *up*-valley.

### III *Grjótteigr etc. and Reykjasel*

S.G. conjectures that *Grjótteigr* refers to the tongue of land between Glúmsstaðadalur and Þuríðarstaðadalur: "Sú túnga gat vel heitið Grjótteigr, því þar hefir ávallt verið grýtt" (p. 455). But he does not offer this as conclusive evidence, and in fact there are altogether too many stony areas hereabouts for such argument to take us far. Grjótteigssel is, however, clearly to be placed up-valley from Aðalból, in view of chapter III, p. 102 *í sel fram í Hrafnkelsdal, þar sem heitir á Grjótteigsseli* and p. 104 *riðr upp til sels* (not to press *ofan eptir gøtunum . . . ofan eptir dalnum . . . upp eptir dalnum* in view of what has been said above). Like Aðalból it is on the western side of the river, since the author presumably did not think of Hrafnkell as carrying Einarr's body across it when he *lét færa Einar vestr á hallinn frá selinu* (p. 105). The site that at once suggests itself is the second of the possible sites for Aðalból itself mentioned above, near Faxagil. If Hrafnkell is supposed to have retained the grazing there for his own use, not given the site for a farm, he could well have wished to have a shieling there, on an area of pasturage separated from the home pastures. There are

plenty of stones to account for the name<sup>18</sup> (larger in size than those in the river bed near Aðalból, which might rather have been called *möl* than *grjót*). They appear in quantity in stony flats and islands at valley floor level (there are areas of *eyrr* ample for a score of sheep and a dozen horses), and in an area of pasturage just above this level but below the main *völlr* on which the *sel* would have stood, and higher up in the small watercourses which come down from the hillside.

The saga also tells us concerning this *sel* that the river Grjótteigsá *fell fyrir framan selit* (chapter III, p. 102). This river is usually, and plausibly, taken to be identical with the Grjótá which gives its name to the Grjótárgil beside which Einarr rode in search of his sheep; and it is often assumed to be a small tributary of the main river. If so, the only *gil* in a remotely suitable place is Faxagil, and Grjót(teigs)á is the stream that flows out of it. It is only small (no doubt bigger in wetter weather), but as an element in proper names *á* carries no implication of size. There are, however, several difficulties in accepting this identification. I could see no site beside this stream at all suitable for a *sel*, the natural place being the more open *völlr* some little way to the north of it. I cannot imagine any author who knew the area making Einarr ride up beside its *gil*; for this is not, like most, a V-shaped gulley descending for some distance cut into a sloping hillside, but a bowl going no great distance back in a very steep hillside, the stream coming down its inner face in a vertical fall of perhaps 60 metres. I doubt if one *could*

<sup>18</sup> H.S. (p. 159) attractively suggests that this area is also the puzzling Steinrðarstaðir which *Landnámabók* gives as Hrafnkell's farm; the name related not (as is certainly usual for such names) to an otherwise unrecorded person Steinrøðr but to \*steinruð ('ruð, það sem ruðst hefur, stytting úr ruðningur'), referring to falls of stone from the steep watercourse above Faxagil, with the recorded name a corruption of \**Steinruðarstaðir*. I had myself sought to make the same localization on the basis of a postulated \**steinrøð* 'stony shore', which would require the correct form to be \**Steinrøðarstaðir*; but of the two speculations that of the native Icelander is clearly to be preferred. If the author knew of a tradition that this territory belonged to Hrafnkell, though his dwelling as he understood it was elsewhere, to postulate here a *sel* dependent on Aðalból would be reasonable.

ride up the hillside beside it, and I am sure no rider would; he would instead ride obliquely south and west, slanting up the much gentler slope to the south of the *gil*. It could of course be suggested that Einarr is merely described as riding past the mouth of this *gil* before riding up just as I have described, but then to describe his route just after passing the mouth simply as *svá upp til jökla*, as though an obvious continuation of his movement so far would take him to the glacier, is odd. Also (though it is not a point on which to lay much stress) there is much less *eyrr* beside the outflow of this stream than there is a little way down river.

A more satisfactory explanation (though not fully so) of Grjót(teigs)á and its *gil* remains that of S.G. (pp. 455-6). He suggests that the name Grjótá, which now signifies only the major source-river of Þuríðarstaðadalsá, once applied also to that river (which owes its current name to the fact that some time after the abandonment of the Hrafnkelsdalur settlements its valley became an outlying part of the estate of Þuríðarstaðir in Fljótsdalur), so that the saga's Grjótárgil is the gorge of Þuríðarstaðadalsá. From my postulated site of Hrafnkell's *sel* a natural route for a search up to the glacier and back would run up the eastern bank of this gorge, on towards the glacier east of the marshy area between Þuríðarstaðadalur and Jökuldalur, across to Jökulsá, and back beside this river, now west of the marshy area (see Maps 1 and 2). S.G.'s explanation of Grjótá, however, requires him to place the *sel* beside Þuríðarstaðadalsá, and necessarily then south of the gorge, since to the north the gorge continues right to the confluence with Glúmsstaðadalsá. There, to the west of the river, he records the presence of a mound known as Einarisdys. He confidently identifies this with the saga's Einar svarða (he is of course of his day in assuming the historicity of the saga's action), and therefore sees it as confirming his placing of the *sel* on the western bank of the river here. J.J., with his Aðalból located in Glúms-



staðadalur, naturally also requires a southerly situation for the *sel*; he also appeals to Einarisdys (p. 105, note 3) but, not accepting the extended application of the name Grjótá, places the *sel* on the other side of the river: "austan við Þuríðarstaðadalsá, rétt norðan við Grjótá" (p. 102, note 3). He assumes that the name Hrafnkelsdalr covered not only the main valley but both those into which it divides.

These placings of the *sel* raise serious difficulties relative to the accepted placing of Reykjasel, but so does my favoured site, and they could be resolved in the same sort of way (see below). The main objection to them is that they make Einarr start his search already south of any possible Grjótárgil, so it becomes hard to attach any sense to the statement that he rode *upþ hjá Grjótárgili, svá upþ til jökla* (p. 103). I find this an insuperable objection. Einarisdys is certainly not compelling evidence; it may well have been named after the saga, as in other cases. I therefore extend S.G.'s suggestion that the name Grjótá referred to more of the river system than it does now, and posit that it continued to apply to the joint stream below the confluence of Glúmsstaðadalsá and Þuríðarstaðadalsá, the *Hrafnkel*-names, like these, being later. The *sel* can then be located where I have suggested, on the pasturage somewhat north of Faxagil, close to the main river. Sheep can easily cross this here, and for Einarr to start his search by crossing it also before riding up towards the glacier would be a most reasonable plan.

He would then follow the course I have suggested, returning north beside Jökulsá to Reykjasel. The accepted site for this is on the east bank of Jökulsá opposite the entry of Reykjará; the name is reported here by S.G. (p. 456). But if Einarr went so far before turning east, he would then cross into lower Hrafnkelsdalur, a little above Brú; he would not come down the hill anywhere near Grjótteigr on any of the suggested locations of

this. Also, if he did return to Grjótteigssel (wherever it was) after riding up to the glacier and down to this Reykjasel, he would have covered some 90 kilometres<sup>19</sup> — a formidable ride indeed over rough country. Also, to return into Hrafnkelsdalur from this Reykjasel involves crossing only one ridge, but Einarr is said to have returned *yfir hálsta*<sup>20</sup> (p. 103). If, however, the saga's Reykjasel could be placed at a point by Jökulsá more or less west of my suggested site for Grjótteigssel, the route back east would first cross into Desjarárdalur and then over again into Hrafnkelsdalur, thus providing two *hálstar*; and this suggestion also cuts some 35 kilometres off the line of search, reducing the ride from the phenomenal to the merely exceptional.<sup>21</sup> Names in *Reykja-* are of course common in Iceland. I was not, unfortunately, able to explore the appropriate reaches of Jökulsá to see if there are now any hot springs there which might have given this name to a shieling; but when the accepted placing of Reykjasel offers so many difficulties I nevertheless prefer to think that the author may have understood a quite different one, much further upstream.

Einarr would then have returned into Hrafnkelsdalur slanting down the slope south of Faxagil which I mentioned above. As he did so, he would be able to look up into the gorge of Þuriðarstaðadalssá, our postulated Grjótárgil; and if the usual assumption is correct that the *gil* where he found the sheep is the one beside which he had ridden up earlier in the day, the action described fits the topography acceptably. Wherever the sheep had been as he rode up in the morning, they had by now got into the

<sup>19</sup> S.V.'s report that "kunnugir menn sögðu mér, að leið sú er Einar reið Freyfaxa mundi ekki vera meira enn 24 tíma ferð fyrir gangandi mann, rösklega gengið" (p. 39) can hardly refer to this route; unfortunately he could not himself traverse the route, and he gives no details.

<sup>20</sup> Nor can we avoid the difficulty by reading *yfir hálsta*; there is no suitable water there that might have had this name.

<sup>21</sup> On these points, S.G.'s and J.J.'s placings of the *sel* would be equally acceptable; the *hálstar* would be those between Jökuldalur and Glúmsstaðadalur and between this and Þuriðarstaðadalur (much less pronounced ridges than those of my postulate, but a *hálsta* need not be steep), and a further 10 km or so would come off the length of the ride.

mouth of the gorge. But I doubt if the assumption is correct. For one thing, the phrase . . . *hann hafði fram riðit áðr* (p. 103) suggests rather riding past the mouth of the *gil* than up along its length as (if I am right) the author made Einarr do beside Grjótárgil. For another, this main river gorge is a much less likely place for sheep than Faxagil, which is indeed an ideal place to imagine a flock of sheep hidden in — having seen it, I can hardly believe that the author would have placed a “lost sheep” episode in any other. Einarr would have passed its mouth as he rode up valley, but at some distance, on the other side of the river. From there the narrow mouth of the *gil* and the large boulders that lie in it quite hide from view the considerable little area of grass in the wider inner end of the bowl, and one can perfectly well imagine the sheep there all the time (any noise from them masked by that of the river), thus adding to the feeling of fate working against Einarr which the author clearly intends in describing the odd behaviour of the horses. This *gil* is evidently attractive to sheep today: I found it carefully fenced off both above, whence sheep could get in down some steep slopes between the actual cliffs, and at its mouth, where they could get in from the narrow strip of grazing which here runs alongside the main river bank. Einarr’s return route would have led him close past its entrance, now on the near side of the river, giving him a much better chance of hearing any *sauðajarmr*; as he then turned into the mouth the sheep would come out to meet him just as described. The “fit” of the action to the precise topography could not be closer; but in this case if the author expected his readers to follow it properly, he expected them to know the valley well enough to be familiar with the striking *gil* at (if I am right) Grjótteigr, and to know the quite different Grjótárgil by its name, with no tendency to confuse the two. The later loss of certain names, and the spurious placing of others in ill-judged attempts to locate saga action, have confused the picture.

IV *Hallfreðarstaðir, Hallfreðargata, and Eyvindarfjöll etc.*

The view has often been expressed that the author constructed parts of his story to provide an explanation for the pre-existing names Hallfreðarstaðir, near the east bank of Jökulsá and some 20 kilometres from its mouth, and Hallfreðargata, the route thence to Hrafnkelsdalur over the moor.<sup>22</sup> Of these, the former is certainly an established modern name, but not the second, though some commentators write as though it were,<sup>23</sup> a belief they might trace back to S.G. He, however, makes no such assertion. His object was not to record established names but to localise saga-names, as he makes clear in his *Eptirmáli* (p. 493):

Fyrir mörgum árum kom mér til hugar, að það gæti verið þarflegt fyrir hvern þann, sem rita vildi sögu Íslands, og til að sanna, hvað rétt væri frá skýrt í sögum landa vorra, sem ritaðar eru í fornöld, að grannkunnugir menn hær á landi semdi skýrslur um öll örnefni, sem getr um í fornum sögum hær á landi, hver af þeim sé enn til, hvar hin muni hafa verið, sem glötuð eru, og um það, sem mishærmt er í sögunum, eða misritað um örnefni, landslag, ferðir og þvílíkt; — bæta og við munnmælasögum, sem fylgja ýmsum stöðum.

Of Hallfreðargata he says: "Það er enn í munnmælum, að sá vegr hafi legið inn frá Hallfreðarstöðum . . ." <sup>24</sup> (p. 454); he is reporting a commonly held view of where the route mentioned in the saga must have been, not a statement that the name was in use for such a route. And he himself was clearly unhappy about the saga reference. This generally accepted "Hallfreðargata" is, he says, certainly for the most part a dry route, but it is quite wrong to call it (as the saga does in chapters II and VIII,

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps also Eyvindarfjöll and Eyvindardalur (see Map 2), but it is of little importance to my argument whether these names in fact antedate the saga.

<sup>23</sup> Not J.J., who says simply "nafnið Hallfreðargata hefir ekki varðveitt" (p. 99, note 2), and reconstructs from the saga a quite different line for it, on which see below.

<sup>24</sup> The approximate line is shown on Map 1, marked [Hallfreðargata (SG)].

pp. 99 and 129) drier *but longer* than some other, presumably more usual, route, "því hann er styttr allra vega og beztr, sem fara má til Aðalbóls frá Hallfreðarstöðum" (p. 454).

Indeed, in every way this line for Hallfreðargata is a misfit with the saga. The route is referred to in chapter VIII in connection with the bogs which obstruct Eyvindr's party on their way from Fljótsdalr to Aðalból, and we are told explicitly that it was these bogs which caused Hallfreðr to find the other route (pp. 128-9); but they could not possibly lie on any alternative route to this "Hallfreðargata", as Gordon has pointed out (p. 21). The route which the author assumed for Eyvindr cannot be exactly reconstructed, but the saga's description (pp. 126-7) leaves no reasonable doubt that it left Fljótsdalur and went up onto Fljótsdalsheiði near Bessastaðir. The *hraun stórt* between the two mires is probably what is now called Miðheiðarháls; and the *háls* on which Eyvindr's last stand is to be placed must be the rise at whose northern end are the two hills now named Eyvindarfjöll, and whose southern end is the high ground of Grjótalda and Þrælaháls. H.S. (pp. 148-9) records the normal route from Bessastaðir to Aðalból as crossing this rise between the Eyvindarfjöll. If the author conceived this as Eyvindr's route, his reference to *fjöll litil* on the rise is difficult; the pass here is dominated by the two close, large, hills. If, however, we take the route as swinging somewhat south along Miðheiðarháls, to cross the rise over a broad, low saddle south of the Eyvindarfjöll, the difficulty disappears; there are several small rocky eminences on this saddle (and we can easily suppose that a wind-eroded turf mound or mounds also once stood on it<sup>25</sup>). This would be a perfectly sensible line; it leads to an easy crossing of the further valley and ridge which (as

<sup>25</sup> Whether the actual "Eyvindartorfa" which S.V., p. 37, reports an informant's father as having seen (with a *haugr* on it) is relevant one cannot now say; he does not in any case state where exactly it was.

Codex D explicitly states) still lie to the west, before descending into Hrafnkelsdalur, almost directly to Aðalból; from the saddle it coincides with the bridle-way from Kleif, further up Fljótisdalur, the only route between the two valleys shown on current published maps.<sup>26</sup> This is the line which my maps show as Eyvindr's probable route. The only other possible crossing of the *háls* of Eyvindr's last stand is north of both Eyvindarfjöll. H.S. records the route from Bessastaðir to Vaðbrekka as passing this way, but I doubt if any likely route to Aðalból would do so.

Now, if we simply look for what chapter VIII would suggest, a drier but longer alternative to this route which Hrafnkell might be supposed to have sought, in some sense *fyrir ofan fell*, we must necessarily look where J.J. does, to the south of Eyvindr's route. It would go out of Fljótisdalur and onto the moor "upp frá Kleif" as J.J. says (p. 99 note 2), just as the modern bridle route does, but it would then hold south of that route, crossing a minimum of wet ground to reach the slopes of the Þrælaháls, skirting this round its northern slopes, and similarly Grjótalda, and so crossing to the final ridge before Hrafnkelsdalur some little way south of Aðalból, for the most part never dropping to the lower and boggy ground at all.<sup>27</sup> I have walked over much of this route; to strike the best line and the best going between the hills and the lower ground would certainly need close familiarity with the district (it would probably differ at different times), and I did not always find it, but that there is a

<sup>26</sup> The line is close to that shown by Kálund as "Aðalbólsvegur" (map facing p. 193).

<sup>27</sup> The approximate line is shown on my map as [Hallfreðargata (JJ/ODMG)]. I take *fyrir ofan* to imply a route over the slopes of these hills, in contrast to the route across the marshy plain below. J.J. clearly accepts the alternative interpretation, as defining that the route passed on the landward side, i.e. south, of the Eyvindarfjöll (p. 99, note 2). Its western end would then coincide with my placing of the usual route, and this in contrast must be further north; he regards as possible (p. 129, note 3) either of the more northerly crossings of the *háls* which H.S. mentions (see above). He suggests no detailed line for Hallfreðargata between Kleif and the crossing south of the Eyvindarfjöll.

practicable route I am in little doubt, and it would indeed be both longer<sup>28</sup> and drier than the more direct one.

But the suggestion that this was the saga's Hallfreðargata can hardly be reconciled with the accepted view that its Hallfreðarstaðir was the same as the modern dwelling of that name in Hróarstunga. Can we really suppose that, although Hrafnkelsdalur and Jökuldalur could together constitute one area of dominance, the ordinary route to the former from a dwelling at the seaward end of the latter led neither up Jökuldalur and so into Hrafnkelsdalur, nor over Fljótsdalsheiði direct, but first far up Fljótsdalur and then by a boggy traverse over the moor to Hrafnkelsdalur? Or, if we can accept that, could the author expect us to believe that a man as familiar with the district as Hallfreðr, looking for a better route, could devise nothing better than one going yet further up Fljótsdalur before turning across the moor? Even if we can suppose this, the distinctive part of this Hallfreðargata is that over the moor, the first and much longer part of the route from Hallfreðarstaðir being the general route up Fljótsdalur. It becomes much less easy to believe that the author connected the Hallfreðr of Hallfreðarstaðir with Hrafnkell because of the evidence of a route linking their dwellings, and for that reason made Hallfreðr Hrafnkell's father instead of the Hrafn of *Landnámabók*, a supposition of S.N. (pp. 23-4) which J.J. approves (pp. xli-xlii).

There are also awkwardnesses in the saga's description, in chapter I (p. 97), of Hallfreðr's move to Hallfreðarstaðir. He is advised in his dream to move *vestr yfir Lagarfljót* from Geitdalur, a comparatively short distance. When he wakes, the fact that he did so move is left unstated, but we are curtly told, as though no explanation were needed,

<sup>28</sup> H.S. records the present route from Bessastaðir to Aðalból as a good third longer than the route from Kleif (p. 149), but he means in distance over the moor. To make the comparison which the saga does we must start from the head of Lagarfljót, and add then to the Kleif route most of the 18 or so km between Bessastaðir and Kleif, apart from the further distance which my suggested line for Hallfreðargata, round Þrælaháls and Grjótalda, would add.

that he went on a very much longer distance in a new direction before establishing himself in his new home. If it were possible to interpret a crossing of *Rangá* into *Tunga* as referring to a crossing of what is now Kelduá, the eastern of the two rivers which join to form Lagarfljót, into the "tongue" of land between these two (for which the name *Tunga* would be perfectly proper, though it is not recorded), these difficulties would disappear. There would also be the advantage that among the *Jökulsdalsmenn* upon whom Hrafnkell forced his overlordship and to whom he was so harsh, we would no longer have to place neighbours of his father. The modern Hallfreðarstaðir would then be a mere red herring.

It is a hardy suggestion. The name *Rangá* is a quite common one, and, indicating a wandering course, would be a possible lost name for Kelduá, but there is not the least evidence that it was ever applied to that river; the only recorded *Rangá* hereabouts is the one which flows into the Fljót from the west, over which Hallfreðr's accepted move would take him. Also the word *út*, appropriate to a crossing of the modern *Rangá* in the direction of the sea, becomes hard to interpret. Nevertheless, when the accepted interpretations raise such difficulties, this one might be worth consideration; it would be another case in which the author could rely on his readers knowing place-names which have since been lost.

### *Conclusion*

It is with different degrees of confidence that I have related episodes of the saga to the actual topography of the area, but in certain parts at least the author seems not only himself to have used, but to have relied on in his readers, a very detailed acquaintance with the ground. Such commitment to precise topography, assumed to be



known to the reader as to the author, is I think unique to the Icelandic saga among literary genres, although plenty of authors in other genres have used their own familiarity with the settings of their works. The saga genre is not, of course, to be treated as a uniform entity in this respect; indeed there are cases in which a reader with a knowledge of the topography would have to make a willing suspension of it in order to accept the author's dramatic illusion, as with the notorious *dalur í hváðlinum* of *Brennu-Njáls Saga*,<sup>29</sup> an insignificant topographical feature promoted to what anyone familiar with Bergþórshváll would know to be an impossible place in the action. But, equally, *Hrafnkels Saga* is not unique. In *Víga-Glúms Saga*, for instance, the reader's response to Glúmr's plight as he flees from Víga-Skúta is greatly sharpened if he realises that Glúmr is shown as quite close to home, making towards home, but having (it seems) no hope of getting there because he is being hunted into a tongue of land bounded right to its point by the steep gorges of the Mjaðmá and the Þverá.<sup>30</sup> The author does not supply all the details to establish this response. He clearly expects from his readers a close familiarity with the topography; if not, he would hardly have taken pains elsewhere<sup>31</sup> to point out that the ford between Þverá and Espihóll used in the action of the saga was not the one familiar to his readers (presumably what is still the accepted ford, by the name of Maríugerðivað, a little downstream from Þverá), but was close to Espihóll — a misapprehension on the point would confuse a reader's understanding, particularly, of the action preceding the fight at Hrísteigr. A modern reader who hopes to make informed response to an Icelandic saga must be prepared to find himself needing this sort of close topographical knowledge, and a modern editor to supply it.

<sup>29</sup> ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (Íslenzk Fornrit XII, 1954), ch. CXXVIII, p. 325.

<sup>30</sup> ed. Jónas Kristjánsson in *Eyfirðinga Sögur* (Íslenzk Fornrit IX, 1956), ch. XVI, pp. 52-3.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, ch. XI, p. 39.

BOOKS OWNED BY ORDINARY PEOPLE IN  
ICELAND 1750-1830

BY SÓLRÚN JENSDÓTTIR

THE aim of this paper is to indicate what books were available in Icelandic homes during the period 1750-1830. The two studies which form the main part of the paper are based on material in the National Archives of Iceland (see the sources listed on p. 292). Study (2) deals with the whole of Iceland in the period 1750-1800; study (1) is restricted to Austur-Húnavatnssýsla and covers the years 1800-1830.

In a country as isolated as Iceland used to be an important guide to the people's outlook and culture is a knowledge of what reading material was available to them.

We know that in the last part of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century a fair number of manuscripts of Old Icelandic literature were still available in Iceland. During that period, however, Icelandic manuscripts became collectors' items. They were eagerly sought by foreign scholars, mostly from Scandinavia, although the most prominent manuscript collector during this period was the Icelandic scholar, Árni Magnússon, who was royal antiquary in Copenhagen. Árni's main reasons for collecting were patriotic, since he was convinced that the manuscripts were threatened with destruction if left in Iceland. Stories of how on his journeys through the country he often found valuable fragments of manuscripts tucked away among rubbish prove that he was at least partly right. He collected almost 2000 manuscripts and brought them to Copenhagen. Other collectors also had their share, though it was a small one compared to Árni's. Partly because of

this it became more difficult for Icelanders to get hold of the old literature. By 1750 very few secular books had been printed in Iceland, and one may therefore ask how the general public bridged the gap between the removal of the manuscripts and the time when secular books became commonly available in the nineteenth century. Did the collectors leave a sufficient number of saga manuscripts for the public to read, or had some other kind of literature taken the place of the sagas? From the two studies in question it becomes clear that the latter was the case. After the Reformation in 1550 printed religious books in Icelandic became available. People were encouraged by the clergy to buy these books and at the same time were discouraged from reading secular works—they were considered a waste of time. This may be one of the reasons why Árni Magnússon had to search for manuscripts under the mattresses of old ladies' beds, where they were put to help keep out the cold.

In spite of this, the opinion seems common that the old sagas formed a very important part of people's reading matter in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is supported by the evidence of several authors, who indicate that sagas and other secular stories were as commonly available as religious books, when the people on a farm assembled in the *baðstofa* on a winter's eve to work and read aloud. One of these authors was the Scot, Ebenezer Henderson. He stayed in Iceland for a year (1814-15) and travelled to most parts of the country "to investigate the want of its [Iceland's] inhabitants with respect to the Holy Scriptures". Henderson's description of a winter's eve in Iceland is as follows: "The work is no sooner begun, than one of the family . . . advances to a seat near the lamp and commences the evening lecture, which generally consists of some old saga, or such other histories as are to be obtained on the island. Being but badly supplied with printed books, the Icelanders are under the necessity of copying such as they can get the

loan of . . . The reader is frequently interrupted, either by the head, or some of the more intelligent members of the family, who make remarks on various parts of the story and propose questions, with a view to exercise the ingenuity of the children and servants. In some houses the sagas are repeated by such as have got them by heart . . . Instead of the sagas some of the more pious substitute the historical books of Scripture; and as they always give the preference to poetry, most of these books have been translated into metre, chiefly with a view to this exercise. At the conclusion of the evening labours the family joins in singing a psalm or two, after which a chapter from some book of devotion is read."

From the inventories of the estates of deceased persons on which study (2) is based, however, it seems that the sagas and other old literature, both printed and in manuscript, were very scarce in Iceland from 1750 to 1800 in comparison with religious books. Although it is difficult to know how accurate a picture these sources give, it seems safe to assume that the catalogues preserved from the period mirror the general situation reasonably well.

When looking for an answer to the main question, "What books were available on Icelandic farms?", it becomes clear that for the period up to 1750 we must remain in the dark, since no sources earlier than 1750 are available. Then things start to improve. The sources used in study (1), "Books in Austur-Húnavatnssýsla from 1800-1830", are of two kinds. First, there are *húsvitjunarbækur* kept by the clergymen. Second, there are the inventories of the estates of deceased persons.

Study (2), "Secular books belonging to ordinary people in Iceland 1750-1800", is confined to the inventories.

The nature of these sources must be briefly explained. In 1741 Ludvig Harboe, later bishop of Sjælland, was sent to Iceland to investigate the religious life and educational

standards of the people. On returning to Denmark he pointed out that it would be much easier to acquire knowledge of these matters if the parsons in Iceland were made to keep books in which they recorded information about the members of each household, as they travelled around visiting their parishioners. A decree to this end from the king of Denmark was published in Iceland five years later, in 1746. These books became known as *húsvitjunarbækur*, "visiting books". The parsons were to record the name and age of each person in the household and comment on their behaviour and their ability to read. And since it was one of the parson's duties to see that everyone in his parish had access to what was considered a sufficient quantity of religious reading matter, he was also instructed to write in the *húsvitjunarbækur* the titles of the books available in each house.

The parsons, however, seem to have been rather slow to respond to this decree and from the period 1751-80 *húsvitjunarbækur* are only known from 29 out of the total of 191 parishes in Iceland. This could, of course, be due to poor preservation, but a circular letter of 1784 from the bishops of Hólar and Skálholt, admonishing parsons to keep the books conscientiously, points to negligence. This circular letter seems to have had its effect since the number of books preserved increases rapidly after 1784.

It was clear from the start that study (1), as I envisaged it, could not cover the whole country, and in the event even a whole *sýsla* proved too large. I therefore chose arbitrarily Austur-Húnavatnssýsla. Since very few *húsvitjunarbækur* are available from the region before 1800, I then decided to confine the study to the period 1800-30. At that time Austur-Húnavatnssýsla was divided into nine parishes, from two of which no *húsvitjunarbækur* are preserved, so the study covers seven parishes. In spite of the improvement in the keeping of *húsvitjunarbækur* that seems to have taken place after 1784, they contain nothing like the detail that Harboe had

hoped. In some years the clergy did not even bother to take the books with them when visiting their parishioners. In other years they only noted whether people had moved into or out of the parish.

Over the thirty-year period the books found in people's homes were only recorded once in most parishes, and this forced me to abandon plans to find out what new books a household had acquired over the period. When there was a choice of years, I selected the one in which the books were most meticulously recorded. It turned out that with one exception all such years came within the period 1823-30. The exception was in the parish of Þingeyrar, where the only record that could be used was from 1809.

As mentioned above, the main reason why the clergy were to record books was to show that the household had sufficient access to religious literature. They did not record other books and therefore we do not know in how many places or in what quantities sagas and *rímur* and other kinds of secular literature were available. On the other hand, secular books are recorded in the inventories of the estates of deceased persons. An inventory was to be made of the possessions of everyone who died, as prescribed by the Norwegian Laws of Christian V in force in Iceland at the time. Estates were catalogued regardless of size or value and a price put on every item, rusty nails and rotten planks as well as jewels and livestock. Books were listed in detail and it seems safe to assume that nothing was left unrecorded. Manuscripts were valued as well as printed books and even the most tattered copies had their price.

From the period 1800-1830 I found 129 inventories from the seven parishes in question. The largest library consisted of 231 volumes and the smallest of only one. Clergymen, lawyers and other professional people, most of whom had studied in Copenhagen, owned the largest libraries, and books in foreign languages were

often predominant. The smallest libraries on the other hand belonged to people who had been servants or farm hands all their lives, and also, of course, to people who died young.

The information gained from the *húsvitjunarbækur* made it possible to establish how many religious books belonged to the inhabitants of the seven parishes in Austur-Húnavatnssýsla and how many such books were to be found in the average family library. The total number of religious books noted was 2490. The farms of the seven parishes registered in the *húsvitjunarbækur* number 159, so religious books per farm work out as 15.7. The highest average, 22 books per farm, was in the parish of Undirfell and the lowest, 13 books per farm, in the parish of Grímsungur. In addition it became clear which religious books were the most popular in the area at the time and these are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
THE MOST POPULAR RELIGIOUS BOOKS IN AUSTUR-HÚNAVATNSSÝSLA  
1800-1830

	<i>Number of copies</i>
1. <i>Grallari</i> (hymn-book)	182
2. <i>Vidalínspostilla</i> (sermons by Bishop Jón Vídalín)	173
3. Hallgrímur Pétursson, <i>Passíusálmar</i> (hymns on the Passion)	147
4. Þórður Bárðarson, <i>Þórðarbænir</i> (book of prayers)	136
5. New Testament	128
6. Bible	104
7. <i>Gerhardshugvekjur</i> (brief sermons for home devotion by J. Gerhard)	80
8. Jón Vídalín, <i>Miðvikudaga- eða Föstudupréðikanir</i> (Wednesday or Lent sermons)	80
9. <i>Hugvekjusálmar</i> (hymns from <i>Gerhardshugvekjur</i> , no. 7, by Sigurður Jónsson)	71
10. Jón Guðmundsson, <i>Misseraskiptaoffur</i> (offerings on the change of seasons)	69

	<i>Number of copies</i>
11. Gunnlaugur Snorrason, <i>Fæðingarsálmar</i> (hymns on the Nativity)	61
12. <i>Sálmabók</i> (hymn-book)	49
13. <i>Messusöngsbók</i> (service book)	4 <sup>2</sup>
14. <i>Upprisuhugvekjur</i> (brief sermons on the Resurrection collected by Jón Jónsson)	35
15. <i>Barnalærdómskver</i> (catechism)	24
16. <i>Sálmaflokkabók</i> (hymn-book)	24
17. Steinn Jónsson, <i>Upprisusálmar</i> (hymns on the Resurrection)	24
18. <i>Sturmshugvekjur</i> (brief sermons for home devotion by Sturm)	23
19. Jón Vídalín, <i>7-orðabók</i> (on the words of Christ on the Cross)	21

Four of the 129 estates inventoried owned 562 volumes, while the remaining 125 only had 1521 between them; the average is 12.1. It was found misleading to include the four large libraries when calculating how large a percentage of the books recorded in the inventories were secular, since in these four libraries the ratio of secular religious works was much higher than in an average library. The percentage of secular books in the 125 smaller libraries turned out to be 12.4. It is possible to play with figures and assume that the secular books which the parsons did not record in the *húsvitjunarbækur* made up the same percentage of each library as they do in the inventories. If the assumption were correct, there would have been a total of 2842 books in the seven parishes of Austur-Húnavatnssýsla in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.

Since everything was given a value in the inventories, it is possible to see how much the books were worth in comparison, for example, with a sheep. It appears that *Vídalinspostilla* had the same value as one sheep while *Grallarinn* was worth half that amount.

From study (1) it is clear that religious books made up



a large part of the reading material available to the public at the time, and this is further confirmed by study (2). Before turning to the second study, I will therefore mention some of the most popular religious books.

The first printing press was brought to Iceland *c.* 1530 by the last Catholic bishop of Hólar, Jón Arason, but few books were printed until after the Reformation in 1550. The need for books to spread the new doctrine was greater in Iceland than in most other countries bidding farewell to the Catholic church, since the Icelandic Reformation was not the result of an upsurge of popular religious feeling, but something thrust upon the people in the form of a royal decree after the execution of Jón Arason. Only a few clergymen studying abroad had had any experience of the new church. The first Lutheran bishops of Hólar and Skálholt realised that books would be needed to acquaint the general public with the new doctrine, and Jón Arason's printing-press, set up at Hólar, became busy. Among the religious books printed soon after the Reformation translations of hymns and sermons from Danish and German featured prominently. The most energetic publisher was Guðbrandur Þorláksson who became bishop of Hólar in 1569. He issued the first Bible in Icelandic in 1584 and published over thirty books on religion, some of which he translated himself, in addition to several hymn-books. In the introduction to the most famous of his hymn-books Guðbrandur stresses the importance of giving the people easy access to religious books in the mother tongue.

Had these Lutheran bishops not devoted such energy to the translation and publication of books in Icelandic, the Icelanders might well have had to obtain their religious reading matter from Denmark and this would undoubtedly have been to the detriment of the Icelandic language. Guðbrandur's predecessors translated hymns and sermons themselves, often with very poor results. Although Guðbrandur's primary aim was religious rather than

literary, he realised that quality mattered and tried to get poets to translate the hymns. In spite of this most of his publications are not considered to have much literary value.

Guðbrandur had quite decided views on suitable reading matter. He maintained that all secular literature was a waste of time. This is likely to have made the more pious turn from the sagas to the Bible and other religious works. Another result was that very few secular books were printed during Guðbrandur's years as bishop, since the only printing-press in the country was under his administration and remained so for almost 60 years (until 1627). From the secular books he had printed at Hólar, one can see that he was principally interested in practical works such as laws and calendars, and in books with a strong leaning towards the religious such as *Vinaspegill*. The *rímur* were popular in Guðbrandur's day and when he found that hymns did not succeed in turning people's minds away from these ungodly verses, he got poets to compose *rímur* based on the Bible, but they never achieved much popularity.

The two post-Reformation religious books that are considered to be of most literary value were written and published after Guðbrandur's death. These are the *Passíusálmar* by Hallgrímur Pétursson and the *postilla* written by Bishop Jón Vídalín which, as can be seen from Table 1, take second and third place among the most popular religious books in Austur-Húnavatnssýsla — the farmers there seem to have had good literary taste.

During preparatory work for study (2) it became clear that it would be possible to cover a far larger area, indeed, the whole country, if one confined oneself to the inventories. It would also be possible to go further back, since there are a fair number preserved from the period 1750-1800. Since study (1) dealt primarily with religious books, I decided that study (2) should concentrate on secular works. Nevertheless, the religious books were counted

in order to ascertain the percentage of secular works in the average library and to see how this compared with the figures from Austur-Húnavatnssýsla in study (1).

The total number of inventories found from the fifty-year period was 1285, of which 1149 dealt with the estates of ordinary people. A distinction between ordinary and professional people is made because the latter group usually owned a much larger percentage of secular books.

In the period 1750-1800 Iceland was divided into 17 *sýslur* and some inventories are preserved from all of them except Ísafjarðarsýsla in the west. There are none preserved from Reykjavík or Vestmannaeyjar. The distribution among the *sýslur* is very uneven. For example, there were only two from Borgarfjarðarsýsla and Strandasýsla in the west as against 457 from Eyjafjarðarsýsla and over 100 from each of the other three *sýslur* in the north, Húnavatnssýsla, Skagafjarðarsýsla and Þingeyjarsýsla. No *sýsla* in the south has as many as one hundred. Árnessýsla comes closest with 71 inventories. (It has been suggested that the reason for inferior preservation in the south is its higher degree of humidity, which causes paper to rot more quickly.)

In spite of the uneven distribution and the complete lack of inventories from some areas, these are the only sources which can give us any kind of full picture of the secular books ordinary Icelanders had in their homes between 1750 and 1800.

Before going on to discuss the results of study (2), we may remind ourselves briefly of the situation in Iceland during the period in question. Iceland was ruled as a colony of the Danish crown and since 1602 trade had been controlled by a number of Danish companies. They had a complete monopoly and were therefore able to dictate the prices of all imported goods. Mainly as a result of this trade monopoly the Icelandic peasants, who made up the greater part of the population, were

very poor, even before the onset of the disasters that the country suffered in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The companies sometimes failed to bring necessities. Instead they carried more expensive luxury goods which the Icelanders were compelled to buy since this was the only way they could dispose of their own products, mainly dried fish, hides, eiderdown, knitted articles and tallow. In spite of the monopoly, however, conditions in the country from 1750-1775 were relatively favourable. There were mild winters and good summers. But after 1775 a colder period set in. Pack-ice appeared ten winters in a row, and cold summers made it difficult for the farmers to obtain enough hay to feed their livestock over the winter. A famine followed. A volcanic eruption started in Lakagígar in the south-east in June 1783, making things even worse. The eruption lasted for nearly three years and in that time 400 million cubic feet of lava, the greatest quantity ever recorded from a single eruption, covered the surrounding countryside. Ash from the eruption even affected vegetation in northern Scotland. During the summer of 1783 sulphurous vapour and other poisonous gases polluted the air in Iceland and the effect on vegetation was disastrous. A thick mist blotted out the sun and this phenomenon has given the name *Móðuharðindi* ("mist-hardship") to these years of disaster.

Þorvaldur Thoroddsen describes the *Móðuharðindi* as follows: "The starvation was so general that even the richest farmers and the clergymen had to go hungry. Thefts and robberies were very frequent and people hardly dared to leave their property unguarded. People ate everything they could find, even meat from old horses, horn, shoe-leather and dogs. Sometimes whole districts were depopulated: parents died from their children, and the children themselves were later found dying in their beds, and people who went to seek food from other farms often died on the way." The winter of 1783-4 was

unusually hard, and it is estimated that over 2000 people died from hunger in the northern part of the country and 315 farms were abandoned. No figures are available from other parts of the country for this winter, but it is possible to get some idea of the scale of the disaster by comparing the population of the country before and after it. In 1769 the Icelanders are estimated to have numbered 46,500 but in 1791 the population was only 40,000 — the final disaster had been an epidemic of smallpox in 1786. After that, however, things began to look brighter and by 1800 the population was up to 47,000.

As mentioned earlier, Guðbrandur Þorláksson did everything he could to discourage the reading of books for entertainment, although he recognised the need to print the laws and calendars, and the first secular book to be printed in Iceland was *Jónsbók, Lögbók Íslendinga*, issued in 1578. In 1685 the press was moved to the other episcopal see of Skálholt, and up to that time Guðbrandur's attitude towards secular books seems to have prevailed. Bishop Þórður Þorláksson, who had the press moved to Skálholt, seems to have taken a different view of the matter, since in 1688-9 he published five medieval sagas and histories, the only such works to be printed in Iceland before 1756. Þórður also published calendars and several other secular books as well as religious works. The first *Alþingisbók* was printed at Skálholt in 1669.

The press was moved back to Hólar in 1703. Guðbrandur's views still seem to have prevailed there, since no more sagas were published in Iceland for over fifty years. By then it was realised that it was impossible to persuade people to give up reading secular works and a decision was taken to publish a number of sagas in order to try and improve the financial state of the printing-house at Hólar. The sagas, printed in 1756, appeared in two volumes (see Table 2, item A.4), but

although they became popular, their publication did not succeed in improving the financial position of the press.

Hólar had the exclusive right to print religious books. The second Icelandic press, which was set up in Hrappsey in 1772, had therefore to confine itself to secular books but only until 1782, when the printing-house at Hólar ceased to function and permission to print religious books at Hrappsey was granted. The first book printed on this small island in Breiðafjörður was on law. Many of the books published there were influenced by the "Enlightenment" — e.g. those by Magnús Ketilsson, *sýslumaður* of Dalasýsla, on livestock and gardening. The first *rímur* to be published in Iceland, *Rímur af Úlfari sterka* by Þorlákur Guðbrandsson and Árni Böðvarsson, were printed at Hrappsey in 1775. The printing-house on Hrappsey was established at the beginning of a disastrous period in the history of Iceland, and it experienced great financial difficulties. Its owner, Bogi Benediktsson, a Hrappsey farmer, put it up for sale in 1785. The last book he printed was the philosophical poem, *Heimspækingaskóli*, by Guðmundur Bergþórsson, published in 1785. In 1786 a pamphlet called "Thoughts on the Hrappsey printing-house" was published there. In his book on the printing-house Professor Jón Helgason paraphrases this pamphlet, which he believes was written by Magnús Ketilsson. Among other things we read: "It is often maintained that a printing-house should be able to prosper on Hrappsey as well as it did at Hólar, but this is wrong. People have grown accustomed to the religious books from Hólar and were even compelled by law to buy some of them. On the other hand people are not enthusiastic about secular books, and the annals, *rímur* and sagas printed at Hrappsey have not sold well enough to keep the press rolling." The author of the pamphlet thinks that it would take at least six to eight years to teach people to appreciate secular books.

Bogi Benediktsson did not succeed in selling the press

until 1795 and therefore nothing was printed in Iceland for almost ten years, during and after the *Móðuharðindi*. From what we know of this period it is clear that, even if books had been published, virtually no one would have had the money to buy them.

Bogi sold the press to the *Landsuppfærðingarfélag*, a society whose main aim was to disseminate practical knowledge among the Icelanders. The press was moved to Borgarfjörður and set up in Leirárgarðar. The first book called *Sumargjöf handa börnum* ("A summer present for children") was published in 1795, and contained both educational matter and short stories.

Study (2) involved counting the books in the inventories and listing the secular ones. An attempt to identify the books then followed. This was made difficult by the fact that in the inventories the place and date of printing were very seldom given. Since there is as yet no complete catalogue of Icelandic books, I used Halldór Hermannsson's catalogues of the Icelandic collection bequeathed by Willard Fiske, two essays by the same author in *Islandica* on books printed in Iceland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Ehrencron-Müller's *Forfatterlexicon*. All the titles I located in these sources are listed in normalised spelling and convenient form under the place of printing. The figure against each title in the lists shows how many copies of that particular book were registered in the inventories. Books are listed under "Miscellaneous" when it was impossible to distinguish between two or more editions of the same book or between different books with similar or identical titles. Often the inventories say no more than "calendar" or "reading book for children", making it impossible to decide which of such books published before 1800 was available on the farm concerned.

The total number of books from each printing house is given below the book lists and also how many of these belonged to ordinary people.

TABLE 2

I. SECULAR BOOKS PRINTED IN ICELAND BEFORE 1800  
FOUND IN THE INVENTORIES

	<i>Number of copies</i>
A. Hólar	
1. <i>Jónsbók, Lögbók Íslendinga</i> , 1578, 1582, 1707, 1709	124
2. Sigemund Svevus, <i>Vinaspegill</i> , 1618	3
3. Jón Magnússon, <i>Tveir Kveðlingar</i> , 1755	7
4. <i>Nokkrir margfróðir söguþættir</i> (Kjalnesinga saga, Krókarefs saga, Harðar saga og Hólmverja, Gísla saga Súrssonar, Víga-Glúms saga), 1756, and <i>Ágætir fornmannna sögur</i> (Bandamanna saga, Sagan af Þorgrími prúða og Víglundi syni hans, Þáttur Ölkofra, Sagan af Hávarði Ísfirðingi, Sagan af Þórði hreðu, Sagan af Gretti Ásmundssyni sterka, Sagan af Bárði Snæfellsás, Sagan af Gesti syni Bárðar, Þáttur af Jökli syni Búa Andriðarsonar), 1756. (These two books were usually listed as "Hólasögur" which made it impossible to distinguish them from one another.)	77
5. Þorsteinn Ketilsson (translator), <i>Þess Svenska Gústaf Landkróns og þess Engelska Bertholds ævisögur</i> , 1756	25
6. Jón Pétursson, <i>Stutt ágrip um ichtsyki eður liðaveiki</i> , 1782	11

The total number of books from Hólar listed in the inventories is thus 247, 143 belonging to ordinary people, the rest to the professional classes.

## B. Skálholt

1. Ari Þorgilsson fróði, <i>Schedæ Ara prests fróða um Ísland</i> , 1688	2
2. Arngrímur Jónsson, <i>Grönlandia eður Grænlands saga</i> , 1688	5
3. <i>Kristni saga</i> , 1688	8

The total number of books printed in Skálholt listed in the estate catalogues is thus 15, of which 6 were in the ownership of ordinary people.



## Number of copies

C.	Hrappsey	
1.	<i>Uitlegging yfir norsku laga V. bókar II. kapitula um erfðir</i> , 1773	24
2.	Björn Jónsson, <i>Annálar</i> , 1774	19
3.	Jón Þorláksson (translator), <i>Nokkur þess alþekkta danska skálds Christ. Br. Tullins kvæði</i> , 1774	2
4.	<i>Bíalög</i> , 1775	20
5.	Þorlákur Guðbrandsson og Árni Böðvarsson, <i>Rímur af Úlfari sterka</i> , 1775	8
6.	Magnús Ketilsson, <i>Heiðnir éta hrossakjöt</i> , 1776	2
7.	Árni Böðvarsson, <i>Rímur af Ingvari Viðförla</i> , 1777	3
8.	Magnús Ketilsson, <i>Stutt ágríp um ítölu búffjár í haga</i> , 1776	8
9.	Árni Böðvarsson, <i>Agnars konungs ævi Hróarssonar</i> , 1777	3
10.	Eiríkur Hallsson og Þorvaldur Rögnvaldsson, <i>Rímur af Hrólfri konungi kraka</i> , 1777	1
11.	Ásmundur Sæmundsson, <i>Rímur af Hervöru Angantýsdóttur</i> , 1777	3
12.	Magnús Ketilsson, <i>Um þá íslenzku sauðfjárhirðing</i> , 1778	11
13.	Snorri Björnsson, <i>Rímur af Sigurði snarfara</i> , 1779	5
14.	Christian V, <i>Norsku lög á íslenzku</i> , 1779	90
15.	Magnús Ketilsson, <i>Nokkrar tilraunir gjörðar með nokkrar sáðtegundir og plöntur</i> , 1779	3
16.	Björn Halldórsson, <i>Atli</i> , 1783	31
17.	<i>Egils saga Skallagrímssonar</i> , 1782	8
18.	Halldór Jakobsson, <i>Armanns saga</i> , 1782	6
19.	Eggert Ólafsson, <i>Búnaðarbálkur</i> , 1783	6
20.	Jón Þorláksson, <i>Nokkur ljóðmæli</i> , 1783	8
21.	Snorri Björnsson, <i>Eitt ævintýri er kallast Jóhönnu-raunir</i> , 1784	4
22.	Eggert Ólafsson, <i>Æfi</i> , 1784	2
23.	Guðmundur Bergþórsson, <i>Heimspekingaskóli</i> , 1785	1

The total number of books printed in Hrappsey in the inventories is thus 269, of which 127 were in the ownership of ordinary people.

## D. Leirárgarðar

1.	Guðmundur Jónsson, <i>Sumargjöf handa börnum</i> , 1795	8
2.	Hannes Finnsson, <i>Kvöldvöðurnar</i> , 1794, 1796, 1797	9

		Number of copies
3.	<i>Minnisverð tíðindi</i> , 1796-1808	5
4.	Magnús Stephensen, <i>Skemmtileg Vinagleði</i> , 1797	5
5.	Alexander Pope, <i>Tilraun um Manninn</i> (his <i>Essay on Man</i> translated by Jón Þorláksson), 1798	7
6.	Magnús Stephensen, <i>Margvislegt gaman og alvara</i> , 1798	1

The total number of books printed at Leirárgarðar in the inventories is thus 35, of which 30 were in the ownership of ordinary people.

## II. SECULAR BOOKS IN ICELANDIC PRINTED ABROAD BEFORE 1800 FOUND IN THE INVENTORIES

### A. Copenhagen

1.	Guðmundur Andrésson, <i>Lexicon Islandicum</i> , 1683	2
2.	Sveinn Sölvason, <i>Tyro Juris eður barn í lögum</i> , 1754	61
3.	Eggert Ólafsson, <i>Nokkrar hughreystilegar harmatölur eftir . . . Guðmund Sigvarðsson</i> , 1755	1
4.	Eggert Ólafsson, <i>Friðriksdrápa</i> , 1766	10
5.	Sveinn Sölvason, <i>Lofvíska eða Lovtsu-Lilja</i> , 1767	1
6.	Ólafur Olavius, <i>Íslensk urtagarðsbók</i> , 1770	26
7.	Árni Böðvarsson, <i>Rímur af Þorsteini uxafæti</i> , 1771	3
8.	Ólafur Olavius, <i>Stutt ágrip um fiskiveiðar</i> , 1771	1
9.	Þórður Thoroddi, <i>Einfaldir þankar um akuryrkju</i> , 1771	14
10.	<i>Njáls saga</i> , 1772	36
11.	J. K. Trojel, <i>Ágrip um jarðeplanna nytsemd og ræktan</i> , 1772	2
12.	Eggert Ólafsson, <i>Lachanologia eða matjurtabók</i> , 1774	27
13.	<i>Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu</i> , 1775	1
14.	Gunnlaugur Snorrason, <i>Hebreskt stafróf í íslenskum ljóðmælum framsett</i> , 1775	2
15.	<i>Kristinréttur</i> , 1776, 1777	10
16.	Magnús Gíslason, <i>Æfi og minning háeðla og velburðugs herra Magnúsar Gíslasonar</i> , 1778	2
17.	<i>Hungurvaka</i> , 1778	3
18.	<i>Vafþrúðnismál</i> , 1779	1
19.	<i>Skrá hins íslenska lærdómslistafélags</i> , 1780	1

## Number of copies

20.	Ólafur Olavius, <i>Skíringargreinir um smjör og ostabúnað</i> , 1780	15
21.	<i>Orkneyinga saga</i> , 1780	1
22.	<i>Rímbegla</i> , 1780	1
23.	<i>Rit hins íslenszka lærðómslistafélags</i> , 1781-1798	28
24.	Jakob Eiríksson, <i>Stutt og einföld endurminning göfugs höfðingsmanns</i> , 1782	1
25.	Björn Halldórsson, <i>Grasnytjar</i> , 1783	17
26.	Jón Johnsonius, <i>Christíánsmál</i> , 1783	2
27.	Jón Johnsonius, <i>Skáldmæli kölluð Hrímskviða</i> , 1783	1
28.	Ólafur Olavius, <i>Fyrirsagnartílaun um litunar-gjörð á Íslandi</i> , 1786	6
29.	<i>Edda Sæmundar</i> , 1787	1
30.	Finnur Jónsson, <i>Ættartal og æfisaga</i> , 1792	1
31.	Lofur Guttormsson ríki, <i>Háttalykill</i> , 1793	1
32.	Jón Jónsson, <i>Lífssaga</i> , 1794	1
33.	<i>Eirbyggja saga</i> , 1798	2
34.	Páll Jónsson Vídalín, <i>Stutt ágrip af . . . glóserunum yfir fornryði lögbókar Íslendinga</i> , 1782	3

The total number of books printed in Copenhagen listed in the inventories is thus 285, of which 119 were in the ownership of ordinary people.

## B. Stockholm

1.	<i>Piðreks saga</i> , 1715	4
2.	<i>Ingvær saga víðförla</i> , 1762	1

Of these five books one belonged to a non-professional person.

## C. Miscellaneous

Secular books in Icelandic where it was impossible to distinguish between two or more editions of the same book or between different books with the same title. For example, Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* and Gottfried Schultze's *Ný-yfirskoðuð heimskringla* were both given the title *Heimskringla* in the inventories.

1.	<i>Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar</i> , Uppsala, 1665, 1691, Skálholt, 1689.	42
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	<i>Number of copies</i>
2. <i>Edda Snorra</i> , Copenhagen, 1665, Uppsala, 1746	8
3. Five different calendars, Skálholt, 1687, 1692, 1695, Copenhagen, 1739, Hrappsey, 1781	20
4. <i>Landnámabók</i> , Skálholt, 1688, Copenhagen, 1774	34
5. Three different reading books for children, Skálholt, 1695, Hólar, 1779, Hrappsey, 1782	32
6. <i>Alþingisbækur</i> , Skálholt, 1696-1697, Hólar, 1704, 1713-1716, 1718-1728, 1731-1732, 1734-1737, 1743-1756, 1758, 1765-1767, 1769, 1771, Hrappsey, 1773-1794, Leirárgarðar, 1797-1800	15
7. Snorri Sturluson, <i>Heimskringla</i> , Stockholm, 1697, Copenhagen, 1777, or Gottfried Schultze, <i>Ný-jýfirskoðuð heimskringla</i> , Hrappsey, 1779	17
8. Two books on midwifery, Hólar, 1749, Copenhagen, 1789	23
9. Three books on arithmetic, Copenhagen, 1780, 1782, no date	20
10. Laws and ordinances, published before 1800	29

The total number of books in this category listed in the inventories is thus 240, of which 103 were in the ownership of ordinary people.

The titles which could not be found in the bibliographies are listed separately under the heading "Manuscripts" in Table 3. Very few of these works were printed until after 1800 and some have not been published at all. In some inventories a special note is made of handwritten books and, as can be seen from the lists, manuscript copies made from books already printed did exist in some places. In Table 3 the titles are given as they appear in the inventories and "(MS)" is added where it is specifically stated that the work was in manuscript. Each *sýsla* is listed separately in the Table. The total number of books and manuscripts which could not be traced in the bibliographies was 218, 101 of which belonged to ordinary people. Further search will doubtless identify some or many of them.

TABLE 3  
MANUSCRIPTS

	<i>Number of copies</i>
<i>Múlasýsla (Norður-)</i>	
Af Hring og Tryggva	I
Aldarháttur (MS)	I
Edda (MS)	I
Eiríks víðförla rímur	I
J. Peterss. Kvennaskóla- og flokkubísur	I
Konungs Gorms gamla þáttur	I
Kvæðabók séra Ólafs á Söndum	I
Olgeirs danska rímur	I
Saga af Bragða Mágusi	I
Saga af Vilhjálmi og átta öðrum (MS)	I
Sigurðar þögla saga	I
Sigurgarðs frækna saga	I
Total	12
Belonging to ordinary people	10
<i>Múlasýsla (Suður-)</i>	
B. Halld. Annal.	I
Gamlar bækur	2
Læknisbók	I
Ólafs saga helga (MS)	I
Rembihnútur	I
Skrifbók	I
Total	7
Belonging to ordinary people	7
<i>Skaftafellssýslur</i> (not divided as now)	
Bósa rímur	I
Hrólfs saga (MS)	I
Kvæðakver	I
Lögbók (MS)	I
Rímur af Remundi	I
Rímur af Víglundi	I
Rusl af rímum og sögum (1 MS)	I
Total	7
Belonging to ordinary people	7

## Number of copies

*Rangárvallasýsla*

Búalög (MS)	1
Íslendingasögur (MS)	1
Total	2
Belonging to ordinary people	1

*Arnessýsla*

Njáls saga (MS)	1
Sögur (MS)	3
Sögur af tveimur Hrólfum	1
Total	5
Belonging to ordinary people	5

*Gullbringu og Kjósarsýsla*

Alexanders saga	1
Heimspekinga skóli (MS)	1
Sturlunga	1
Total	3
Belonging to ordinary people	1

*Borgarfjarðarsýsla*

Flóamanna saga	1
Laxdæla	1
Ólafs saga helga	1
Total	3
Belonging to ordinary people	0

*Mýrasýsla*

Forordningabók (MS)	1
Ísl. lögbók (MS)	1
Kver með sagna fabúlur	1
Orthographie, lögm. E.O. á íslenzku	1
Sögubók (MS)	1
Söguhver, hefst á Þorst. bæjarmagni	1
Total	6
Belonging to ordinary people	0

*Snæfellsnessýsla*

Ábóta annálar o. fl. (MS)	1
Alþingissamþykkt o.fl. (MS)	1
Búalög (MS)	1

*Number of copies*

Commentarius yfir ísl. erfðir o.fl. (MS)	I
Gamlar útlekkingar vísra manna yfir forn lög (MS)	I
Gömul bréfabók (MS)	I
Ólafs saga helga	I
Rembihnútur o.fl. (MS)	I
Skrifbók	I
Stutt ágrip veraldlegs og andlegs réttargangs og hússtjórnar stéttar í de Eidsiwa lög (MS)	I
Sögubók (MS)	I
Um hvalakyn og sela o.fl. (MS)	I
Total	12
Belonging to ordinary people	I

*Dalasýsla*

Annálar (MS)	I
Flores og Leo rímur	I
Kver með kveðlingum (MS)	I
Kvæðakver	2
Rímnakver	3
Saga af Bæringi fagra	I
Saga af Hrólfi kraka (MS)	I
Saga af Sigurði Fáfnisbana (MS)	I
Saga Jóns Indíafara	I
Total	12
Belonging to ordinary people	11

*Strandasýsla*

Sögubók (MS)	I
Vatnsmillubók	I
Vinaspegill (MS)	I
Total	3
Belonging to ordinary people	0

*Húnavatnssýslur* (not divided as now)

B. Gíslason: Yfir tvíræðar laganna greinar	I
Barndóms rímur	I
Bessastaðapóstur	I
Bras rímur	I
Rímur og kvæði	I
Dómabók Odds Jónssonar (MS)	I
E. Arnfinnsson: Framfærslukambur	I
Eiríks rímur	I

*Number of copies*

Finnboga rímur (MS)	I
Fróðleiksrit (MS)	I
Gamlir dómar og konungsbréf	I
Jersens rímur	I
Knapa kennsla sr. Þorsteins Péturssonar (MS)	I
Kristinréttur (MS)	I
Laxdæla (MS)	I
Lækningakver	I
Lærdómssaga sr. Þorsteins Péturssonar	I
Manducus sr. Þorsteins Péturssonar	I
Nokkrar dæmisögur (MS)	I
Páll Vídalín: Fornyrði (MS)	I
Presta partur sr. Þorsteins Péturssonar (MS)	I
Rímnakver	5
Rímur	I
Rímur af Gunnari á Hlíðarenda (MS)	I
Samtínings skræða	I
Sjónarspeggill sr. Þorsteins Péturssonar	I
Snorra Edda (MS)	I
Úlfars rímur (MS)	I
Valdemars rímur	2
Viðvíkjandi þeirri nýju höndlun (MS)	I
Total	35
Belonging to ordinary people	13

*Skagafjarðarsýsla*

A.M.S., Um kristinrétti	I
Bjarkeyjarréttur	I
Dómabók Árna Oddssonar	I
Edda Snorra (MS)	2
Edda Sæmundar	I
Finnboga saga ramma	I
Fornyrði Björns Jónssonar á Skarðsá	I
Fornyrði Páls Vídalíns (MS)	I
Grágás	I
Gulapings lög (MS)	I
Hálfðánar saga Eysteinnssonar	I
Háttalykill sr. Tómasar Þórðarsonar	I
Hirðstjóraskrá	I
Járnsíða	I
Játvarðar saga helga	I
Jónsbók (MS)	I



*Number of copies*

Knytlingasaga (MS)	1
Lagagreinar Bárðar Gíslasonar	1
Lækningabók (MS)	1
Lækningabók J.P.S.	1
Mágus saga	1
Matthildarkviða	1
Njála skrifuð með hendi Björns á Skarðsá	1
Ólafs saga helga	1
Reikningsbók Gbr. skrifuð af honum sjálfum	1
Rembihnútur	1
Rím sr. Ólafs Jónssonar 1672-1707 (MS)	1
Saga Árna biskups (MS)	1
Saga Jóns Indíafara	1
Sagan af Magnúsi góða	1
Sigurðar saga þögla	1
Sigurgarðs saga frækna	1
Skalla-Gríms saga	1
Skjöldur	1
Skýringar Eyjólf Jónssonar við Aldarhátt Hallgríms	
Péturssonar	1
Stjórni (MS)	2
Sturlunga (MS)	1
Syrpur sr. Einars H.S.	1
Um ætt og líffsögu sr. H.P.S.	1
Uppkast að þýðingu á Konungsskuggsjá	1
Víglóði	1
Vilhjálmssjós saga	1
Þorlákur Markússon: Annálar	1
Total	45
Belonging to ordinary people	4

*Eyjafljóðarsýsla*

Agnars rímur (MS)	1
Almennur meðalmaður	1
Ambáles saga	1
Annálakver (MS)	2
Biskupa ævir	1
Cedras rímur	1
Fornt áttatölukver	2
Forordningar (MS)	1
Flovents saga	2
Hrólfs saga kraka (MS)	1

	<i>Number of copies</i>
Jallmans rímur	1
Jónsbók (MS)	4
Jurin primus rímur	1
Kvæðakver	1
Laxdæla	1
Litakver (MS)	1
Lækningakver (MS)	2
Mágus saga	1
Náttúruskoðarinn	1
Njála (MS)	1
Nýja landsins rímur	1
Olgeirs rímur	3
Rímur af Þorsteini Vfkingsyni	1
Rit sr. Páls í Selárdal	1
Rollands rímur (MS)	2
Snorra Edda (MS)	2
Sr. Ólafs reisubók	1
Sturlunga	1
Trójumanna rímur	1
Tyro Juris (MS)	1
Valdimars rímur	1
Vatnsdæla	1
Vatnsmillu pési	1
Vita sál. Jóns á Grenivík	1
Total	45
Belonging to ordinary people	35

*Þingeyjarsýslur* (not divided as now)

Af Valbrandi	1
Annálar (MS)	1
Bréfabók	1
Hákonar saga gamla	1
Knytlingasaga (MS)	2
Kvæðakver	1
Lækningabók (MS)	2
Njála (MS)	2
Rímur af Adam (MS)	1
Rollands rímur (MS)	1
Sagan of Hrafnkeli Freysgoða	1
Sigurgarðs saga frækna	1
Sögubók (MS)	1
Svarfdæla	1

	<i>Number of copies</i>
Sverris saga	1
Vermundar saga	1
Þáttur Einars Sokkasonar	1
Ættartölubók	1
Total	21
Belonging to ordinary people	6
 Total from all the <i>sýslur</i>	 218
Belonging to ordinary people	101

As mentioned above, there were 1285 inventories available from the period 1750-1800, but only the 1149 which cover estates belonging to ordinary people have been analysed. Ordinary people owned 9298 religious books but only 627 secular ones, 6.3% of the total. While the average library thus consisted of 8.6 books, only 55 secular works were found to every 100 estates. There were 206 foreign books plus an undefined number of "German books in a barrel"!

If these results are compared with those from study (1), it will be seen that there was a substantial increase in the distribution of secular books after the turn of the century. In the part of Húnavatnssýsla dealt with in study (1) the percentage of secular books was 12.4, but in Húnavatnssýsla as a whole in the period 1750-1800 only 6.1. This is not surprising since the printing of secular books increased rapidly after 1800 and the financial state of the country also gradually improved.

To summarise the nature of the secular books belonging to ordinary people in the latter half of the eighteenth century I have divided them into the following ten categories:

1. Books on law	194
2. Instructive books on other subjects	156
3. Sagas, fornkvæði, þættir	118
4. Rímur	35
5. Biographies	25

6. Translated books for pastime	25
7. Poetry	23
8. Periodicals	21
9. Annals	10
10. Books on other subjects	20

Law books are most common and that does not seem unnatural for interest in law had been strong in Iceland for centuries. In earlier times, for example, it was helpful for anyone who wished to participate in the work of the Alþing to know the laws by heart and the same applied later to the *sýslumenn*. It was not uncommon for young people to learn to read and write from *Jónsbók* (making it easier for them to learn the laws by heart later on).

The second category is related to the first in as much as that the books contained in it are intended to educate rather than entertain. Ordinary people owned 156 such volumes. The most common were reading books for children (25) and books on arithmetic (15). Fairly popular also were works on gardening, raising livestock and making butter and cheese. Most of these were published at Hráppsey.

The third largest category consists of sagas, *þættir* and *fornkvæði*. There were 118 such volumes in the possession of ordinary people, and the two saga collections printed at Hólar were by far the most common (46 copies). They were followed by *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Njála*, both of which were found in 18 different places (two of the copies of *Njála* were manuscripts). In fourth place was *Landnáma*, although only nine copies of this were recorded.

The seven remaining categories are all very small. *Rímur*, for example, were available in 35 places, 8 printed books and 27 manuscripts (it must be borne in mind that the first *rímur* were not printed until 1776). There were 15 manuscripts and 10 printed books containing

biographies and 23 books of contemporary poetry. There were only 25 volumes of fiction translated from foreign languages, and 17 of these were copies of *Gustavs saga og Bertholds*, printed at Hólar in 1756. Only 10 volumes containing annals were found, but periodicals were available in 21 places. They consisted of (1) issues of *Rit lærðómslistafélagsins*, published in 15 volumes from 1781 to 1796 by Icelandic students in Copenhagen (nine places), (2) copies of *Kvöldvökur*, published at Leirárgarðar (nine places), and (3) copies of *Minnisverð tíðindi*, also published at Leirárgarðar, which appear in only 3 catalogues. *Minnisverð tíðindi* carried news of the main events at home and abroad. It was impossible to find out how many copies of these periodicals were available in each place since this was not recorded in the inventories.

The contents of 20 volumes could not be defined since I was unable to find them in the bibliographies and the titles gave no indication of the subject.

It is not clear how large a percentage the extant inventories form of the original total. There seems no reason, however, to believe that the inventories used are unrepresentative, except for the geographical bias in favour of the north already discussed.

Judging by the results of these studies, books or manuscripts containing Old Icelandic literature were only to be found on one farm in ten. Compared with this the number of religious books was vast. This is a consideration to be borne in mind when attempting to assess the influence of the sagas on the literary ability of Icelandic farmers at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

If it were possible to travel two centuries back in time and visit an average Icelandic farm, the volumes one would be most likely to find on the bookshelf are *Vidalínspostilla*, *Grallarinn*, *Passíusálmar*, the New Testament, a couple of hymn books, one or two prayer books and possibly a book on law.

## SOURCES

*Unprinted in the National Archives of Iceland (Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands)*

*Húsvitjunarbækur* from seven parishes in Húnavatnssýsla 1800–1830 (Þingeyrarklaustur, Hjaltabakki, Undirfell, Gríms-tungur, Auðkula (and Svínavatn), Bergsstaðir (and Bólstaðarhlíð), Höskuldsstaðir).

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*Printed*

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Ebenezer Henderson, *Iceland* (1818).

Halldór Hermannsson, *Catalogue of the Icelandic Collection bequeathed by Willard Fiske* (1914); . . . Additions 1913–26 (1927); . Additions 1927–42 (1943).

Halldór Hermannsson, *Islandica* IX (1916).

idem, *Islandica* XIV (1922).

idem, *Prentsmiðja Jóns Matthíassonar* (1930).

Jón Guðnason, introduction to the *Catalogue of parish registers and húsvitjunarbækur in the National Archives of Iceland* (1953).

Jón Helgason, *Hrappseyjarprentsmiðja 1773–1794* (1928).

Klemens Jónsson, *Fjögur hundruð ára saga prentlistarinnar á Íslandi* (1930).

*Kongs Christians Pess Fimmta Norsku Løg* (Hrappsey, 1779).

Páll E. Ólafsson, *Menn og Menntir* IV (1926).

idem, *Saga Íslendinga* V (1942).

idem and Þorkell Jóhannesson, *Saga Íslendinga* VI (1943).

Þorkell Jóhannesson, *Saga Íslendinga* VII (1950).

## NOTES

### I. EARL RÖGNVALD'S SHIPWRECK

BY LUCY COLLINGS, R. FARRELL AND I. MORRISON

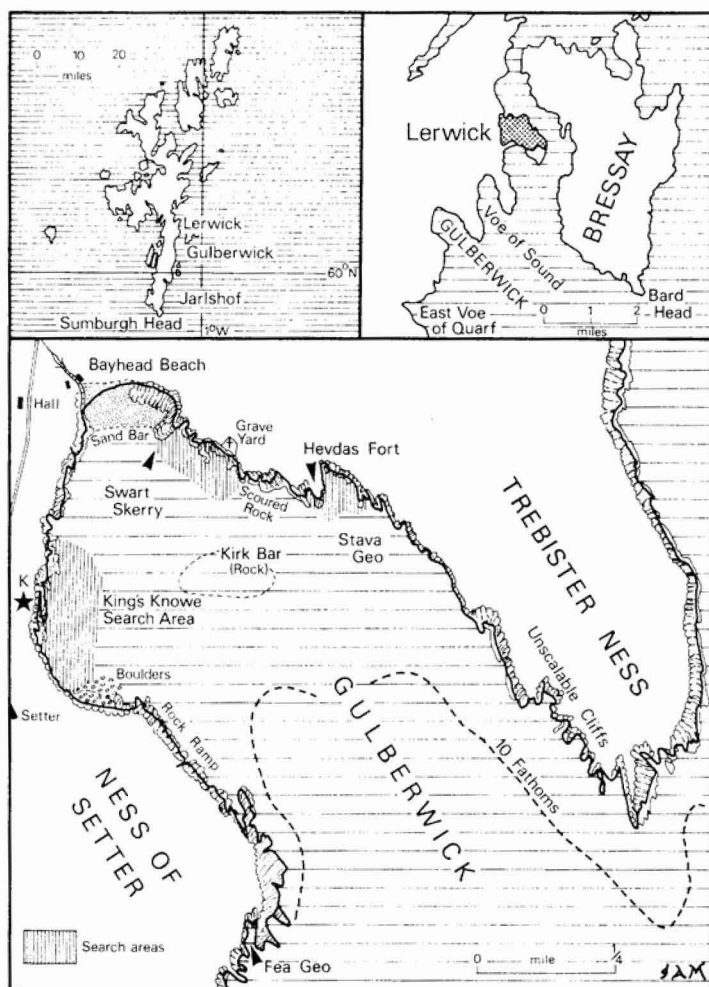
IN THE SUMMER OF 1972 an expedition to the Shetland Islands took place with two main objectives. The first was to study the marine environment of *Jarlshof*, the famous settlement at the southernmost tip of Shetland. The second was to investigate Gulberwick, a small bay just south of Lerwick, which has been connected with the account in *Orkneyinga saga* of the sinking of two Viking ships. The expedition was led by Commander Alan Bax, R.N. (ret.), of Fort Bovisand Underwater Centre, Plymouth, Dr Robert Farrell of Cornell University, James Gill of Fort Bovisand, and Dr Ian Morrison of Edinburgh University.

Some thirty divers, supported by fifteen non-divers, came from the British Army Sub-Aqua Association, the Slough Sub-Aqua Club, and from Bradford, Brunel and Manchester universities. Their enthusiasm was remarkable. Divers would spend four to five hours in 12°C water in poor weather conditions. Without their dedicated labour, the expedition would not have accomplished much.

The present note concerns the work at Gulberwick.<sup>1</sup> Our point of departure was the account in *Orkneyinga saga* (ch. 85) of the loss of two ships, the *Hjálp* and the *Fífa*, which belonged to Rögnvald, earl of Orkney. The saga is believed to date from the late twelfth century, but only survives in a version of c. 1230.<sup>2</sup> It is a composite work and the incident of the shipwreck stands in isolation, apparently not part of any design. We thus assume that any historical reality which the episode might have was subject only to changes imposed on it by oral tradition, not necessarily those governed by aesthetic principles. To test our assumption that the wreck did indeed take place, in much the same way as the saga describes it, we planned both an underwater search and a geomorphological survey, as well as a search for any

<sup>1</sup> The results are being published elsewhere, and a provisional report is available from Fort Bovisand Underwater Centre, Plymouth, Devon.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Finnogi Guðmundsson, *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder*, XII (1967), 699–702, and Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*<sup>3</sup> II (1967), 262–6, for a discussion of the dating of the saga.



Shetland and Gulberwick.



local traditions concerning the wreck. In the framework of our working hypothesis, the saga constituted our primary evidence, and our first task therefore was a philological investigation of the shipwreck episode.

1. *Evidence of the written tradition*

The following translation of the passage is given with the Icelandic text quoted from the edition of Finnbogi Guðmundsson (Íslensk Fornrit XXXIV, 1965). *Flateyjarbók* is the main source for this passage, but we have also checked the other important manuscripts: Isl. R: 702 in the University Library, Uppsala, and Isl. papp. fol. nr 39 in the Royal Library, Stockholm.

*Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 85 (excerpts)

(The year is 1148. Ingi and Eystein rule Norway; Earl Rögnvald is invited there with Earl Harald Maddaðarson. At the end of his stay, he sets sail from Bergen for the Orkneys, bearing many gifts.)

Rögnvaldr jarl  
fór heim vestr um  
haustit ok ætlaði  
at sitja tvá vetr  
í ríki sínu.  
Ingi konungr gaf jarli  
langskip tvau,  
heldr lítil ok einkar  
fögr ok gör mest  
til róðrar ok váru  
allra skipa skjótust.  
Rögnvaldr  
jarl gaf Haraldi jarli  
annat skipit;  
þat hét Fífa,  
en annat hét Hjálp.  
Þessum skipum  
heldu jarlar vestr  
um haf. Rögnvaldr  
jarl hafði ok  
þegit stórgjafar  
af vinum sínum.  
Þat var þriðjudagskveld,  
er jarlar létu  
í haf, ok sigldu

Earl Rögnvald  
went home westwards in  
the autumn,  
intending to remain two  
winters in his earldom.  
King Ingi gave  
the earl two longships,  
quite small and  
very beautiful and  
made especially for  
rowing; they were of all  
ships the swiftest.  
Earl Rögnvald gave  
Earl Harald one ship;  
that was called *Fífa*  
("Arrow") and the  
other was called *Hjálp*  
("Help") The earls  
sailed these ships  
westwards over the sea.  
Earl Rögnvald had  
also received great gifts  
from his friends.  
It was Tuesday evening  
when the earls put to sea

allgóðan byr  
 um náttina. Miðvikudag  
 var stormr mikill,  
 en um náttina urðu þeir  
 við land varir;  
 þá var myrkr  
 mikit; þeir sá boðaslóðir öllum  
 megin hjá sér.  
 Þeir höfðu áðr samfloti  
 haldit. Þá var  
 engi kostr annarr en  
 sigla til brots  
 báðum skipunum, ok  
 svá gerðu þeir.  
 Þar var urð fyrir,  
 en lítit forlendi,  
 en hamrar it  
 efra. Þar heldusk  
 menn allir, en  
 týndu fé miklu;  
 sumt rak upp um  
 náttina. Rögnvaldr  
 jarl bargsk þá  
 enn allra manna  
 bezt sem jafnan.  
 Hann var svá kátr,  
 at hann lék við  
 fingr sína ok orti  
 nær við hvert orð.<sup>3</sup>  
 . .  
 Ok er þeir höfðu  
 upp borit fongin,  
 fóru þeir á land  
 at leita byggða,  
 því at þeir þóttusk  
 vita, at þeir  
 myndi við Hjaltland komnir.  
 Þeir fundu brátt bæi,  
 ok er þá skipt

and they sailed  
 before a very good breeze  
 during the night. On Wednesday  
 there was a great gale, and during  
 the night they knew land was near;  
 it was extremely dark then;  
 they saw signs of breakers all  
 around them.

Up till then they had held  
 together; now there was no  
 choice but to run  
 both ships ashore, and  
 this they did. There  
 was a stony beach  
 in front of them, and a  
 narrow strip of shore,  
 and crags above. There  
 the men all survived,  
 but they lost  
 many goods, some of which  
 were washed ashore  
 during the night.  
 At that time Earl Rögnvald  
 once again proved himself the  
 most resilient of all men, as he  
 always did. He was  
 so cheerful that he  
 played with his fingers and  
 made verse almost at every word

. . . .  
 When they had carried  
 up their belongings,  
 they went inland  
 to look for dwellings, for  
 they felt certain that  
 they had come to  
 Shetland. They soon found  
 farms, and the men were distri-  
 buted among the farmsteads.

<sup>3</sup> Omitted is a textually obscure verse which has no direct bearing on the wreck. According to the latest opinion, Rögnvald is believed to be referring in it to his lost boat (*Hjálp*), personified as a woman. See Roberta Frank, 'Anatomy of a skaldic double-entendre: Rögnvaldr Kali's Lausavisa 7', in the *Festschrift* for Einar Haugen (1972), 235-43. Our thanks are due to Dr Frank for making a pre-publication copy of her article available to us.

monnum í byggðir.

Þar urðu menn jarli  
fegnir, er hann kom,  
ok spurðu menn at

um ferðir hans. Jarl kvað vísu:

Brast, pás boði lesti,  
bauð hrönn skaða monnum,  
sút fekk veðr et váta  
vífum, Hjǫlp ok Fífu.  
Sék, at sjá mun þykkja  
snarlyndra fjarla,  
sveit gat vás at vísu  
vinna, hofð at minnum.

Húsfúin bar skinnfeld  
at Rognvaldi  
jarli fyrir skikkju;  
hann rétti hendr  
í mótík ok tók hlæjandi  
við ok kvað:

Skek hér skinnfeld hrokkinn,  
skraut er mér afar lítit,  
stórr er sás stendr of órum  
stafnvöllr yfirhofnum,  
nærgi's enn af úrgum  
álvangs mari gongum,  
brim rak hest við hamra  
húns, skrautligar búnir.

Þá váru gervir fyrir  
þeim eldar stórir, ok  
þokuðusk þeir þar við.  
Griðkona kom inn ok  
skalf mjök

(R: 702 has the following  
passage here:

Ása hét heimakona; hon gekk

Men were glad to see  
the earl, when  
he came, and asked him  
about his voyages.

The earl spoke a verse:

There was a crash, when the  
wave smashed Hjálp and Fífa;  
the wet wind gave sorrow to  
women (the two ships);<sup>4</sup> the  
wave did men damage. I see  
that this journey of the bold-  
minded earls will be  
remembered; the company  
truly had to suffer hardship.

The housewife brought the  
earl a pelt to  
use as a cloak;  
he accepted it laughingly,  
stretching out his hands towards  
it, saying:

I shake here a wrinkled skin  
cloak, it is very small ornament  
for me — the ship field (sea) is  
deep where it stands over our  
outer garments — whenever it  
may be that we again go  
more finely dressed from the  
wet steed of the eel's field  
(ship); the breakers drove the  
horse of the mast-head (ship)  
against the cliffs.

Large fires were made for them,  
and they warmed themselves  
against them.

A housemaid came in shivering,

(There was a housemaid called  
Ása; she went out to the water

<sup>4</sup> Finnbogi Guðmundsson takes the word *vifum* as referring to the two ships (*Orkneyinga saga*, 197 note); it could of course also be understood in its literal sense, constituting a conventional lament, a shipwreck causing "sorrow for women", who might have cause to grieve for loss of presents, if not for loss of men-folk.

út til vatns ok önnur kona  
með henni. En [er] þær  
kómu til vatnsins, steypðisk  
Ása í brunninn í fjúkinu,  
en hin hljóp heim kalin mjök)  
ok mælti í skjálftanum,  
ok skilðu menn eigi, hvat hon  
mælti. Jarl kvezk skilja  
tungu hennar:

Dúsið ér, en Ása  
— atatata — liggr í vatni,  
— hutututu — hvar skalk  
sitja?  
heldr er mér kalt, við eldinn.

Jarl sendi menn sína tólf  
til Einars í Gullberuvík,  
en hann lézk eigi mundu við  
þeim taka, nema jarl kæmi  
sjálfr . . . .

with another woman. When  
they came to the water, Ása  
fell into the spring in the driving  
storm, and the other woman ran  
home frozen stiff)  
and spoke as she shivered,  
but they did not understand  
what she said. The earl said he  
could interpret her language:

You sit in ease by the fire,  
while Ása — atatata — lies in  
the water — hutututu —  
where shall I sit — I am  
rather cold — by the fire?

The earl sent twelve of his  
men to Einar at Gullberuvík,  
but he said he would not  
receive them unless the earl  
himself came . . . .

The most circumstantial section in this passage is that describing the site of the shipwreck, but the detail is somewhat blurred by the ambiguities. The following is an attempt to delineate these ambiguities and to derive from them the maximum of certainty.

#### *sigla til brots*

The implication of this phrase seems to be that the ships, while still under some measure of control, were sailed against the shore — thus causing them to break up but allowing the crew a good chance of survival.<sup>5</sup> See J. Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle*

<sup>5</sup> G. J. Marcus, in 'A Note on Norse Seamanship: *Sigla til brots*', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 41 (1955), 61-2, considers this to be an established nautical manoeuvre: but Alan Binns, 'The navigation of Viking ships round the British Isles in Old English and Old Norse sources', *The Fifth Viking Congress* (Tórshavn, 1968), 103-17, is more sceptical, preferring to call it a "desperate last resource . . . (not) entirely an act of volition on the part of the skipper" (114). This passage may be compared with a parallel passage in *Egils saga*, which describes Egil's shipwreck by the mouth of the Humber and uses the same term *sigla til brots*: Egill varð ekki snimmbúinn, ok er hann lét í haf, þá byrjaði heldr seint, tók at hausta ok stærði veðrin; sigldu þeir fyrir norðan Orkneyjar . . . Sigldu þeir þá suðr fyrir Skotland ok höfðu storm mikinn ok veðr pvert; fengu þeir beitt fyrir Skotland ok svá norðan fyrir England. En aptan dags, er myrkva tók, var veðr hvasst; finna þeir eigi fyrr en grunnföll váru á útborða ok svá fram fyrir. Var þá engi annarr til en stefna á land upp, ok svá gerðu þeir, sigldu þá til brots ok kómu at landi við Humru mynni; þær heldusk menn allir ok mestr hluti fjár, annat en skip; þat brotnaði í spán (ed. Sigurður Nordal, *Íslenzk Fornrit* II, 1933, 177). It is clear from these two passages that the technique was indeed a last resort (cf. the specific statement in each case that there was no alternative), taken in the hope of saving lives, and, with luck, some of the cargo.

*norske Sprog* (1883-96), s.v. *brot* n. who cites a passage from the *Egils saga* which contains this phrase (see note 5).

*urð*

Fritzner s.v. gives the meaning "Stenurd, Hob af de under et Fjeld derfra nedstyrtede Stene". The following definitions are given for the word in the modern Scandinavian languages: Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók* (1963), has "stórgrytt landsvæði"; M. A. Jacobsen and Chr. Matras, *Føroyisk-donsk orðabók* (2nd ed., 1961), have "ur, samling af større sten el. klippeblokke, som regel dannet ved fjeldskred"; Ivar Aasen, *Ordbog over det norske Folkesprog* (1850), s.v. *Ur* (*Urd*), has "Steengrund, Steenbanke; en Plan eller Skraaning som dannes af et Lag af store Stene med liden eller ingen Jord imellem; ogsaa om en Mark, som er meget fuld af Steen". The word also exists in Norn; Jakob Jakobsen, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* (1928-32), s.v. *urð* has "(1) a heap of fragments of rocks; (2) a big boulder". The *urð* of our text thus probably meant an area of large stones, possibly talus from the cliffs which form the backdrop to the beach.

*forlendi*

Fritzner s.v. has "Landstrækning, som ligger mellem Søen og indenfor liggende Fjeld eller Skov". In this case the *forlendi* probably consists of *urð* — the shore at that point is narrow and covered with large stones.

*hamrar*

*hamarr* m. in ON normally means "cliff, crag" — a high, steeply inclining wall of rock (q.v. Fritzner). In Norn the word *hammer* is used to indicate the typical Shetland cliff — a hillside with outcropping rock (cf. Jakobsen), and this is almost certainly the meaning here.

The basic facts seem clear: there was sufficient beach, of a stony nature, for Earl Rögnvald and his men to land on safely, and behind this beach the land rose in a rocky incline. One of Rögnvald's verses (beginning "I shake here a wrinkled skin cloak") might be thought to contradict the prose, for it mentions the boats as being dashed *við hamra* ("the breakers drove the horse of the mast-head against the cliffs"), but this can be taken as a description of the fate of the boats after the crew had escaped, when wind and waves had them completely in thrall.

## 2. Evidence of local tradition

Since the saga description of the site of the wreck is by no means conclusive, an investigation was made into the possible survival

of information in local tradition. There must even remain a doubt whether the wreck took place in Gulberwick, for the sole mention of that name in the saga — *Jarl sendi menn sína tólf til Einars í Gullberuvík* — does not preclude the possibility that the boats were wrecked elsewhere. However, Shetlanders as well as scholars seem always to have believed Gulberwick to be the site (see below).

We decided to talk to all of the resident families of the bay area,<sup>6</sup> and also to people outside Gulberwick with antiquarian interests, such as Mr Henderson of the Lerwick Museum, Dr Manson, the former editor of the *Shetland News*, and Captain Inkster, the Harbour Master of Lerwick. Almost everyone had heard of the shipwreck and located it in Gulberwick. They all knew that Rögnvald had been wrecked there with two boats. It is impossible however to say that in this knowledge we have any long or independent tradition, because of the certain influence of the printed word, primarily the saga itself, which a large number of people had read. Some of them had opinions as to the identity of Einar's farmstead, some agreeing with A. B. Taylor's identification of the farm as Trebister, on Trebister Ness, and others with Finnbogi Guðmundsson's preference for Wick, a now derelict farm situated about a mile up the burn which crosses the southern end of the beach. The remoter position of this farm would explain its specific mention in the text, for Rögnvald would first of all have divided his men among the nearest farms. Moreover, it is possible to explain Wick (<vík) as an abbreviation of Gullberuvík, the name of Einar's farm in the saga. Mr Henderson, the Museum Curator, suggested the farm Mucklegarth (now derelict), on account of its name, which would have been ON *Mikligarðr*.<sup>7</sup>

Local "memory" would also have been jogged by a recent "Up-Helly-A" festival. This festival, held in January of each year, features some aspect of Viking life and in its present form only dates back to the nineteenth century. In 1949, the first "Up-Helly-A" festival after the war, the Guizerjarl (the chief character of the parade) was Earl Rögnvald. The programme

<sup>6</sup> In this relatively stable community we found that at least one adult per family had actually been born in Gulberwick, and those families who were referred to by their neighbours as "newcomers" were subsequently discovered to have lived there for at least twenty years.

<sup>7</sup> This identification finds support in the unpublished notes to A. B. Taylor's revision of his translation, left incomplete on his death in 1972. Here he points not only to the etymology of the name but also to the presence of a ruined chapel a little way below the house, both facts indicating earlier importance. We are very grateful to Mrs Elizabeth Taylor for making her husband's notes available to us.

announced the theme of the festival as "Jarl Rögnvalds Skipverjar" and the landing at Gulberwick was treated. Laurence Johnson, a native of Gulberwick and mentioned by the whole community as a store-house of local tradition, was the Guizerjarl. A replica of Rögnvald's boat *Hjálþ* was drawn through the streets of Lerwick. The main source of the scenes enacted was the *Orkneyinga saga*. Long before this festival, mention of the Gulberwick shipwreck is to be found in print, although again all facts can be attributed to a knowledge of the saga. For example, a popular work by Catherine Spence, intended for local consumption and entitled *Earl Rögnvald and his Forebears* (1896), mentions the shipwreck in some detail, but all the information is derived from the saga and a local knowledge of the area. A Shetland holiday guide of c. 1900 (John Nicholson, *The Shetland Islands*), also mentions Gulberwick as the site of Rögnvald's wreck.

It is perhaps noteworthy that local tradition and the printed word, apart from the saga, are in fact more specific than the saga at one point — namely that the wreck did indeed take place at Gulberwick. It is just possible that this certainty stems from ancient tradition independent of the saga.

Local tradition concerning the precise place of the shipwreck was virtually non-existent, although it seems likely that a quarter of a century ago an investigation might have been more successful. Of the local people, only Mr Henderson of the Lerwick Museum could offer information. He said that he had once heard old people say that a natural mound, known as the King's Knowe, situated on the Setter property on the southern shore of the bay, was the site. A. B. Taylor had obviously also heard of some tradition, for he makes the tantalizingly elusive comment in his footnotes that "local tradition is contradictory regarding the exact site of the shipwreck" (p. 391, note 4).<sup>8</sup> Finnbogi Guðmundsson visited the area in 1962, and informed us in a letter that his notes report that "the tradition is that Earl Rögnvaldur came ashore at Setter on the southwest side of the bay. In a southeast wind there is some shelter out there because of the crags." This seems to link the site with the King's Knowe, and we therefore looked more closely into the identification of this spot as the site; our results are given below, together with a note of other possible sites mentioned by local people.

*The King's Knowe* — We believe that the name of this mound is primarily responsible for its association with the shipwreck, and

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately the unpublished notes to his revised version (mentioned above in note 7) do not elaborate on this statement.

not vice-versa. It should first be mentioned that the connection, although it once seems to have existed, was probably rather tenuous, for although all of the natives in Gulberwick had heard of the King's Knowe, none now associate it with the wreck, except, on being questioned specifically, to "wonder" whether that was the site, because of the name. The origin of the name remains a mystery, although its form suggests several reasons why it should have no connection with the wreck at all. First, it is English, and there is no reason to believe that a Norse place-name would be subsequently translated into English, when the great majority of Shetland names retained their Norse form. Second, the name refers to a king, whereas Rögnvald was a jarl, and the Shetlanders even today speak of "Earl Ronald." It is possible that in the name "the King's Knowe" we have a folk etymology, "king" being a modern English misunderstanding of ON *kinn* = "cheek", quite common in Shetland place-names to indicate a proclivity. The process of naming might have been Kinn > Kinn Knowe > King's Knowe.<sup>9</sup> Thus, although early information on tradition provided by Mr Henderson led us to begin our underwater search just below the King's Knowe, it now seems less probable that the ships were lost in that part of the bay.

*An archaeological note on the King's Knowe* — The mound itself is a problematic feature, and the degree of disturbance that it has suffered casts doubt on whether even a full-scale excavation could now fully elucidate its nature. A survey was made of its external characteristics, old amateur excavation trenches in its summit were cleared and the remains of stone structures there were recorded. A proton magnetometer survey was made by Dennis Mott, of Bradford University, but the anomalies registered were judged too small to be significant.

The Knowe is capped by a platform of peaty turf, now partially destroyed. The body of the mound is however of compact sand and gravel. This may well be a natural deposit, *in situ*, although rabbit burrows in the broken top of the mound seem to go down into relatively unconsolidated material. The possibility of, say, a burial at the base level of the mound thus cannot be eliminated. The stone structures in the top of the mound are so disturbed that positive conclusions as to their function are unwise. It is not clear how numerous stones piled beside the old excavation trench relate to those that remain. One long slab, set on edge, might

<sup>9</sup> Our thanks are due to Dr Ian Fraser of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, and to Mr John Stewart of Aberdeen, for their very helpful suggestions, contained in private communications, as to the origin and significance of this name.



possibly be the side of a disturbed grave. On the other hand, occasional pieces of clinker are present. The Knowe has been grouped with the "burnt mounds", those problematic hillocks of burnt stones common in the Northern Isles, but it is definitely not one of these. Neither is the clinker abundant enough to suggest a forge site. However, the possibility of some kind of beacon or leading-light arises, in view of the remarkably precise positioning of the centre line of the mound on the transit of Trebister Ness with the Bard o' Bressay.

The King's Knowe remains an enigma.

*Trebister Ness* — Several inhabitants of the area had vague memories of a wreck on Trebister Ness, some of them stating that it was a Viking wreck. The same guide-book mentioned above makes a definite association between the Ness and Rögnvald's wreck: "It was on the rugged Ness at the entrance of the voe of Gulberwick that Rögnvald was ship-wrecked when on a voyage from Norway to the Holy Land." However, the saga account of the shore line of the wreck site, plus the fact that all men survived, makes this an unpromising site.

While an investigation into local *traditions* about the wreck site proved, as one might expect, unfruitful, elicitation of local people's *opinions* as to the site was rewarding. They were felt to be well worth following up, first because they were the opinions of people who had an intuitive knowledge of the locality, for whom the saga account of the wreck was a meaningful description to which they could supply the background; second, because it was obvious from their response that they had already thought a lot about the position of Rögnvald's wreck; and third, because opinion as to the site was virtually unanimous. The two boats would have been wrecked on the north side of the bay, they said, because Rögnvald was heading for Orkney and was therefore almost certainly blown off course by a south-easterly gale. Captain Inkster said that the shoal in the middle of the bay, called the Kirk Bar because it is below the cemetery south of the Trebister farm (which is also reportedly the site of an old church), would be the most likely spot. He said the boats could have been overwhelmed on the Kirk Bar, and then could have drifted up to the shore. The crew could have done nothing else once they had foundered in the breakers, he said, which is an interesting echo of *þá var engi kostur annarr en sigla til brots báðum skipunum*. Mr W. Sales, the former second coxswain of the Lerwick lifeboat, who in addition to his lifeboat experience had also fished the area, held a similar opinion as to the site of the wreck and the cause of the two boats no longer being able to hold together.

### 3. *Geomorphological evidence*

Gulberwick was studied geomorphologically, in order to assess the extent to which the bay might have changed since the period of the Norse expansion. The first aim was to establish whether coastal features and sea conditions mentioned or implied by the saga might have been found there in the relevant period. The second aim was to provide data for the selection of areas for intensive sea-bed searches. The section which follows is concerned chiefly with the former theme. Since however the criteria underlying the operational decisions on search areas in part condition the overall conclusions on the historicity of the saga, the nature of the geomorphological elements in these decisions is introduced here, and is set out more fully in an Appendix.

Vertical air photographs were used extensively. Coastal detail from these was plotted on a base map at a scale of 1:2500 (c. 25 inches to the mile). Data were also compiled from recent Ordnance Survey maps and the Admiralty Chart. The mapping of the cliff and beach features was checked in detail on the ground. An extensive reconnaissance was then made underwater, and the position of boundaries between morphological units on the sea-bed was fixed from the shore by sextant and optical range-finder.

The submarine features of the bay were then recorded in quantitative terms using a paper-recording echo sounder. With this a series of cross and longitudinal profiles was measured on lines selected as characteristic on the basis of the diving reconnaissance. The nature of features shown up by the trace was checked by direct observation on further dives, so that bedrock features were distinguished with certainty from those that might have changed more radically over the last millennium or so.

It was concluded that while certain parts of the bay had clearly altered in detail since the twelfth century, both the general lay-out and the range of coastal land-forms represented in the area was unlikely to have been much different then. Both the lay-out and the land-forms seemed compatible with the account given in *Orkneyinga saga*.

For example, Gulberwick opens to the south-east, and when there is a northward set the protruding arm of Trebister Ness (see Map) tends to send a surface current curling into the bay. The storm-tossed Earls had been heading from Bergen for Orkney, not Shetland, so they had certainly been set well to the north of their course. Had the saga implied instead that they had been driven southward, say, this would have made a hypothetical entrance to Gulberwick much more problematic because of the

barriers offered in that case by the Ness and Bressay beyond.

Second, it seems that they were forced to run their ships ashore when surprised on a dark and perhaps misty night by finding breakers all round them. The geomorphological survey suggested that at certain frequencies the way the bay shoals within the Nesses of Setter and Trebister might well cause broken water to occur *inside* the bay when there was only a heavy swell on the deeper waters outside. People of Gulberwick and Captain Inkster confirmed that this was so, and that it is not uncommon for the whole surface of Gulberwick to be breaking when there is only an oily swell outside. Even when surf is not general, waves often break on the Kirk Bar in the centre of the bay (see Map). This is a bedrock reef, and was certainly at least as much in evidence in the twelfth century. Thus, with a tired crew, relaxed after the stress of the storm of the previous day and perhaps keeping a less than perfect look-out in the admittedly poor visibility, the saga certainly seems to ring true for the special conditions of the Gulberwick area.

Third, in describing the circumstances of the landing the saga writer mentions accumulations of boulders and shingle in association with cliffs, or at least steep sea slopes. Certainly, the wording of the original allows some scope in the interpretation of the exact relationship of these elements. They are however plentifully represented at Gulberwick, in the whole gamut of possible relations, and there is every indication that geologically this was just as likely 800 years ago.

Compatibility of the text with geomorphology is one thing, but direct proof of the incident is another. Since the saga is not sufficiently precise topographically to allow a specific site for seeking the wrecks to be proposed from the geomorphological reconstruction of the twelfth century coastal physiography, it was necessary to seek general grounds for selecting areas where it would be reasonable to deploy the expedition's limited resources for intensive seabed search.

The conditions discussed above are not only characteristic of Gulberwick, but are also represented in varying degrees in the neighbouring Voe of Sound and East Voe of Quarff. The possibility that the wrecks took place in either of these localities, each within easy walking distance of the presumed site of the steading of Gullberuvík, cannot be entirely eliminated on geomorphological or hydrographic grounds. The broad compatibility of more than one of these closely spaced inlets (see Map) with the text need not in itself cast doubt on the veracity of the saga writer. An operational problem was however posed for the

expedition, since the labour-intensive nature of seabed searches made it unwise to disperse the expedition's effort over more than one bay. Gulberwick itself was selected because of the overall balance of probabilities.

The types of geomorphological criteria involved in the selection of particular search areas within Gulberwick are given in the Appendix. Broadly, in some stretches of the coastline it was clear that the land-forms had never been compatible with the saga's description, and thus could be safely eliminated. However, some parts of the bay, which considerations of geomorphology and seamanship together suggested to be likely areas for shipwreck in the conditions implied by the saga, are such as to preclude the survival of artifacts almost entirely. If the ships fetched up there, there now seems almost no prospect of securing direct evidence of the fact. In several other very likely areas, including the bay-head beach, effective search was impracticable with the available resources because of the sheer tonnage of loose rock or shifting sand to be excavated and sifted.

Even the possibility that the wrecks occurred in the areas that were searched most intensively cannot be wholly eliminated. Substantial ship remains, or indeed any large, durable artifacts, were not to be expected. Underwater, the divers had to attempt to recognise eight-hundred year old debris, rolled or concreted into unfamiliar forms, embedded in pebble-choked crevices or camouflaged by copious algal growths. Although enthusiastic and conscientious, few had had much previous experience of this type of operation, and they got little help from underwater metal detectors because of the nature of the terrain and problems of serviceability. In this case, therefore, perhaps even more than ordinarily, very little weight may be placed on negative evidence. The possibility that the wrecks did occur in the Gulberwick area can in no sense be said to have been eliminated by the searches it proved practicable to undertake there.

The search result does not therefore run contrary to the geomorphological conclusions. These showed that an assessment of the twelfth-century topography and hydrography of the area reveals nothing that might be construed as casting doubt on the saga passage, and that on the credit side it brings to light several characteristics which appear to correspond well with the saga's account of the wrecking of the Earls.

*Appendix**Physiographic considerations in the selection of diver search areas within Gulberwick*

As noted in the main text, it seemed unnecessary to make intensive underwater searches in certain parts of the coastline of Gulberwick. For example, much of the coast towards Trebister Ness seaward of Stava Geo (see Map) consists of vertical cliffs rising directly from deep water, and there appears to be no geological reason for envisaging a different situation there in the twelfth century. The saga states specifically that the crews of both vessels survived the wreck, and suggests that they ran the ships ashore while they still retained at least some measure of control. It is very difficult indeed to conceive how every one of perhaps eighty men could have contrived to have got out of breakers directly up those crags. If they did retain any control of the ships at all, in that situation they would surely have tried at least to claw along the cliffs until there was some sign of a foot-hold at water level. If that was the kind of thing that happened, they might well have ended up in Stava Geo, as in the cod-end of a trawl (see Map). There boulder accumulations occur, part landslide and part beach, that would certainly fit the mention of such features in the saga. Scrambling up the grass slope at the back of the Geo is awkward, but not dangerous. The geological structure there is such as to suggest that while the cliffs are currently being freshened up by the sea, their basic layout and the probability of an equivalent boulder beach and grassed slope was much the same in the twelfth century as now. Stava Geo was therefore selected as a major search area.

On the other side of the bay, on the stretch of coast running in from Setter Ness, the rocks dip seawards and a great ramp of bedrock slabs sweeps down below present sea level. There seems no prospect that there was any kind of beach or cliff-line there in the twelfth century to match the saga's account. Over much of that stretch, the chance of any artifacts surviving on the storm-scoured slabs making up the sea-bed was in any case minimal. This part was therefore also eliminated from the search area.

Other parts of the Gulberwick coastline had to be abandoned with regret. These were areas where the wrecks could well have occurred, but where the character of the seabed made saturation searches impractical with the available resources. There were three main regions of this kind (see Map): Fea Geo; the boulder-filled bay below the steading of Setter; and the sand beach at the head of Gulberwick. A vessel swept into Fea Geo, the cliff-girt slot in Setter Ness, would certainly be quickly smashed up if there

was any sea running. The inner end is choked with boulders, again fitting the saga description, and despite the forbidding aspect of the place it did not prove difficult to climb out of it, even wearing a diving suit. However, the sheer magnitude of the pile of tumbled boulders, below as well as above the sea surface, and the likelihood that this has been augmented by substantial cliff falls within the last millennium, ruled out an effective search.

There was also evidence of very recent coastal change along the shoreline of the bight below Setter farm. For example, the seaward dyke of a sheep pound is falling over the eroding sea scarp there. This together with information from people living around the bay left no doubt that the massive spread of boulders that floors the shallows there was subject to continual reworking in the winter storms. It would be a good place to run ashore, with the boulder beach and easily scaled scarp fitting the saga very satisfactorily, but hundreds rather than tens of tons of boulders would have to be shifted to search there.

The situation at the head of the bay, at the sand beach, is not dissimilar. A vessel swamped crossing the Kirk Bar (see Map) would be very likely to be swept in there, while if one retains control but must beach one's craft, it is by far the most attractive place in Gulberwick for which to head. Even in the dark of night the lighter tone of the sand and the lower profile of the valley that runs back from it can often be distinguished from the gloom of the cliffs elsewhere. The sand is however continually on the move. Within the six months prior to the expedition, it was scoured away by a major gale, and then re-established itself. The position of the off-shore sand bar there changes even more frequently. What is more, while it seems very likely that there was a similar bay-head beach in the twelfth century, this was almost certainly on a line that lay further seawards. The geomorphological evidence of this received interesting corroboration from the local tradition that there had been a patch of pasture on which cows had been tethered on what are now the bare rocks of the Swart Skerries, immediately seawards of the east end of the present beach. Elsewhere, it is not unknown for artifacts to be recovered from moving masses of sand, but to seek them systematically in such an area requires more powerful metal detectors than were available.

The areas of seabed immediately out from the beach were investigated on both sides of the bay. More attention was paid to the eastern side, where conditions seemed to offer more chance of making finds. Ships in difficulty, heading for the bay-head beach, might very easily have fetched up in either of these

stretches. The shallow well-scoured bedrock ledges did not however represent good conditions for the preservation of artifacts.

The area around the King's Knowe (see Map) was one that simultaneously offered three key things:

- (i) compatibility with the saga (feasible landing places on rock ledges, with sporadic accumulations of shingle and boulders; scaleable cliffs);
- (ii) reasonable conditions for artifact survival (complex bedrock topography with many crevices, often choked with boulders and shingle);
- (iii) suitability for reasonably effective search with the equipment and personnel available.

In addition, one elusive local tradition centred on the Knowe. Along with Stava Geo, this area was therefore selected for major attention by the expedition.

#### *Stava Geo — the Hevdas fortification*

The area surrounding Gulberwick was prospected for antiquities by Duncan McArdle and Ian Morrison, and a number of previously unrecorded sites were located. These will be reported in 'Discovery and Excavation' and details lodged with Lerwick Museum.

A fortified site was located on "The Hevdas", a cliff promontory immediately overlooking the search area in Stava Geo. A detailed tacheometric survey was made, at 1:200 scale. A rampart enclosed an approximately rectangular area, bounded in part by an embayment in the bedrock. Apparently at a later date, a rectangular house had been cut into part of the rampart. Immediately outside the fortification at the tip of the promontory was a circular structure with massive walls, perhaps the base of a broch. In the section at the top of the cliff eroding dry-stone walling was visible. Coarse pottery that would not have been out of place in a "Dark Age to Viking" context was recovered. This site might be well worth excavating.

#### *Conclusions*

It thus appears that the choice of Gulberwick as the probable site of the sinking of the *Hjálþ* and *Fífa* is correct. The bay satisfies the conditions of the shipwreck which lie behind the saga account, and the geomorphological evidence as well as the local tradition (such as it is) support the hypothesis or at least do not militate against it. Although none of our investigations enabled us to identify the actual site of the wreck, it is clear that the saga account is compatible with several spots in Gulberwick.

From this we may conclude either that the saga author was familiar with Shetland landscape and created the scene with a considerable degree of verisimilitude, even to the extent that he chose a bay with a NW-SE axis as the most likely place for a boat to be wrecked that was supposedly en route to the Orkneys, or that the account does in fact represent a memory of an actual event. There seems every reason to incline towards the latter viewpoint.

The marine archeological investigations carried out so far have by no means exhausted the site, but if further work is to be done it seems best to wait until more effective prospecting devices are available.



## BOOK REVIEWS

STUDIER I LANDNÁMABÓK. KRITISKA BIDRAG TILL DEN ISLÄNDSKA FRISTATENS HISTORIA. By SVEINBJÖRN RAFNSSON. *Bibliotheca Historica Lundensis*, XXXI. CWK Gleerup. Lund, 1974. 256 pp.\*

For many years now, *Landnámabók* has attracted scholarly attention and understandably so. Not only is the preservation of the text unusually complicated (it exists in five redactions), but its value as a historical source has been subjected to increasing criticism in recent decades. These two main problems, the relationship between the various redactions of *Landnámabók* and its historical reliability, are considered anew in this Lund thesis by Sveinbjörn Rafnsson.

Sveinbjörn's book bears witness to an independent approach to the subject. To an essential degree the author has freed himself from the theories of his predecessors and criticises them unhesitatingly — often somewhat harshly. At the same time, he is not afraid of putting forward new ideas, even though they may be based on conjectures which cannot be fully proven. He also draws attention to many matters which have not before been considered in researches into *Landnámabók* and ventilates more thoroughly certain ideas which his predecessors have put forward without adequate support. As might be expected, there is much in a book like this to excite discussion and protest. Its great value lies in the fact that it leads us along new avenues of approach and encourages us to consider the subject from a new angle.

The book is divided into three main sections: the first deals with the manuscripts, previous research and the relationship between the various redactions; the second discusses the age of *Landnámabók* and its relationship to other works; the third deals with the background to *Landnámabók* and its purpose.

In the first section, there is a clear survey of the manuscripts and the researches of previous scholars. Here the author often takes the opportunity of making brief criticisms of his predecessors' work, not least work on the relationship between the redactions. Here Sveinbjörn puts forward a new theory which conflicts with the conclusions of Jón Jóhannesson. Put as

\* This is a slightly abridged version of a review article in *Skrínir* 148 (1974), 207-15, under the title 'Markmið Landnámabókar'; translated here by Richard Perkins.

succinctly as possible, it is Sveinbjörn's conclusion that Sturla Þórðarson did not use *Styrmisbók* but that *Sturlubók* and *Styrmisbók* are both derived from a common source (called \*X); further, that *Melabók* is not derived from *Styrmisbók*, but rather from an older redaction, independent of \*X. In the lost \*X, the original disposition of *Landnámabók* was changed and stories about the Christian settlers and other material were incorporated, primarily from Gunnlaugr Leifsson's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason. This innovation introduced a "Christian" element into *Landnámabók* and, to a certain extent, a historical element, both by prefixing chapters about the first sailings to Iceland and by suffixing *Kristni saga*; Sveinbjörn thinks that the bulk of the extant *Kristni saga* was in \*X and also in *Styrmisbók*.

It would take too much space to discuss this theory in detail, but I must say that I remain unconvinced by it, even though I cannot deny that it is conceivable. At this stage, however, it seems to me nothing more than a hypothesis by which some facts can be explained while others are left unaccounted for. One of Sveinbjörn's main arguments for his theory relates to the text about Ásólftr alskik which is preserved in somewhat differing forms in *Sturlubók*, *Hauksbók* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*. Sveinbjörn thinks that it was derived from Gunnlaugr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, passed from there into \*X, was expanded in *Styrmisbók* and it is from *Styrmisbók* that the additions in *Hauksbók* come. This of course is a possibility, but it is also possible that the text existed in lengthened form as an independent *þáttir* which was used by Haukr, even though Sturla might have taken his version from Gunnlaugr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason. The reasons Sveinbjörn gives for believing *Kristni saga* was in *Styrmisbók* are feeble: the fact that the heading *Kristni saga* is found in *Hauksbók* but was probably not in *Sturlubók* proves nothing. It could just as easily have come from Haukr as from Styrmir.

Another shortcoming I find in Sveinbjörn's exposition is the fact that he has not investigated the points collected by Jón Jóhannesson (*Gerðir Landnámabókar*, 1941, 145-59) of agreement between *Melabók* and *Hauksbók*, where *Sturlubók* has a different text. From these it is clear that in many cases *Styrmisbók* had a text which agreed with *Melabók* against *Sturlubók*. For example, *Styrmisbók* was not influenced by *Egils saga* and from this it is reasonable to assume that it did not come into existence much later than around 1220, that is, precisely at the time when one might, for other reasons, suppose that the archetype from which *Melabók* is derived is most likely to have been written.

As for influence from Gunnlaugr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, it is extremely difficult to say much for certain. In this matter, Sveinbjörn has made particular use of the investigations of Björn M. Ólsen. Although these are of great importance, the following points should be made in connection with them. First, that the composition and development of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* have not yet been investigated in detail and it seems to me quite possible that Gunnlaugr has been credited with more of the saga than he should be. Second, that certain features of phraseology and style which Björn M. Ólsen regarded as indicating translation from Latin are extremely shaky criteria by which to attribute given passages to Gunnlaugr; such features are relatively common in texts from the end of the thirteenth century and on into the fourteenth, where there is no question of direct translation from Latin. Of the dangers of the use of such criteria, Sveinbjörn is in fact aware to some extent (see his pp. 70-71), but even so he is not prepared to reject the conclusions which Björn M. Ólsen drew from them.

In fact, there is no reason why Sturla should not have known and made direct use of Gunnlaugr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason and why those elements which may have come from it should not first have entered the *Landnámabók* tradition via *Sturlubók*. One point may be mentioned which Sveinbjörn only touches on (p. 80, note 29) but does not go into in detail. According to Sturla, it was Naddoddr who first came to Iceland, according to Haukr it was Garðarr. Sveinbjörn thinks that Sturla's report of Naddoddr's priority is derived from Gunnlaugr and was also in *Styrmisbók*. On the other hand, later on in *Sturlubók* (ch. 284) we read that Garðarr first discovered Iceland, and the same statement also appeared in *Melabók*. This must be a piece of information which Sturla took from his normal exemplar and which he forgot to alter after he had decided to present Naddoddr as the first discoverer. Haukr, on the other hand, probably stuck to *Styrmisbók* which must then, like *Melabók*, have presented Garðarr as the first discoverer. From where Sturla got the story that Naddoddr was first to get to Iceland cannot be known, but, allowing that Sveinbjörn's theory is correct, it is unlikely to have come from \*X. It should not be forgotten either that the tradition that Iceland was first discovered by Norwegians sailing to the Faroes appears in *Historia de antiquitate regum Norvagiensium* by Theodoricus (written about 1180); admittedly Naddoddr is not named there, but then Sturla only says that *sumir* mention him in this connection.

I do not intend to pursue this matter further here, but it does

seem to me that even though Sveinbjörn has demonstrated various defects in Jón Jóhannesson's argument, particularly concerning the relationship of *Landnámabók* to Gunnlaugr's Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, he has himself done nothing more than advance a hypothesis which is conceivable but which is in no way proven. On the other hand, he is right when he says that *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* have, by comparison with *Melabók*, been "historiserade och kristnade", whether that change is to be attributed solely to the influence of Gunnlaugr Leifsson or not.

Sveinbjörn's theory about the relationship between the various redactions fortunately makes little difference to the investigations he publishes in the second and third sections of his book. *Melabók* remains the representative of the oldest preserved redaction of *Landnámabók* and it is *Melabók* which, above all, has to be resorted to when we attempt to visualise what the work was like in its original form.

In the second section, Sveinbjörn deals with the relationship between *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* and the connections of other works with *Landnámabók*. Finally, he considers references to volcanic eruptions in *Landnámabók* and stresses that the eruption of Hekla in 1104 is nowhere mentioned. From these factors, he arrives at conclusions about the age of the first version of *Landnámabók*. In this section, attention is drawn to a number of important points which have not been discussed before in connection with *Landnámabók*. Not least, the author discusses the relationship between it and the Commonwealth laws and various translations of foreign works, from which can be seen what contacts the *Landnámabók* redactors had with contemporary learning, both foreign and native. In this context, Sveinbjörn deals with the "Quarter-prologues" (*fjórðungsformálar*) and the epilogue in *Melabók* and rightly points out that these are to no small extent fashioned on foreign models; for this reason, no material conclusions about dating or the author's outlook can be based on their content.

As far as the date of the original *Landnámabók* is concerned, Sveinbjörn energetically maintains that it must have been written before *Íslendingabók*. His main arguments are: (i) It is likely that Kolskeggr inn fróði who *sagði fyrir* concerning the *landnám* in the Eastern Quarter was older than Ari. (ii) Ari refers to four settlers in *Íslendingabók*, one from each Quarter; this suggests that, when he was writing, a *Landnámabók* arranged according to Quarters was in existence. (iii) Ari's use of the term *landnámsmaðr* in *Íslendingabók* suggests that it had become established as a written term. (iv) The fact that the eruption of Hekla in 1104

and the destruction of inhabited areas it caused are not mentioned in *Landnámabók* indicate that it was written before that date.

We may consider this last argument first. Of course, as the author shows, various eruptions are mentioned in *Landnámabók*; but all these reports have a distinctly legendary character and the dating of the eruptions themselves is highly uncertain. The appearance of such stories in *Landnámabók* is, by itself, no guarantee that the eruption of Hekla would have been mentioned even if the work was written a few years after it occurred. Memories of the eruption would inevitably have been so fresh in men's minds that it might have seemed quite unnecessary to make special mention of it. Nor would there have been time for folk-tales about the eruption to develop. There seems no need, then, to attach much importance to this argument. The first argument (about Kolskeggr's age) is the strongest and the other two also have some weight of probability. But even if the original *Landnámabók* was older than *Íslendingabók*, this need not imply that Ari fróði could not have taken part in compiling it, though indeed this is something on which Sveinbjörn voices no direct opinion. The compilation of the original *Landnámabók* must have taken a considerable time and a good number of people must have had a hand in the work, either directly or indirectly. Other arguments have been adduced for Ari's participation in the original *Landnámabók* and these are not weakened even if it can be shown that it was composed in the first decades of the twelfth century.

In the last section of the book, the author discusses the background to *Landnámabók* and the social conditions under which the original work was written. The inspiration for Sveinbjörn's investigation is here the article by Barði Guðmundsson, 'Uppruni Landnámabókar' in *Skírnir*, 1938, in which he put forward the idea that the main purpose of the original *Landnámabók* was to explain how the *landnámsmenn* and their families originally acquired land and how the properties were passed on from one generation to the next. Jón Jóhannesson totally rejected this theory but with insufficient reason as I have pointed out in the introduction to my edition of *Landnámabók* (*Íslensk fornrit* I, cxviii-ix). Researches by Magnús Már Lárusson have, as Sveinbjörn observes, lent support to Barði's view in various ways.

But Sveinbjörn gives Barði's theory further and more detailed consideration and produces a number of new arguments in support of it. His view is that the main purpose of the original *Landnámabók* was to record the rights of the various landowning

families to their estates. A family estate consisted primarily of one or more *aðalból* (manors) with appurtenant *útjarðir* (outlying estates). The *aðalból* were not divided up between the different heirs but were kept within the family and the family had unlimited rights of vindication (*brigð*) if property came into strange hands without sanction. Usucaption (*hefð*) had no place in the laws of the Commonwealth. For this reason, it was important that proof of ownership of family properties went sufficiently far back, and the main point must have been to know how the land originally came into the family. And naturally it was not possible to go further back than the colonisation. Of course, this was most important in the case of *aðalból*, and Sveinbjörn's study shows that comparatively many of these later "manors" were among the farms where principal *landnámsmenn* settled. In addition, there is the fact that from the start the power of *goðar* had some essential connection with the property owned by the families with *goðorð*, comprising a main estate with outlying farmsteads where *landnámsmenn* placed their companions, freedmen and slaves, as is often noted in *Landnámabók*.

According to this view, the principal aim of the original *Landnámabók* was not to describe the colonisation of Iceland, but rather to record the title of families to the estates they owned, or claimed to own, at the beginning of the twelfth century. This end was most reliably achieved by accounting for who first settled a piece of land and the extent of the land settled. The acceptance of the Tithe Law in 1097 doubtless made this imperative since many of the *aðalból* had become or became church-farms (*kirkjustaðir*) and their owners quickly realised what profit could accrue from the innovation. Church-owners received half of the tithes, the church-tithe (*kirkjuttund*) and the priest's tithe (*preststiund*) and although they had to keep a priest and maintain the church-building, one of the larger churches could soon produce a large income.

If we accept these arguments, we must regard *Landnámabók* first and foremost as a source for the social environment from which it grew and the various redactional changes it underwent could to some extent be traced to changes in society itself, in the attitudes of the chieftain class and in the political situation in Iceland. On this point again, the author makes a number of new and valuable observations.

By and large, Sveinbjörn adduces many and good reasons in support of his argument, all of which cannot be gone into here. Even if his book consisted only of this third section, its author would have made an important contribution, not only to the study

of *Landnámabók*, but also to our understanding of developments within the Icelandic community in the first centuries of its history. I will not discuss here the general implications of the author's conclusions. That is the task of historians. But they will not be able to avoid making up their minds on the views Sveinbjörn puts forward.

Sveinbjörn lays great stress on arguing that the original *Landnámabók* was not a work of history and this claim can be plausibly upheld. It is probably also right that the descriptions of the different *landnám*, their size and distribution, are to an essential degree dictated by the distribution of land ownership and political relations in Iceland just after 1100, and we shall never know with complete certainty what truth there is in the information given about individual *landnámsmenn*. But it seems to me that Sveinbjörn goes too far in denying *Landnámabók* value as an historical source. There is, of course, no doubt that much is pure invention, and some of the *landnámsmenn* never existed except as elements in place-names. On the other hand, I cannot believe that the principal families in Iceland did not know who their ancestors were five or six generations back, nor who the colonist among their ancestors was, nor where he lived. How much was known about the size of the settlements and their boundaries is another matter; accounts of these in *Landnámabók* could well have been governed by contemporary conditions. We may note that in many places a colonist's descendants are not traced for more than one or two generations, or all that is given is the name of a family which descended from a particular colonist (e.g. Húsvíkingar, Sandvíkingar, Kløkuætt, Krymlingar, etc.). If such references were supposed to have any function about the year 1100, people must have been able to trace their ancestry to these families, whether rightly or wrongly. There would have been little point in knowing who the land-taker in a given area was if no connection could be made between him and some family living around 1100. I have discussed the whole problem elsewhere and will not do so again here. But although Sveinbjörn Rafnsson would wish to make light of my arguments, I cannot see that he has demolished the premisses on which they are based. It is true that it has occurred neither to me nor to other recent critics to regard *Landnámabók* as a sort of historical document of its time or as a historical source on a level with contemporary records. But it is a far cry between doing this and denying the work any value as a source for personal history. But when using it as a source in this fashion, one must of course approach both the texts themselves and the historical circumstances surrounding their composition in a rigorously critical way.

Although there is much to be said for Sveinbjörn's view that the primary purpose of the first *Landnámabók* was to support the claims to land-ownership of leading families at the beginning of the twelfth century, he seems to me to be unnecessarily blinkered when he denies the existence or minimises the significance of other factors which may have influenced the form *Landnámabók* in fact took. There can be little doubt that right from the beginning traditions and folk-tales were recorded in *Landnámabók* which had little or no relevance to rights of ownership. An attempt was made to collect colonists for the whole country so that as few areas as possible were left uncovered. It is doubtful whether the decisive factor was always more an interest in rights of ownership than a desire to produce as comprehensive a register as possible, a sort of *horror vacui* — even if it was necessary to invent *landnámsmenn* to fill the gaps. But on this kind of thing it is difficult to come to definite conclusions and it is safest to dogmatise as little as possible.

JAKOB BENEDIKTSSON

A HISTORY OF THE OLD ICELANDIC COMMONWEALTH. *ÍSLENDINGA SAGA*. By JÓN JÓHANNESSON. Translated from the Icelandic by HARALDUR BESSASON. *University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies Vol. II. University of Manitoba Press. [Winnipeg] 1974. xi+407 pp.*

The English translation of Jón Jóhannesson's *Íslendinga saga* (1956) will be welcomed by teachers and students of Old Norse alike. It answers the need for a trustworthy and authoritative history of the medieval Icelandic commonwealth in English. The original work has long been acknowledged in Iceland and among readers of Icelandic as a standard text-book which gives a general account of the period from the settlement down to 1264 and also covers the country's constitutional, ecclesiastical and economic history. Haraldur Bessason has taken immense trouble over his translation and has produced an English version which is, for the most part, readable and reliable. He has added a number of useful notes and references to the original. True, one sometimes has the feeling of reading a translated work and it is a pity that the original has not sometimes been rendered more freely. Further, there is the occasional mistranslation; for example, on p. 94, where *með gínöndum höfðum* is rendered "with towering heads" Nor is some of the extra information volunteered always entirely accurate; for example, the identification of Hvarfið (sic)



on p. 382 with Cape Farewell is probably not justified (cf. *Íslenszk fornrit* IV, 201, footnote 2). A typographical irritation lies in the fact that þ is always rendered as th; thus, for example, Einar Arnórsson's book is called *Réttarsaga althingis* (p. 371; and wrongly dated 1937). If ð is not transliterated, why should þ be? But minor blemishes like these do nothing to detract from the value of the whole and the undertaking has been entirely worthwhile. As suggested, this book will be of particular value to students of Old Norse at English-speaking universities. It is sturdily produced and contains a large, attractive fold-out map at the end (a vast improvement on the one in the original) showing many of the places mentioned in the text. A short biographical note on Jón Jóhannesson and a select bibliography of his writings have also been added.

RICHARD PERKINS

THE HISTORY OF GREENLAND. II. 1700-1782. By FINN GAD. Translated from the Danish by GORDON C. BOWDEN. C. Hurst & Company. London, 1973. xviii+446 pp.

C. Hurst and Company have now published the second volume of the English translation of Finn Gad's *Grønlands historie*, the first of which (published in 1970) was reviewed by Professor Quinn in *Saga-Book* XVIII (1970-73), 211-19. The present tome covers the years 1700 to 1782, a period which can only be thought of as the age of the Egedes. Inspired by missionary successes in Trankebar and Finmark, Hans Egede arrived in Greenland in 1721 to preach Lutheranism to the descendants of the medieval Norse settlers. He found only Eskimos and for fifteen years this sensitive, compassionate, if perhaps over-serious, man laboured for the conversion of the heathen in the face of manifold adversities. From the beginning of the century, control of Greenland had been in danger of slipping from Danish into Dutch hands, and right up to the 1770s the crews of Dutch ships continued to be an irresponsible and unruly element which undid much of the mission's good work. In the early years, Egede had to rely on a succession of private trading companies for financial support, and this fisher of men's souls was also obliged to concern himself with traffic in blubber, baleen and seal-skins. Poor housing, bad food, scurvy, language difficulties, strained relations with a rival Moravian mission, tenuous communication with the homeland, a smallpox epidemic — these were all problems and setbacks to be contended with. Hans Egede left Greenland in 1736 but in the following

years the work of evangelisation and colonisation was carried on by his sons, Poul and Niels, and a growing number of gifted and zealous men, some of whom had family ties with the Egedes — Egill Thorhallesen, Jørgen Sverdrup, Henric Christopher Glahn, Hans Egede Saabye were just a few of them. Poul Egede stayed only until 1740 but in Denmark he later produced his *Dictionarium groenlandico-latinum* (1750), the first Eskimo dictionary ever to appear, and a Greenlandic grammar (1760). Niels Egede distinguished himself not only as a missionary but also as a trader and whaling technician. He was in Greenland until 1782. From about 1740 the mission gained ground at greater speed. In 1740 there were only two settled areas, around Godthåb and around Christianshåb. By 1776 there was a chain of mission- and trading-stations up the west coast from Julianehåb in the extreme south to Upernavik north of the seventy-second parallel. In 1774 the Danish government took sole control of the Greenland trade and by the end of the period exerted full sovereignty over its northerly possession. The theme of this volume, then, is the opening up of modern Greenland. Gad's whole exposition is well written and well proportioned. There are excellent portraits of the important personalities and the political background in Denmark is given clear and adequate coverage. There are interesting and often humorous descriptions of everyday life in the Greenland colony in the early days and of the slow and often painful assimilation of European culture by the Greenlanders. The author is clearly more at home with the sources for this period than he was with those needed for his first volume. Certainly the English rendering is of a much higher standard. All in all, then, this volume is a credit to both author and translator. We look forward to the third volume with pleasure.

RICHARD PERKINS

DIE ISLÄNDERSAGA. Herausgegeben von WALTER BAETKE. *Wege der Forschung*, CLI. *Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft*. Darmstadt 1974. xxii + 390 pp.

This book, a collection of contributions by divers hands to the study of the Sagas of Icelanders, is considerably out of date — its bibliography extends no further than 1965, and the final item in the collection, Hermann Pálsson's *Síðfræði Hrafnkels sögu*, dates from 1964. The purpose of this review will be partly to assess the usefulness of the book to readers of English and partly to bring to their attention relevant material published since 1964.

Six of the 23 "items" included in the book are accessible in English — either published originally in English or available in translation. The former is the case with excerpts from W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* and an extract from Halvdan Koht's *The Old Norse Sagas*. The latter is the case with items by Axel Olrik and Paul V. Rubow, with one of the two items by Knut Liestøl, and with one of the three by Sigurður Nordal. The items in question, which with the exception of Rubow's two essays consist mostly of extracts, will be found in English in the following works: Axel Olrik, *Viking Civilization* (1930), 175-92; Paul V. Rubow, *Two Essays* (1949), 30-64; Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas* (1930), 25-37, 233-54; and Sigurður Nordal, *Hrafnkels saga: a Study* (1958), 1-6. Apart from the curious fact that Rubow's two essays are treated as though they were first published in 1936, the items collected in the book are in chronological order; Rubow's essays will be found in their original published form in *Tilskueren* (1928) 1, 347-57 and 11, 170-4. Heusler's "Die isländische Saga: Ihr Werdegang" (1943) which is placed before Dag Strömbäck's "Von der isländischen Familiensaga" (1942) had in fact appeared in the second edition of Heusler's *Die allgermanische Dichtung* (1941).

Many of the works excerpted or reproduced have been summarized and placed in their historical setting by Theodore M. Andersson in *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (1964). This is the case with the items by Rubow and Liestøl already mentioned (Andersson, 70-71, 47 ff.); the other item by Liestøl, "Tradisjon og forfattar i den isländske ættesaga" (Andersson, 77); Maurer's "Ueber die Hœnsna-Póris saga" (Andersson, 39-40); Jessen's "Glaubwürdigkeit der Egils-Saga . . ." (Andersson, 42-3); Bugge's "Entstehung und Glaubwürdigkeit der isländischen Saga" (Andersson, 58); Bley's *Eigla-Studien* (Andersson, 54); B. M. Ólsen's "Um Íslendingasögur" (Andersson, 70, 72); Nordal's *Snorri Sturluson and his Sagalitteratur* (Andersson, 76); and with Baetke's "Ueber die geschichtlichen Gehalt der Isländersagas" (Andersson, 79). Further, the essential arguments of Finnur Jónsson about the historicity of the sagas in the second edition of his literary history are outlined by Andersson on pp. 45-6 of his book, even though the passages he selects for discussion are not precisely the same as those selected by Baetke for inclusion in his collection. The omission of Andersson's book from Baetke's bibliography is thus very striking, as is also that of P. G. Foote's article "Some Account of the Present State of Saga-Research", *Scandinavica* (1965), 115-26. Foote discusses much of the material covered by Andersson and Baetke, and gives

more space than Andersson does to a discussion of the theories of Barði Guðmundsson and Bjarni Einarsson, whose contributions to saga-research are represented in Baetke's collection by extracts from Barði's book *Höfundur Njáls* and by the foreword and introduction to Bjarni's book *Skáldasögur*. The content of Hermann Pálsson's article, mentioned above, is now available in English in an expanded and somewhat altered form in his *Art and Ethics in Hrafnkel's Saga* (1971).

I have yet to mention two of the three items by Baetke himself, his "Zum Erzählstil der Isländersagas" and extracts from the introduction to his edition of *Hænsna-Þórissaga*. These, like those by Heusler and Strömbäck mentioned above, are perhaps not as readily approachable through the medium of English as the remainder of the collection. In the first Baetke seeks to resolve the apparent contradiction between the realistic psychology and the impressionistic narrative technique of the Sagas of Icelanders by characterizing their narrative style as dramatic; in the second he suggests that the differences between the events of *Hænsna-Þórissaga* and the historical events on which it is ultimately based should be explained not by reference to oral tradition but by the fact that this saga, like other Sagas of Icelanders, is the artistic composition of an author whose main purpose was to entertain. Heusler in his contribution suggests that, for all the differences in style and content between the Irish and the Icelandic sagas, the ancient Irish art of oral storytelling may have provided the original stimulus for the narration of sagas in Iceland, and that the creative achievement represented by the Sagas of Icelanders is collective (*gruppenhaft*), that is to say, *primarily* the achievement of many narrators, oral and lettered, rather than of individuals. Strömbäck's contribution is a restrained attack on Rubow's view that the Sagas of Icelanders may be regarded as historical novels. According to Strömbäck, their partial background in oral tradition should never be lost sight of, and in cases like *Heiðarvíga saga*, where such a background is particularly marked, it is inappropriate to compare the sagas with novels, though the comparison is apt enough in the case of *Njáls saga*, for instance.

In attempting to bring Baetke's bibliography up to date I shall concentrate chiefly on works in English. Theodore M. Andersson's *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (1967) is in many ways a useful handbook for beginners, though criticism of it should be chased up in Hans Bekker-Nielsen, ed., *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies* (1963 ff., in progress). Peter Hallberg's statistical studies of the sagas, referred to by Baetke

on p. xiv of his foreword, have been provided with a German summary in Hallberg's *Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur* (1968). Remarks in the items by Bley, Nordal, Liestøl, Rubow and Strömbäck on the nature of truth and fiction in the Sagas of Icelanders seem to look forward in different ways to Steblin-Kamenskij's *The Saga Mind* (1973), which, however, does little to solve the problems raised by this subject, as two reviews in *Medieval Scandinavia* (1973), 215-21 and (1974), 102-17 will show. W. P. Ker's remarks on the general absence from the sagas of a too explicit heroic ideal are rendered more specific by those of Michael Chesnutt on *Njáls saga* in his contribution to Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson and Desmond Slay, eds., *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference* (1973), 28-65. Rubow's emphasis on the influence of *Tristrams saga* on Old Icelandic literature should now be seen in relation to Paul Schach's article on the subject in E. C. Polomé, ed., *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: a Symposium* (1969), 81-129; Bjarni Einarsson's "The Lovesick Skald", *Medieval Scandinavia* (1971), 21-41; Jónas Kristjánsson's conclusions on *Fóstbræðra saga*, summarized in English in his *Um Fóstbræðra sögu* (1972); and Peter Hallberg's "Is there a Tristram-Group of the Riddarasögur?" in *Scandinavian Studies* (1975), 1-17. The most recent contributions I have been able to find to the study of the individual sagas treated at length in Baetke's collection are Peter Hallberg's remarks on *Hænsna-Póris saga* in his report on the Second International Saga Conference in *Edda* (1973), 373-82; Christine Fell's introduction and bibliography to her recent translation of *Egils saga* (1975); and articles by F. J. Heinemann and Walter Scheps on *Hrafnkels saga* and *Njáls saga* respectively in *Scandinavian Studies* (1974), 102-33. Scheps refers, *inter alia*, to Paul Schach, trans., *Njáls Saga: A Literary Masterpiece* (1971), by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, a scholar whose work is strikingly absent from Baetke's collection. To readers who are stimulated by Bugge's and Heusler's contributions to investigate the Irish "Free-prose-Book-prose" problem I recommend Nessa Ní Shé's foreword to the 1971 reprint of Gerard Murphy's *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland*, and Francis John Byrne's "'Senchas': the Nature of Gaelic Historical Tradition" in *Historical Studies. Papers read before the Irish Conference of Historians*. IX . . . (1974), 137-59.

Baetke's collection will undoubtedly be of great value to German students of Old Icelandic, though I think they will be rightly irritated by the misprints with which it is riddled. I am not competent to judge the quality of the various translations into German in the book, which again are by divers hands, though

I may say that I have found Baetke's own contributions to the collection by far the easiest and the pleasantest to read.

R. W. McTurk

DIE SAGA VON GRETTIR. Aus dem Altisländischen übersetzt und kommentiert von HUBERT SEELOW. *Saga*, 2. Eugen Diederichs Verlag. Düsseldorf and Cologne, 1974. 288 pp. DM 38.

This translation of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* represents the second volume in a series of six planned as a commemoration of the eleventh centenary of the settlement of Iceland in 874. Vol. 1, *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, also appeared in 1974, and the remaining volumes — containing *Laxdæla saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grænlendinga saga*, *Gautreks saga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Friðþjófs saga ens frækna* — are due to be published at the rate of a volume a year until 1978. It is perhaps worth noting that publication has been assisted by the Icelandic consuls in seven West German cities.

This is the first German translation of *Grettis saga* since Paul Herrmann's, also published by Eugen Diederichs, then in Jena, as vol. 5 of the famous *Sammlung Thule* in 1913; this was reprinted, with a postscript by H. M. Heinrichs, in 1963. Herrmann's language now sounds slightly dated, and so Seelow's fresh and vigorous translation is extremely welcome. It reads very well, avoiding archaisms and the equally inappropriate modern colloquialisms which often mar translations of medieval literature. As one would expect in this permissive age, Grettir's sexual adventure (ch. 75) has not been prudishly suppressed as it was in G. A. Hight's well-known English translation. The general reader may find it tedious to be expected to look in footnotes for elucidation of Icelandic names (twenty-eight times in the first four pages!). It surely does no harm to call Hálfðan svartí "Halfðan der Schwarze", etc. One respect in which Seelow's translation represents a major improvement on Herrmann's version is in the rendering of the verse passages. While Herrmann strove to reproduce the strophic forms and adorned his efforts with rhyme and alliteration and thus frequently sacrificed intelligibility, Seelow has wisely concentrated on conveying the sense of the original, the kennings being explained in notes. Thus the pun on "Hallmundr" (ch. 54, str. 43) now becomes clear; Herrmann's version was a travesty of the original.

The translation is followed by a simple map of Iceland (which is considerably less informative than that in the *Sammlung Thule* volume) and by nine pages of notes on the text. It would have been useful if there had been indications in the text that these notes exist. Seelow has also written a "Nachwort" (pp. 239-60) in which he gives an up-to-date survey of scholarship on the saga. There is a brief account of the manuscripts, references to Grettir in other texts, and the sources of the work. There is special comment on the parallels with *Beowulf*, a question on which Seelow sits on the fence — as he does over the question of the transmission of the Tristram elements used in *Spesar þáttr*. He further discusses the verses and the age of the saga and the problem of its authorship. In his brief attempt to offer an interpretation of the work, Seelow, perhaps somewhat inadequately, sees the 'message' embodied in the sentence. . . *sitt er hvúrt, gæfa eða górvigleikr* . . . (ch. 34) "es sind verschiedene Dinge, Glück und Tapferkeit" (p. 252). There follows a summary of the events covered in the saga and their structural significance (pp. 252-60). It is disappointing to find so little in the way of an assessment of the literary merit of the saga. The struggle with Glám is described as the "artistic climax" of the work and the "plastic description" in that episode is said to be some of the best in Icelandic prose writing (p. 255), but surely we can expect something a little more profound than that? Nevertheless, on the whole Seelow's "Nachwort" gives a fair view of the current state of scholarship regarding the saga. The select bibliography, comprising twenty-five items, is up-to-date. The volume concludes with a full index of names with explanatory notes (pp. 263-88).

JOHN L. FLOOD

KARLAMAGNUS SAGA. THE SAGA OF CHARLEMAGNE AND HIS HEROES. Translated by CONSTANCE B. HIEATT. *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 13. The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Toronto, 1975. Volume One. 346 pp.

Interesting though *Karlamagnús Saga* (*Kms*) is to students of Old Norse literature, it is probably of even greater interest to Romance scholars and students of comparative mediaeval literature. Apart from its intrinsic value, it preserves versions of several Old French epic poems which, as has been shown by recent research (e.g. Halvorsen's *Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland* and Aebischer's *La première Branche de la Karlamagnus Saga*),

are in some cases older than extant Old French texts. It therefore sheds valuable light on the development of Old French epic poems.

Scholars in these fields closely related to Old Norse literature have generally been faced with the problem of reading the text of *Kms* in the original language, itself in places dauntingly obscure. Indeed, only branches VIII and IX have so far been translated, by E. Koschwitz and P. Aebischer into German and French, and by P. A. Becker into German respectively. Even the first branch, probably the most interesting to non-Norse scholars, was available only in a short summary by G. Paris until the recent translation by P. Aebischer. And branches III and VII, both of which are of the utmost interest to Romance scholars, still remain inaccessible to those inexperienced in Old Norse.

It will therefore be immediately obvious how necessary and welcome a translation of the entire *Kms* into a widely read modern language must be. Professor Hieatt's enterprise, in undertaking to supply material so important both for the study of comparative mediaeval literature in general and of Old French epics in particular, can thus only be acclaimed with gratitude and enthusiasm.

The present volume, the first in a series of three, consists of a translation of the first three branches, preceded by a general introduction to *Kms* itself, short synopses of the individual branches and a brief survey of relevant scholarship. The scholar new to the field will find the introduction admirably informative and the exposition of critical attitudes towards the saga lucid and complete, if not particularly original. It is supplemented by a short select bibliography in which the only serious omission is that of P. Aebischer's recent book, *Textes Norrois et Littérature française du moyen âge II, La première branche de la Karlamagnus saga*, 1972.

The translator of *Kms* is faced with many problems of style. The Old Norse is itself apparently affected by the style of the Old French from which it was translated, with the result that in places it is far from easy and fluent. Professor Hieatt has clearly tried to steer a middle course between the terse, sometimes awkward, structure of her original and the easy English prose acceptable to a modern reader. She often chooses to avoid reproducing such characteristics of style as alternation between the past tense and the historic present in order to produce something more like contemporary prose.

However, whilst full credit must be given to Professor Hieatt for her achievement, some inaccuracies in translation which



will prove misleading to the reader altogether ignorant of Old Norse should be pointed out before the book goes through a second edition. It would be inappropriate here to attempt a complete analysis of the text, so a few examples may serve to illustrate the weaknesses that do exist.

Some are faults of omission: e.g. 72/19: *after* Saxland, *add* but Karlamagnus did not accept the offer. Then Drefja offered to go (Unger 9/29); 136/12: *after* it, *add* then he had measured how wide the river was and commanded the army to make a bridge across (U.41/27); 155/6: *after* him, *add* he was brought a horse, grey in colour, which he had obtained in Spain (U.48/18); 253/26: *after* comrades, *add* there were a thousand squires (U.82/24); 323/29: *after* help, *add* those who are trapped there (U.122/24). Some of these are probably explicable as scribal errors of the type "saut du même au même". Some minor omissions of one or two words can however hardly be justified along these lines: e.g.: 57/23: *after* and (2), *add* good (U.2, 37); 72/29: *after* Puleis, *add* with the letters (U.10/1); 78/24: *after* horns, *add* and trumpets (U.13/8); 111/1: *after* Leunz, *add* with ten thousand knights (U.29/5); 147/27: *after* washed, *add* and dried out (U.45/25).

Major misunderstandings do occur here and there: e.g.: þat sem pér berr at hendi (U.2/27), translated: if you will bear this on your hand (57/11), would be better rendered: whatever difficulties come to hand; ok var ekki at gert nema fengit til (U.41/32), instead of: but nothing was finished, the work had only started (136/17), read: and no progress was made beyond assembling the materials; Undrum verði sá, segir hann, er hann hirðir, ef ná má honum (U.45/11), translated: it would be a marvel, says he, for him to take care of him, if I can capture him (147/9), could be more sensibly rendered: let him be an object of wonder, he says, who obeys him (Karlamagnus), if he (Ful) may be taken; skyldi eigi sjá blóðit er hann koemi (U.45/26), translated: would not see the blood that had been shed (147/28), could be better rendered: would not see the blood when he came; ok laust hann hállslög (U.48/24), instead of: he granted him his freedom (155/12), read: and he dubbed him a knight. There is also the occasional mistranslation of an individual word: or boenum (U.2/22), *instead of*: as they were asked (57/5), *read*: from the town; scemiliga (U.11/1), *instead of* together (75/3), *read* fittingly; borgarmenn (U.13/9), *instead of* bowmen (78/25), *read* townsmen; með góðum klæðum (U.19/22), *instead of* in golden robes (195/4), *read* in good robes; at fjórða manni hvártveggja (U.46/21), *instead of* the fourth degree of kinship on the male side (150/13), *read* the fourth degree of kinship on each side.

Grammatical confusions are not unduly frequent, although a misreading of a neuter 3rd person plural pronoun as a masculine results in a rather curious interpretation: Tók erkibiskup síðan þau er hann skyldi hafa með sér ok geymdi, en Basin þau sem honum heyrðu til (U.9/27), *instead of* the archbishop took those who were to accompany him and looked after them, and Basin saw to those who were to go with him (72/19), *read* then the archbishop took those letters which he was to have with him and put them safely up and Basin took those which concerned him. There is besides an overall tendency to confuse the number of pronouns: they promised to give him (76/5), *instead of* he promised to give them; he blew his trumpet (138/5), *instead of* they blew their trumpets; he left (1, 2) (144/13), *instead of* they left; he made (148/7), *instead of* they made. And number in nouns is not always strictly preserved either: horse (74/5), *instead of* horses; a letter (85/7), *instead of* letters.

Although the translation is chiefly intended for the benefit of Romance scholars, Professor Hieatt's work proves to be of great interest to the student of Norse literature, particularly on account of the sensible array of footnotes to the text directing attention to comparable passages in the parallel French texts. Another feature of considerable supplementary benefit to the Norse scholar is the index which, with a few unfortunate omissions, not only lists the occurrences of proper names but also, where possible, identifies them. A few additional identified characters could be added: Akard of Mesines: Achart de Mesines (Langlois, *Table des noms propres de toute expèce compris dans les chansons de geste imprimées*, 1904, p. 4); Arned of Bolland: Hernaude de Beaulande (Langlois p. 337); Geddon af Brittania: Oedon de Bretagne (Langlois p. 493); Hatun af Kampaneis: Eodun de Champenois (Langlois p. 494).

In conclusion, it must be borne in mind that the errors in the text form only a tiny percentage of the whole and that criticism expressed in these notes is aimed simply towards supplementing a work which in itself constitutes a remarkable piece of scholarship. This first volume is an achievement which augurs well for the complete translation of the saga promised by Professor Hieatt. Her enterprise represents an important step forward in the study of *Kms* and, in making the text accessible to the scholarly world at large, opens the door to a whole range of fruitful lines of research into the Norse compilation and its sources.

ANNETTE GODEFROIT

DRAUMKVÆDE. AN EDITION AND STUDY. By MICHAEL BARNES. *Universitetsforlaget*. Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, 1974. 264 pp.

Judging from the final remark in his Preface, Michael Barnes would admit that this is a difficult book to read. So it is — not because of his presentation, but because of the complexity of the material treated. Yet for those interested in *Draumkvæde* and its relationship to other ballads, the effort required to work through it is repaid in full. It is divided into five sections, the third of which, that dealing with the texts, is by far the most complicated. The second, a survey of *Draumkvæde* research, is much easier going, and the work of many earlier and established *Draumkvæde* scholars is examined critically, often with comments both scathing and humorous; but also sometimes with admiration. Michael Barnes has, in fact, in his own analysis of the material at our disposal, succeeded in making a fresh start and avoided carrying on the opinions and, possibly, errors of earlier scholars. Much of this section, which looks at the great wealth of variants and seeks to categorise them, has almost the aspect of mathematical tables, and like mathematical tables they are confusing at first sight, but mean something significant on careful examination.

Two things the author does not do: although the book is subtitled "an edition", he makes no attempt to produce a "definitive" version, nor does he venture into the realm of speculation and seek to give anything like a precise date for the composition of the ballad or ballads upon which what we now know as *Draumkvæde* is based. He is content to finish this long section by suggesting that something like certain versions still extant was sung "in at least parts of Telemark before the Reformation". A more conservative judgement could scarcely be found, and it hangs on a methodical examination of the texts on the basis of what is found to be a reasonable definition of *Draumkvæde*. Mr Barnes has been careful to avoid bolder and less well substantiated judgements: indeed, this is one of the objects of the book. The case is argued convincingly and logically, and unless someone comes up with new material, it will probably not be possible to date it still earlier, tempted though one might be to try.

The long analysis of the value of the different versions is followed by a section containing several of them. Here one cannot expect all extant versions to be included, but it would have been interesting to see V9 among them, since it has loomed large in the previous section. Each version is followed by notes and variants, and then comes a section devoted to an examination of the language of the ballad. Finally come notes, glossary and indices which make the book easier to use than it would otherwise

be, all done with the thoroughness characteristic of the rest of it.

One of the greatest difficulties facing the author has in fact been to decide just what *Draumkvæde* is. To what extent does it conform to the ballad pattern, and to what extent do parts of it represent *stev* which have been included, because of their similarity to the remainder of the text? There appears to be no final answer to this either, though perhaps it would be worth considering whether *Draumkvæde* does not in fact stand in a category of its own, neither *visa* nor *stev*. It is unique, and one might as well recognise that fact, even when trying to define it. Mr Barnes shows himself aware of this problem in pointing out that it is called a *kvæde*, though he adds that this term is used by many scholars in just the same sense as *visa*.

All in all this is a major and original contribution to *Draumkvæde* studies; it is not a literary appraisal; it demolishes many established theories and may therefore prove controversial. But it is a book no student of *Draumkvæde* will be able to ignore in future.

W. GLYN JONES

THE BUILDING AND TRIALS OF THE REPLICA OF AN ANCIENT BOAT: THE GOKSTAD FAERING. PART I BUILDING THE REPLICA. By SEAN McGRAIL. PART II THE SEA TRIALS. By ERIC MCKEE. *National Maritime Museum Monographs and Reports* No. 11, 1974. vii + 59 pp. and iv + 38 pp.

Some of our contemporary writers on the Viking Age have always manifested an uncritical admiration for the Viking ship of Gokstad type, and are beginning to include the Skuldelev knorr among the objects of a veneration in some danger of becoming superstitious. Their attitude is a far cry from the assured superiority with which the *Parker Chronicle* entry for 897 patronises the Viking ships its author knew. He describes them as built many years earlier and inferior in speed, stability and freeboard (and therefore seaworthiness) to Alfred's ships. The authors of this most recent splendid contribution to a series of reports which has established already a very high standard would, I think, on balance be on the side of the contemporary Old English observers rather than the modern admirers. But about this one can only speculate, since their presentation is a model of objectivity, honesty and modesty, and one's only regret must be that the two authors restricted themselves so rigorously to the factual and do not deal in implications. By conducting this important experiment with adequate instrumentation to give

precise values for the speed, stability and manoeuvrability of their replica they have, it is to be hoped, ensured that discussions of Viking ships will, in future, be more firmly based. In this respect their work though brief may properly be called epoch-making. One quotation from each Part will show both the originality and the integrity of the approach.

From the *Gokstad* ship replica built in Norway in 1893, to the current British replicas of the *Mayflower*, *Nonsuch* and *Golden Hinde*, all replicas have been influenced by a mixture of motives, such as national prestige, commercial success and historic nostalgia. These influences seem often to have overshadowed the claims of research and the replicas cannot, therefore, claim to be successful archaeological experiments, especially as few if any have been published in rigorous form (McGrail, p. 1).

At 4.9 knots 10.9 Ft lbs [torque on the tiller was] needed, and at 5.2 knots 13.5 Ft lbs. Though the boat was steady on the correct course, it is thought that these rather large couples were necessary to overcome yaw set up by the two not being astern of the tug . . . As fitted to this replica it seems that this steering gear is only mechanically and hydro-dynamically effective for small angles of helm. This will need to be confirmed or refuted by independent trials on other boats with side rudders. If this is shown to be so, then this limitation must have been a significant obstacle to the development of the sailing boat that could change tacks (McKee, pp. 24, 26).

This is a refreshing change from the constant quoting from one book to the next of the same selective quotations from Magnus Andersen's account of *Viking*, but never of his account of the impossibility of tacking through the wind, which probably influenced nineteenth-century scholars into underestimating the Viking ship's sailing ability. It provokes reflection on the design parameters which produced a vessel of this type, and represents a combination of general awareness and scientific detail which the Viking ship, in spite of recent important work in Denmark, has never received in print. The choice of the 20 ft boat from Gokstad and not the ship itself was determined, as Basil Greenhill, Director of the National Maritime Museum, tells us in a foreword, by funds available and the need to assure the completion of an experiment of manageable size as a pilot project. But some features of the boat have always seemed to me those of a miniaturised longship; the shape of the sheerplank, the stems, the rudder, the concave waterlines are more representative of such a ship than an ordinary workboat, and I understand that Christensen shares this feeling in general though he would not necessarily agree in details. If this

is so (and the technicalities cannot be developed in a brief review), then this experiment has more to tell us about Viking longships than may appear at first sight, for whilst some conclusions are affected by change of scale, others are not. The skittish lack of initial stability and the ability to produce vertical accelerations of 1 g in anyone unfortunate enough to be in the bows when doing 6 knots into waves only one metre high (an everyday occurrence in the eyes of some modern admirers) are valid for longships of this type and illuminate the calm confidence of the *Parker Chronicle* as well as the vessel's ability to carry a large crew long distances to windward.

It is characteristic that the authors are as frank about what can be learnt from mistakes as about what they have proved. It is a pity that, because of difficulty with oak, laminated wooden stems were used, and Magnus Andersen's use of raw oak building outside in a cold winter (not mentioned in the Report) was in this more probably authentic as well as more successful. And an excess in stripped weight of 15 per cent over the original is, as the Report admits, disturbingly high. It becomes less important as the total weight of gear etc. increases, but it does show very well how difficult it is to equal Viking shipbuilders in their concentration on light weight even at the cost of lowered strength, shorter life and less seaworthy hulls. The implications of this in intended purpose, propulsion and ability to hold (in smooth waters) more than they could really carry safely are striking, and contrast with the knorr.

If the Graveney boat receives treatment of this quality, then Anglo-Saxon historians and archaeologists will be as deeply indebted to the National Maritime Museum as those interested in Viking ships must be for this brief but profoundly stimulating report.

ALAN BINNS

THE POETIC EDDA. I. HEROIC POEMS. Edited with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by URSULA DRONKE. *Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press*, 1969. xvi+251 pp.

When Sophus Bugge brought out his celebrated *Norraen Fornkvæði* in 1867, the art of editing and elucidating Eddaic poetry was a long-established academic pursuit. His bibliography includes the Arnarnagnæan edition from 1787-1828 and such distinguished names as Sveinbjörn Egilsson, Svend Grundtvig,

Konráð Gíslason, the Brothers Grimm and T. Möbius. Notwithstanding all the significant contributions offered during the past hundred years, particularly by German scholars, this branch of philology is still essentially the same discipline today as it was in Bugge's time and his classic edition remains a model in many ways. No one expects a modern edition of Eddaic poetry to reveal a radical departure from the nineteenth-century tradition, but it would be useful if every new editor would state explicitly the textual and exegetical principles behind his work, and an indication of his actual contributions would make it easier for the student to compare his edition and commentary with those of his predecessors. In my opinion, one of the inherent weaknesses in Eddaic scholarship as it has been practised over the years is the arbitrary way in which individual words are singled out for comment; it is often done in such a way that it is difficult to tell whether the explanatory notes are written in order to help us make sense of the poems or are intended for some extra-literary purposes. Also, in spite of the common tradition to which all the editions of the Poetic Edda belong, editors show some remarkable divergences in their treatment of the Codex Regius, ranging from a faithful transliteration of the medieval texts to a capricious re-writing of the verbal artifacts to suit the editor's notions about metre, aesthetics, culture and legendary history. The best scholars, however, are careful to distinguish between the roles of editor and commentator, and it is a great pity that others have excessively imposed their idiosyncrasies on the text, rather than relegating them to footnotes, where they properly belong.

In the Preface to her new edition of *Atlakviða*, *Atlamál*, *Guðrúnarhvöt* and *Hamðismál*, Mrs Dronke informs us that this is the first part of a four-volume edition of the Poetic Edda, which will include several poems not in the Codex Regius. The scope of the proposed series can be gauged from the size of the present volume: to these four poems she devotes more than two hundred and fifty pages, of which the texts and translations take up only forty-five, the rest comprising notes (textual, cultural and linguistic) and extended essays on various literary aspects of the poems, their analogues and legendary background. Not only does her literary criticism surpass anything available on these poems in English, but I doubt if they have ever been analyzed with such clarity and passion. The translations are superb, combining fidelity to the original with felicity of style; the stark beauty and dignity of the poems are fluently conveyed. And for the student it is an invaluable aid to be given in English such an articulate treatment of numerous textual and linguistic problems as Mrs

Dronke provides in her commentary. As a teacher of Old Icelandic I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness to her work, which enables me and others to include the four poems in the reading list for undergraduates.

Although the admirable qualities of Mrs Dronke's scholarship will undoubtedly rank her among the outstanding Eddaic scholars of the century, I can hardly be the only reader to entertain some serious misgivings about the volume. As she casually points out in her Preface, the compiler of the Edda collection, "arranged his material with much forethought and care", yet she made the dubious decision to present the poems in a different order, thus destroying the organic unity of the Codex Regius as a whole. *Hamðismál* is not only a poem about Hamðir's and Sörl's fateful quest for revenge: at different levels it forms the last phase of the Nibelungen Cycle and, beyond that, it brings the codex as a total structure to its inexorable conclusion. In the context of the manuscript the fall of the last of the Gjúkungar may be thematically related to the poems preceding *Hamðismál*, all the way back to *Völuspá*, with which the codex so powerfully begins. The decision to present the Poetic Edda in such a dismembered state is probably the reason why Mrs Dronke left out the prose passage *Dráp Atla* which comes immediately before *Atlakviða* in the codex; this short piece is of course relevant to the interpretation of the poem itself. What she gains by her revolutionary arrangement is that it facilitates the scrutiny of each individual poem in isolation from the rest, but we must wait until she has completed her edition before we can tell whether the new Eddaic order is really worth the trouble.

Another questionable editorial policy is to normalize "the spelling of the text, maintaining a compromise between existing printing convention for Old Norse (based largely on etymological spellings), and the orthography of the MS., where this differs from the conventions" (p. xiv). Such an arbitrary compromise is bound to diminish the value of her edition for linguistic purposes.

Mrs Dronke's textual emendations fall into two separate categories, though she never makes clear the principles involved. Like many of her predecessors, she offers new readings where the text is obviously corrupt, an activity that can be regarded as a legitimate part of the editor's function of making sense of the text. On the whole, these emendations are plausible, though the reader is bound to ask whether it was always necessary to change the text, instead of dealing with the problems in the commentary. However, her edition contains a number of textual alterations which are not only unnecessary but even, in some cases, offer



readings inferior to those of the Codex Regius. Thus, for example, she changes *liðskíðlfar diúpa* (Akv. 14/2) to *liðskíðlfar djúpar*, an emendation rejected by Bugge for the perfectly sound reason that the genitive plural gives better sense than a qualifying adjective. The phrase *liðskíðlfar diúpa* could be compared with *Rosmofíoll Rínar* in the same poem. The emasculation of the line *svinn áskunna* (Akv. 27/7) into *(á) sú in áskunna* is hard to defend, though admittedly there seems to be something wrong with the text here. A simpler and less drastic emendation would be to change *áskunna* to *áskunnra* (i.e. *Svinn Rín skal ráða rógmálmi skatna, arfi áskunnra Niflunga*), as one would expect the royal house, rather than the river, to have divine associations. In the same poem *gengo inn hvárir* makes perfect sense (see Jón Helgason's note on 35/6 in *Tvær kviður fornar*), but Mrs Dronke substitutes *hvatir* for *hvárir*. Also *Atlamál* has suffered considerably through the editor's zealous efforts to improve on the Codex Regius text. In particular I question her treatment of 1/6, 2/3, 5/6, 7/2, 47/7, 52/4, 67/5, 76/3, 83/7 and 89/1. I should like to mention two examples. It is hard to understand why anyone should want to change *Illa rézk Atla* (2/3) to *Illa rézk Atli*, as the impersonal construction not only gives better sense in the context but is also more idiomatic. The emendation of *heimsko harðræðis* to *heimsko ok harðræðis* (83/7) may on the surface seem innocuous enough, yet in this twelfth-century poem the unadulterated text is decisively preferable. In *Guðrúnarhvöt* the editor has arbitrarily changed *helvegi* (2/10) to *hervegi* and *Goðþjóðo* (8/6 and 16/4) to *Gotþjóðo*; both changes serve to alter the total meaning of the poem considerably. The reading *hugumstæri* (*Hamðismál* 6/2) should probably have been retained, though *hugumstóri* occurs elsewhere in the poem. The reasons offered for changing *opt ór þeim belg* (*Hmð.* 26/3) to *opt ór rauðum belg* are hardly adequate, though one must admit that the new reading adds a gory bit of colour to the proceedings. Following Bugge (though he leaves the lines in the text) and others, she argues for the rejection of the first two lines in stanza 24 (*Hitt kvað þá Hamðir inn hugumstóri*) on the grounds that the following speech must be attributed to Sörli, but her interpretation of that part of *Hamðismál* is open to discussion.

Mrs Dronke's commentary testifies to a remarkably wide range of learning, but some of her erudite notes take us tendentiously away from the poems they serve. Occasionally, her assertive statements convey the impression that she has found the final solution to hitherto intractable problems, inviting us not to question her authoritative pronouncements, even where there still

seems to be plenty of room for doubt. One can easily detect a certain reluctance on her part to accept the painful reality that these verbal artifacts belong to too remote an age for us to hope to attain a perfect understanding of them. A thirteenth-century manuscript of a ninth-century poem like *Atlakviða* may be textually sound in some of the places that baffle us most, for the simple reason that we have no means of retrieving the precise meanings and functions of its archaic vocabulary. This obviously applies to terms relating to ancient customs and beliefs. How can we be sure that modern scholarship has given us an adequate key to the poetic functions of the following words in *Atlakviða*: *ðísir*, *nornir*, *skíaldmeyjar*, *sigtívar*, *Sigtýs berg*, *valhöll*, (*h*)*liðskíðlf*, *giöld Rognis*, *Myrkheimr*, *hólkvir hvílbeðjar* and *fiarghús*? Should the commentator consider the element "nifl" in *Niflungar*, *geir-Niflungar* and *nifl-farnir* as a deliberate part of the total design of the poem, or are we to ignore its recurrence when we set out to interpret the words individually? To what extent can we assume words to be intentionally ambivalent when two different meanings are possible? There are several semantic problems of this kind which are not satisfactorily dealt with in the commentary. As an example of an unhappy way of dealing with the text, I should like to mention *Atlakviða* 12/1-4: *Leiddo landrögni / lýðar óneisir / grátendr gunnhvata / ór garði húna*. In her notes she argues that "either we must emend to *gunnhvatan*, agreeing with *landrögni* . . . or assume a swift development from singular to plural, from Gunnarr alone, the *landrögnir*, to include Hogni, both men brave in war." And her note on *húna* reads: "if this is not an error, it can only be interpreted as 'the children of Gunnarr and Hogni', cubs of *bræðr berhardir* (cf. *Vkv* 32/4, *Ghv* 12/1). *Húnar* is never used, like *Gotar*, in a general sense 'heroes'." But the editor does not explore the possibility that *Húna* could be acc. pl. and used in the same sense as elsewhere in the poem (2/4, 4/4, 7/12, 15/7, 16/9, 27/12, 35/4 and 39/5, cf. also *Húnmork* 13/5), in which case *gunnhvata* would be the adjective qualifying the noun. There is no reason why the finite verb *leiddo* and the prepositional phrase *ór garði* should not serve a dual function here: *Óneisir lýðar leiddo landrögni ór garði, grátendr (leiddo) gunnhvata Húna (ór garði)*. The acc. pl. would then refer to *Knéfrøðr* and his retinue.

Considering the state of our knowledge of ninth-tenth-century Norse one is bound to wonder about the validity of the suggestions that "Gunnar" may have coined the word *blakfialler* "with special reference to him and Hogni" (p. 25), that "*skíaldmeyjar Húna* is a fiction of the poet's for the purposes of his poem" (note on *Akv*. 16), and that *Myrkheimr* may have been coined by the poet. In

the notes on *Hamðismál* several compounds are styled as possible coinages by the poet, including *kvistskæða*, *sundrmæðri*, *stórbrögðóttir*, *Hróðrglǫð* and *skíði-iárn*. How can we know? The author of *Atlakvíða* stands accused of using a slang term (*bras* 16/1), and indulging in colloquialisms: *kapps gálig* (6/3) "was no doubt a common colloquialism", and *beidiz* (84/4) is described as a "colloquial ironic idiom". There are several other instances of this sort of thing in the notes, which seems to imply that Mrs Dronke is more familiar with the linguistic habits of the Greenlanders in the twelfth century than the rest of us are. The note on the defective verb *hnóf* (*Ghv* 12/5) suggests that it "may have been a colloquialism for striking or cutting off the head . . . The use of a colloquialism for this cruel act may have been suggested by *Am*: *snýtt hefir þú sífunum* 82/5." The compounds *naudmaðr* (22/4) and *dagmegir* (62/6) certainly merit comment, but to suggest that they are abbreviated forms of *naudhleytamaðr* and *\*dagstarfsmegir* (or *\*dagkaupamegir*) is simply absurd. Before resorting to such fancies, the editor should have explored more thoroughly the poetic functions of the elements *dag*- and *naud*-.

In her literary analysis of the poems Mrs Dronke attempts to establish the sources known to the four poets. Although a good deal of what she says makes excellent sense, one is bound to question some of her assumptions. Is it not possible that the poets of *Atlakvíða* and *Hamðismál* may have known visual representations of the legends, as well as poems and stories? Would it be absurd to assume that some of the descriptive elements in *Atlakvíða* may have been inspired by the same sort of art as the pictures which served as a model for *Ragnarsdrápa*? To what extent can we work out the original form of *Atlakvíða*? Is it necessary to postulate *Preludes* I, II and III to account for the genesis of *Guðrúnarhvot* and the first part of *Hamðismál*? These and many other problems relating to the four poems in this volume may prove insoluble, but it is sometimes better to accept defeat rather than attempt too definitive an answer.

HERMANN PÁLSSON

THE SAGA OF TRISTRAM AND ÍSÖND. Translated with an introduction by PAUL SCHACH. *University of Nebraska Press*, 1973. 148 pp.

This long-promised English translation of *Tristrams saga* significantly reflects increasing interest in the role played by

Continental European literature in the evolution of the classical Icelandic saga. Friar Robert's Norwegian translation is the sole complete version of Thomas of England's *Tristan*, itself only extant in fragments. It is accordingly a work of great importance both in the study of Franco-Scandinavian literary relations and among the numerous forms of the most popular eternal-triangle story known in medieval European art and literature. In the introduction, Professor Schach summarises his extensive research on the Tristan story and sketches the growth and development of the legend in England, France, Germany and Scandinavia.

As the translator of a medieval translation, he is faced with a peculiarly difficult problem in deciding what style to adopt. While Friar Robert's replacement of the verse of his original by the rhetorical prose of *Tristrams saga* may be appropriate from a medieval viewpoint, it is arguable that an attempt to approximate Norse "translator's prose" in a modern English version designed for a wide reading public is not. Schach takes R. S. Loomis to task for his "tedious, tortured, archaic language" (p. xxiii) in *The Romance of Tristram and Ysolt* (1923), a composite of *Tristrams saga* and the Thomas fragments. But compare the versions of:

Konungr þessi hinn frægi ok ríki, Markis, átti systur eina, er svá var frið ok ynnilig, sjálig ok sæmilig, kurteislig ok elskulig, ríkulig ok gofuglig, svá at þvílíkt rósarlíf var ei til í veröldunni, svá at menn vissu til . . . (ed. Kölbing, 1878, V)

This King Mark had one sister that was so fair to see and courteous, kind and worshipful that such a rose was not in the world known of men . . . (Loomis, p. 5)

This renowned and mighty King Markis had a sister who was so beautiful and becoming, lovely and lovable, gracious and graceful, magnificent and majestic that there has not been a flower like her in the world within the ken of man . . . (Schach, p. 7)

Loomis's abridgement seems rather less "tortured" and "tedious" than Schach's brave struggle.

Similarly, "modest maidens and lovely ladies" (Schach, p. 6) for *fríðra meyja ok kurteissa kvenna* (III) may seem clumsy beside "fair damozels and gentle ladies" (Loomis, p. 3). The laboured eye-alliteration of "with her becoming bevy of maidens" (Schach, p. 11) for *með sinum sæmiligum meyja flokki* (VIII) comes perilously close to the burlesque, and "shattering the strongest spear shafts against shields in spirited tilts" (*þeir brutu hin sterkustu spjótskopt á skjöldum sínum í hýrdum atreiðum*, VII) may commend itself as a tongue-twister but hardly for any other reason. Schach himself has remarked that "More liberal use of

litotes and understatement would have been a welcome counter-balance to the plethora of superlatives and hyperbolic effusions which Friar Robert retained from the original of Thomas" (*Essays presented to H. G. Leach*, 1965, p. 79), and this desire for stylistic temperance might well have been applied to his own imitative alliterative extravagances.

Loomis's language is at least consistently, if unashamedly, archaic, while Schach's is often obsolete in a faintly eccentric way: for example, "you are not behaving as it behooves you" (p. 64); "I eat that part of my food that beseems me" (p. 64); "I need that you proffer me some wise counsel" (p. 140). However, these stylistic quirks diminish as the narrative progresses, and Schach's unadorned accounts of dialogue and the lovers' anguished monologues lend the love story itself a poignancy obliterated by Loomis's histrionics.

This *Saga of Tristram and Ísönd* meets a practical need in replacing Loomis's reconstruction of Thomas's *Tristan*, which substitutes the extant fragments of the original for the Norse whenever possible, with an English version of the complete *Tristrams saga*. Whether or not Professor Schach's attempts to imitate Robert's style serve any purpose other than to disconcert the reader is a matter for individual taste, but he has produced an essentially readable and accurate translation which should prove of interest to students of both Scandinavian and European literature.

GERALDINE BARNES

SCANDINAVIAN SETTLEMENT NAMES IN YORKSHIRE. By GILLIAN FELLOWS JENSEN. *Akademisk Forlag*. Copenhagen, 1972. xx + 276 pp., 22 maps.

Stirring movements are in progress in English place-name studies. 'English place-name studies' meaning, of course, the study of the place-names of England, be they British, Welsh, English, Scandinavian, Irish, French or pre-Celtic. On one front those of us interested in the process by which "Britain" became "England & Wales" are seeking to establish typological stratifications by which the place-name evidence may be calibrated against the historical and archaeological evidences. On another, specific typological studies and monographs are being produced, e.g. Karl Inge Sandred's "English Place-Names in *-stede*", and Urs Wagner's work now in progress on place-names in *þorp*, *þorp*. On a third, there is quite an industry busy with the identification and interpretation of the memorials of the

Scandinavian settlements in England: foremost at the moment in the study of the onomastic element in this field are Kenneth Cameron and Gillian Fellows Jensen. The latter now follows up her *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire* (1968) with another monumental study. The footnote equipment in the introductory chapter provides titles for a good course of reading; the bibliography is excellent and choice; at pp. 252-61 there is an Appendix which forms in itself an important revision of the list of Scandinavian place-names in Yorkshire; there is a great index of place-names; so here we are given a good book and a good continuation all at once.

The book announces two main aims. The first is to see what the place-names of Yorkshire can reveal about Scandinavian settlement in Yorkshire in the period from the ninth to the eleventh centuries; the second to examine the practice followed by the settlers not only when naming new settlements created by them but also when coping with the already existing names of the settlements they took over from the English. Since there is very little historical evidence for the early period of settlement, our knowledge of the original settlements and of the subsequent relations between the colonists and the native English depends largely on the interpretation of the place-name evidence.

In this book the discussion of place-names is limited to those that are recorded in the Domesday Book, supplemented by relevant earlier compilations which give the names of those berewicks, etc., *mentioned* but not *named* in Domesday Book. The place-names treated in this work are not only the entirely Scandinavian ones, but also English names which had been subjected to Scandinavian linguistic influence before 1086. Chapter II deals with 210 place-names in *bý*; Chapter III with place-names in *þorp*; Chapter IV, place-names in *búð*, *gerði*, *laða*, *salr*, *skáli*, *sætr*, *toft*, *ðergi*, *flórr*, *hús*, *loft-hús*; Chapter V, place-names of a hybrid character, whose final element is OE *tūn* but with a first element which is either Scandinavian or scandinavianised; Chapter VI, other hybrid or scandinavianised types.

About *bý* place-names, Dr Fellows Jensen finds (pp. 16-17) this:

The most striking feature about the first elements of the Yorkshire p(lace)-n(ame)s in *bý* is the dominance of pers(onal) n(ame)s. P. ns. with pers. ns. as first element probably indicate settlements established or tenanted by individual men. The majority of these men must have been Scandinavians but the seven p. ns. containing OE pers. ns. may indicate younger settlements established by Englishmen at a period when the

relationship between the Danes and the English had become comparatively peaceful. These OE pers. ns. may, alternatively, have been borne by men of Scandinavian descent or the p. ns. may represent an adaptation by the vikings of original OE p. ns. in *tūn*. Similarly, if some of the *býs* are younger settlements, some of the men whose Scandinavian pers. ns. are contained in them may have been of English descent. . . . The dominance of pers. ns. as first elements is in marked contrast to the situation in Denmark, where the majority of the p. ns. in *-bý* have as first element an appellative, frequently one indicating some natural feature or vegetation. In Denmark this type of name has been taken to indicate a collective settlement and it seems likely that the Yorkshire predominance of names containing pers. ns. over names containing appellatives indicates that the Scandinavian settlement in England was basically different from the kind of settlement of land that took place in the Scandinavian homelands.

In fact, Dr Jensen observes, *bý* in England is used for "village" in the Danish areas, but possibly for "single farmstead" in the Norwegian-settled areas. Here (p. 6) she might have compared such examples as Frankby in Cheshire (*The Place-Names of Cheshire*, Pt. 4, EPNS 41, 287). On place-names in *þorp* she concludes (pp. 52-3) that the majority indicate secondary settlements made by the men whose names appear as first element; that almost no *þorp* place-names indicate collective settlements; that the fact that a few of these place-names contain Continental Germanic personal names shows that *þorp* remained in use as a place-name-forming element into the eleventh century; that it was still current even later than the compilation of Domesday Book, since numerous names in *þorp* are first recorded at later dates; that it is thus not necessary to assume that all place-names in *þorp* were coined by Scandinavians.

At p. 109 ff., in Chapter V, there appears an important discussion of place-names in *tūn* with a Scandinavian first element, i.e. the "Grimston hybrids". Here reference is made, rightly, to Kenneth Cameron's article in *England Before the Conquest* 1 (ed. P. Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes, 1971), 147-63. The model of Cameron's various studies on "Scandinavian Settlement in the Territory of the Five Boroughs" inspires Chapter VIII where among other things the importance of site geology is illustrated. It is observed (p. 109) that there is a characteristic distribution of "Grimston hybrids" on the edges of areas in which *bý* and *þorp* names are most frequent. Dr Jensen sets out the two explanations, first that these names denote English villas taken over by

Danes and whose names have been adapted to Danish models, and second, that these names mark a movement of Danes away from the areas where they were numerous enough to dominate the local population linguistically as well as politically. She also brings into the discussion three factors not always borne in mind: (1) the existence of place-names in *tūn* in Scandinavia, and the likelihood of the invaders recognising it as a place-name-forming suffix; (2) the distribution of place-names in *tūn* in Yorkshire; (3) the Yorkshire Domesday Book place-names in *tūn* whose first element either is a Scandinavian word other than a personal name or else shows traces of Scandinavian linguistic influence.

The discussion is summarized pp. 120-1:

It seems clear that the invading Vikings sometimes took over not only a settlement, but also its OE name. This name, however, was often adapted to a form that was less alien to the Danes. This could be done either by the substitution of cognate or similar Scandinavian elements for the original ones or simply by altering the pronunciation. Place-names are given in the first place by the neighbours of the settlements and the form taken by a p.n. through the years is the result of the neighbours' adaptation of it. The scandinavianisation of an OE p.n. cannot, therefore, be ascribed to the mere fact that one or two Danes were in a position of authority in the settlement itself. The Scandinavian p.ns., unlike the Norman-French ones, were not given deliberately by an aristocracy. The Danes must have been numerous enough in the areas surrounding their settlements to be able to impose their form or pronunciation of a p.n. upon any surviving Englishmen . . . The p.ns. whose DB forms show vacillation between OE and Scandinavian forms, e.g. *stān/steinn*, *middel/meðal*, may indicate that in the areas in question neither the Danes nor the English were sufficiently strong to be entirely linguistically dominant.

This is what the book is all about: it is a contribution to the debate which runs back to p. 11 of Peter Sawyer's *The Age of the Vikings* (1962). Of course, Dr Fellows Jensen enters the proper cautions: the scandinavianized or hybrid place-names may be altered versions of older English names, but they could be younger formations coined by the Anglo-Scandinavian population of Yorkshire in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Since scandinavianisation of place-names can be shown to have taken place as late as the thirteenth century (p. 139), caution must be shown when using scandinavianized place-names as evidence for Viking colonization. The conclusion to be drawn from typology and



distribution-patterns is stated at p. 250: "A study of the situations enjoyed by the villas with Scandinavian, hybrid and scandinavianized names confirms that many, if not the majority, of the hybrid and scandinavianized names are borne by older English villas whose names had been adapted by the invading Scandinavians. There is little about the sites of the settlements, however, to suggest that villas with Scandinavian names may also be older English settlements . . . The situations of the majority of the *býs* suggest that these villas mark the subsequent occupation by the Danes of the best available vacant land. They were sometimes established in completely virgin areas but sometimes edged in on vacant plots between existing English villages. A third stage in the colonisation, characterised by the exploitation of land less immediately favourable for agriculture, seems to be marked by the establishment of *þorps* and of villas with Scandinavian names that originally denoted temporary settlements."

Important etymological material is contained in the place-name lists at pp. 17 ff., 53 ff., 125 ff., 141 ff., 252 ff.; space precludes its discussion here, but students of the Viking settlement and of English place-names will need to add a number of corrections to their Place-Name Society volumes for Yorkshire.

I have one or two minor quibbles to enter, which arise from no fault of Dr Fellows Jensen, but from the tremendous speed at which the revisions of place-name "technology" are taking place. Map 1 (p. 172) and the relevant discussion will not be accurate on the *-hām*, *-ingaham* types; in addition to Dr Barrie Cox's article in *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* 5 (1973), 15-73, there will be the work on Yorkshire settlement patterns now in progress by Miss Margaret Faull at Leeds; and a piece of my own in *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973) involving an analysis of *hām* in S.E. England, and a development of Margaret Gelling's study of place-names in OE *hamm* in *Namn och Bygd* (1960), 140-62. At pp. 259-60, *s.n.* Wharram, it may be noted that Dr Margaret Gelling would not now be so certain of the northern limit of distribution of OE *hamm* as she was in 1960.

JOHN McN. DODGSON



## SUSIE I. TUCKER

SUSIE TUCKER was a woman of her own quality, diffident but attentive to strangers, but once she formed a friendship, devoted and generous. So she was to all the students who had mediaeval interests at the University of Bristol where she taught for almost all of her career. With her a student became a quick reader and an alert listener. Her lectures were crammed with information, presented in that clear Devon speech which she rightly had no wish to change. If a question were asked, the reply almost always was: "I'll lend you some books". Weak students, both physically and mentally, were deterred since the number of books was rarely less than ten. But to those who wanted her kind of learning, the well never seemed dry, both to colleagues and students.

It used to be said about women of Susie's generation that they had modesty but no shame. What she would never think of reading as a lady, she read as a scholar. I recall one occasion when a couple of us were toying, for interest, with some mediaeval lyrics of double meaning and there was a word which neither of us could understand. As usual, in such a situation, we asked Susie. Sometime later, she stumped into the room, placed an old envelope on the desk, blushed and immediately walked away. The meaning was one scarcely known to us. As a lady Susie blushed, as a scholar she did not shirk to reveal the answer.

Her publications were mainly in the field of Modern English language, but her delight was in Iceland, which

she visited as a lone young woman for the first time on a cattle boat, and in Old Norse literature, which she trained her students to read with a sense of the human situation.

Her friends in the Viking Society will remember and miss a woman of dry humour, good sense and great kindness.

J.E.C.

*BEOWULF AND GRETTIS SAGA:*  
AN EXCURSION<sup>1</sup>

BY JOAN TURVILLE-PETRE

**B**EOWULF pursues Grendel's mother into her lair, deep below the water. Grettir plunges under a waterfall, to reach the habitat of a troll-woman. Each of them destroys the enemy, after great struggles.

So we have two works, separated by 500 years or more; and in each of them the hero overcomes a visitant from the other-world, in basically similar circumstances.

Direct influence of the poem on the author of the saga is easily ruled out. Even if he could have read the poem, the saga writer could not possibly have constructed his account from this source. Yet there are striking similarities, in general and in detail. We have to ask in what kind of literary tradition this episode was formulated, and how it was transmitted. The affair has been so fully discussed that much that was once taken for granted can bear re-examination. In the literary foreground, how does it fit each of these quite different heroes? And in the background, where did they find it?

One preliminary distinction must be made: Beowulf is a mythical figure, Grettir is not.

There was a real Grettir, who lived in the early eleventh century. His family and contemporaries are independently attested, and some of his own activities can likewise be cross-checked.<sup>2</sup> But essentially the saga is imaginative reconstruction, based on an idea of the kind of person Grettir was, and how he came to live as he did. I take it that the writer of the final recension was not making any significant changes in representing the central figure.<sup>3</sup> Overall there is close attention to character and motive. Although there is a non-human element in Grettir, his

humanity is clearly shown in his ready wit: he answers back effectively, and makes shrewd comments.

Beowulf did not live in history; he does not belong to any known dynasty. The poem is organized to show a hero in action. The story is the outline of Beowulf's career, presented in sharply-focused incidents. These are linked by narrative of a more discursive kind: allusions back and forward in time, subsidiary characters and supporting incidents, all held together by comments from the poet or from leading characters (e.g. Beowulf, Hroðgar, Wiglaf). The human society depicted in the poem is generalized and symbolic, a tissue of mutual obligations and benefits.<sup>4</sup> Beowulf is the exemplary figure who illustrates the rules and the virtues of this society.

When I say that Beowulf is a mythical figure, I do not mean that he represents any divine being, nor that his activities have any connexion with ritual practices. I mean "myth" in Northrop Frye's sense:<sup>5</sup> an abstract fictional design, a story (fabula) constructed for a purpose. In this sense, Professor Quinn describes the *Aeneid* as "a poetic myth".<sup>6</sup> The elements of such a story (persons, places and situations) are already familiar to the audience. The central figure also may exist in a previous literary context; but essentially he is the poet's creation. His actions are directly related to the main themes. What the poet particularly has to say is also conveyed in new combinations of stock figures and events (archetypes), used to evoke the main themes.

The poet of *Beowulf* touches on various themes, but there is one central idea, as I see it. This is the ancient religious concept of the deliverer. The hero pits himself against evil powers, the enemy that presses on the borders of the human world. Now Grettir's situation is formally similar to this, though very different in quality. I shall not discuss Grettir as a deliverer; the motive is present, but not dominating. I point only to the entirely different

conception of the "outside". Grettir himself has strong connexions with this region and its supernatural inhabitants. *Grettis saga* is the spookiest of the major family sagas, dealing freely with the surrounding world of spirits, which is still a living element of Icelandic culture. This environment is strange rather than terrifying, entirely different from the awesome setting of *Beowulf's* exploits.

To come now to actual events in the encounter of these two heroes with man-like monsters from the outside. It follows a certain pattern, and the underwater episode is the climax. The essential points are:

(1) the enemy is a male-and-female pair, living underwater;

(2) one of the pair attacks a dwelling at night (Hroðgar's hall, the farm at Sandhaugar), and carries away one or more men to devour in the underwater lair;

(3) the hero waits alone in the house, and when the enemy comes there is a fierce hand-to-hand struggle, indoors;

(4) the enemy breaks out and makes for the water, but is fatally wounded by loss of an arm;

(5) the hero, some time after, plunges into the water, and kills the other member of the pair.

Notice that this pattern does not apply to Grettir's encounter with Glámr (ch. 35). Only point 3 is present here, the indoor wrestling. Glámr is not a member of a pair. He does not live underwater, and he is not a man-eater. He is not a nature-monster at all, but the revenant of a heathen Swede: a living corpse, another intruder from outside which is not unusual in Icelandic literature. I think the brilliant description of this episode has led critics of *Beowulf* to overvalue it as an analogue.

Now for section 5 of the pattern. Here, it has often been observed that the account of *Grettis saga* (chs. 64-7) makes sense, whereas in *Beowulf* (1345-1622) neither place nor sequence is clearly visualized. I do not therefore

suppose that the prose narrative has preserved some original more faithfully than the poem. It seems rather that certain motifs (archetypal situations) have been used by two artists, each practising the technique appropriate to his work.

The components common to both are logically organised in *Grettis saga*. The hero dives under a waterfall, and his struggles in the eddies are described. He enters a cave, where a good fire is burning. A giant was waiting, and he attacked with a *heptisax*; but Grettir broke the handle with a blow of his *sax* (short-sword). While the giant was reaching back for his own sword, Grettir struck again, sliced out the giant's entrails, and finally killed him. Then he kindled a light and explored the cave.

In *Beowulf*, these same components are not organised into a sequence. There is a special weapon, a *hæftmece*, which like *heptisax* is an isolated compound. But it is identified as the hero's sword, which is found useless at the first encounter. There is a waterfall, but it belongs to Hroðgar's impressionistic description of the environment of the monsters' lair (1357-76). There is no waterfall in the accounts of approach (1400-21) and entry (1492-1517). When Beowulf enters the hall of Grendel's mother, he finds that it is free from water and a fire is burning. A human sword cannot touch her, but in the nick of time he sees a giant-sword. He does not have to kindle a light, for a heavenly light irradiates the place.

Let us leave the *hæftmece* for the moment, and consider the waterfall, the fire, and the miraculous light.

The poet relegates the waterfall to a preliminary general description, where it is an image of the power and peril of the world of nature. In *Grettis saga*, the hero's physical prowess is displayed against a realistic waterfall — although there is no waterfall in Bárðardalr.<sup>7</sup> This is not a normal monster-habitat; in Iceland it occurs otherwise only in reproductions of this episode in later romantic sagas. Trolls live in crags and rocks, but the



trolls of Bárðardalr live in a cave accessible only through water.

The fire, in each work, is the focus of domestic life, showing that these underwater creatures use the same means of heating and cooking as human beings.

The sword, which in *Grettis saga* is merely part of the furniture, in *Beowulf* makes the point that no human weapon can penetrate so evil a monster, and Beowulf alone among humans can wield it. As for the light, it is the external sign of God's saving grace, which released Beowulf from the grip of the giantess, and willed the destruction of her evil power. The incident has caused some confusion; first, because of the narrative sequence, and second, because of the inherent symbolism. In the passage 1545-72 the order of narration depends not on logic, but on poetic rhetoric. First, we are told that Beowulf would have perished, if God had not rightly ordained the outcome (1550-6). Next, Beowulf finds the sword, and kills the giantess (1557-69). Third, *se leoma* shines out; it is described as heavenly, i.e. not malignant (1570-2). The reason for the demonstrative *se* is that this light had been a factor at the first stage, but is not identified until the third. Chambers perceived this, and explained the inconsistency with a general reference to Old English poetic technique.<sup>8</sup> On a smaller scale, the device of illogical order was freely used by Virgil.<sup>9</sup> The light is symbolic, in so far as it has no physical origin. At the same time, it is a real light that persists, for it enables Beowulf to explore the whole cave. There is no inconsistency here, for symbolism is not a hard-and-fast scheme, but a momentary allusion to a different level of meaning.<sup>10</sup> When the poet associates sudden emergence of light with the destruction of the monster and God's grace to Beowulf, he strikes out symbolic meanings for the incident. Light projects different images. Two are appropriate here: release, and the cleansing of the infested place.

The *heptisax* or *hæftmece* is the most striking point of agreement. It appears to be a technical term, specifically associated with cave-warfare. Each author interprets this special term in his own way.

The poet equates it outright with a proper sword, but introduces it with some elaboration: "Then, it was by no means the least of strength-supporters [an unusual periphrasis for the sword, but there are parallels<sup>11</sup>] that the spokesman Unferð lent him at his need; that *hæftmece* bore the name Hrunting" (1455-7). He proceeds to describe it as an ancient treasure, a blade of special workmanship.

The author of *Grettis saga* has more trouble, because he is describing realistically. He first states that the giant in the cave seized a *fleinn*. This word means "arrow" or "light spear" in poetry, or in prose derived from verse. But in original prose the word appears as a typical giant's weapon, a pointed iron stake.<sup>12</sup> *Fleinn* does not occur in verse 61 of *Grettis saga*,<sup>13</sup> *heptisax* and *skepti* do (*skepti* only here in poetry). Apparently for this reason, the author adds a *tréskapt* to the *fleinn*, and comments "in those days it was called a *heptisax*". He says also of this *fleinn* that it was suitable for both cut and thrust. This is a typical description of a *sax*,<sup>14</sup> which, unlike the two-edged sword, had a pointed tip. So it seems that the author was describing an impossible composite weapon.

Perhaps it was a mistake to assume that *hepti* had the usual current sense "grip, handhold". This concrete meaning was common for *hepti*, rare for *hæft*. A *hepti* is appropriate to a knife (*sax*, *knifr*),<sup>15</sup> also to the lower end of an axe-shaft;<sup>16</sup> it is too humble or too unspecific for a sword.<sup>17</sup> *Hæft* usually means "fetter" or "captive".<sup>18</sup> The semantic divergence is best shown in the related verbs: *hepta* "bind, put in bonds; hobble a horse"; *hæftan* "bind, hold captive". This sense is formally distinguished in the OI noun *hapt* "fetter, halter"; pl. "bondage", and *høpt*, like *bønd*, is a poetic term for the

gods. If *hepti-/hæft-* is a verbal adjective (as in *sendimaðr*), the compound could mean "blade attached/bound in some way". *Hæftmece* would then be comparable to *fetelhilt*, *Beow.* 1563,<sup>19</sup> derived from a *fetlian* "attach, connect". In historic times, the sword or *sax* could be fitted with a loop to hang on the arm.<sup>20</sup> A weapon attached in this way would be especially useful in an underwater adventure; Grettir "girded himself with his *sax*" before he dived in.

Why was this particular episode brought into the careers of these two very different heroes? In some way it must fit the concept that each author had of his leading character.

The author of the saga shows that Grettir's great strength was his misfortune. In spite of good intentions, he was progressively estranged from society. He was impulsive and uncontrolled, and as a result appropriate outlets for his strength were more and more restricted. Grettir was an outlaw for 19 years. He is depicted as an outsider, a man who naturally consorted with strange beings: such as Hallmundr, who called himself Loptr<sup>21</sup> and lived in a cave, and the half-troll Þórir in his happy valley. Grettir sought out and defeated hostile supernatural beings, partly to meet the challenge, and partly through goodwill. The last of these exploits was the encounter with the trolls of Bárðardalr, and Grettir approached it as an expert: *með því at honum var mjök lagit at koma af reimeikum eða aþtrgongum* (ch. 64) "because he was much by way of getting rid of hauntings and walkings" (or, "had a natural facility for . . .").

Both the first and the last of Grettir's attacks on the supernatural took him into the underworld. The first<sup>22</sup> is set in Norway, where Grettir broke into a grave-mound, overcame the dead man, and returned with all his treasure. He handed it over to the owner, his host Þorfinnr, who later gave Grettir the most precious object of all: a *sax* which Grettir had coveted, and used ever

after. So it seems that Grettir, like some other heroes,<sup>23</sup> acquired his special weapon from the land of the dead.

The final underworld adventure is as different in theme as it is in setting. Grettir is now a fugitive, and his enemies are closing in. He is able to deliver the people of Bárðardalr from the attacks of a troll-woman, and through their gratitude he gains a temporary refuge. His feats of strength begin with a happy prelude: Christopher-like, he carries the housewife and her child across the dangerous river to attend church.

In *Beowulf*, the underwater episode is the culmination of the hero's testing-period. Beowulf had become Hroðgar's visiting champion; with this exploit he attains the full status of a hero. At this point, the poet had to project the action beyond the human world. The preliminary account of the setting, given in Hroðgar's speech, contains the same elements as Aeneas' approach to Hades (*Aen.* vi, 237-41), for it has the same purpose of suggesting gloom and horror. There is a great gulf, dark water, shadowing trees, and the place is shunned by wild creatures. Additional elements, frost and fire, are derived from *The Vision of St Paul*. The succeeding factual account of the route taken by Hroðgar and his troop leads steadily away from man's world. Yet a tableau of vigorous human activity is mounted on the very brink. First there is a hunting scene, then the ceremonial arming of the hero. The arming evokes a flash-back to court life, when Unferð presents his sword, and Beowulf addresses farewell words to his master. He breaks away from this scene, by jumping into the pool and entering the *ælwihtra eard* below.

The symbolism of this setting is in keeping with Beowulf's nature. Beowulf is not a historic person, but an incarnation of the hero-ideal. Like Aeneas, he has a mission, and this is the subject of the epic. Beowulf does not come to found a city; his mission is to deliver mankind, represented by the Danes and the Geats, from

attacks by creatures of the otherworld. The historic element, which establishes Beowulf in the human world, is the spread of Northern dynasties, with their political and military involvements.

Grettir did actually belong to his setting of historic contemporaries. Yet the part he plays in public affairs and family rivalries is less important than for other tragic heroes of the sagas. His encounters with the supernatural are the fabric of his life, as this author sees it. For the Grettir shown to us is formed by the storyteller's art, a literary medium which developed rather rapidly in Iceland during the thirteenth century. It seems that this author perceived in Grettir some of the patterns of heroic life which had been set in ancient poetry.<sup>24</sup> Writers of this period could create tragic heroes from people of past ages, because their literary inheritance offered them such patterns. This inheritance had been developed and enriched by the antiquarian interests of their predecessors in the twelfth century.

In *Grettis saga* there is no overt reference to heroic poetry: no straight comparison, as in *Gísla saga*, where some incidents are modelled on events in the Sigurd poems and where there is a direct reference to that story. Yet some association with the heroes of antiquity is implicit when Grettir gets his special *sax* from the land of the dead. Among his great deeds, the two indoor wrestling-matches (the first with Glámr, the second with the troll-woman) had some place in heroic legend, since they are generically related to the cleansing of Heorot. The underwater adventure with its *heptisax* seems more like a direct allusion. If so, the poetic source of this episode has not survived.

The Old English poem stands nearer this source, in literary form as in time. The underwater episode is entirely appropriate to Beowulf himself, indeed it is necessary to his career. In *Grettis saga*, it is one more remarkable adventure.

When we look for the antecedents of this Beowulf in heroic legend, there is something in his name. It pretty certainly means "bee-wolf", circumlocution for "bear". The name was not fanciful; it is recorded for two historic persons. One was a seventh-century Northumbrian monk,<sup>25</sup> the other was Bjólfr the *landnámsmaðr*.<sup>26</sup> The most likely reason for giving this strange name is that it was current in heroic legend. Far back in pagan antiquity, the name would denote a theriomorphic divinity. In historic times, a bear-hero appears in two divergent literary traditions: in heroic legend (*Bjarkamál*, *Beowulf*) and in the folklore of the Northwest Germanic area. Chambers has shown that a hero of bear-ancestry is well represented here (his chief exploit is to enter the underworld through a hole).<sup>27</sup>

There is not much of the bear left in heroic legend. Bjarki has only his name, and his fierce courage in defence of his lord; according to Saxo, he also slew a bear. In *Beowulf*, the animal attributes implied do survive as poetic imagery. The superhuman grip of the hero reminds us that he is not as other men are. Although his activities are in the human world, he has access to regions beyond it. Beowulf is firmly set in human society, and conforms to its rules. But he can pass beyond these limits, and return unscathed. The excursion increases his human stature; for he begins as a wandering champion, and ends as a king defending his people.

<sup>1</sup> References are to F. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (3rd edition, 1950), by line; and to Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga* (Íslenzk Fornrit VII, 1936), by chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Saga writers did invent incidents in which historical characters are concerned, and also attributed to them situations borrowed from other sagas; see Kathryn Hume, 'The Thematic Design of *Grettis saga*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* LXXIII (1974), 476-82.

<sup>3</sup> There are persuasive reasons for thinking that Sturla Þórðarson composed a life of Grettir c. 1280, and that this work survives in outline in the present redaction of the early fourteenth century; see Sigurður Nordal, *Sturla Þórðarson og Grettis saga* (Íslenzk fræði 4, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. E. B. Irving, *A Reading of Beowulf* (1968), ch. ii.

<sup>5</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957, reprinted 1971), 135; see also 366, "a narrative in which some characters are superhuman . . . a

conventionalized or stylized narrative not fully adapted to plausibility or 'realism'."

<sup>6</sup> K. Quinn, *Virgil's Aeneid; a Critical Description* (1968), 52-4.

<sup>7</sup> This is one sign that conventional elements have been naturalized. Another is the fate of the troll-woman. In the description of the fight itself (ch. 65), Grettir freed himself by cutting off her right arm, whereupon she fell into the gorge. Later in the same chapter, an alternative account is given: "but the people of Bárðardalr say that she was overtaken by daylight as they wrestled, and succumbed when he struck off her arm; and there she still stands on the cliff in the shape of a woman." On the substitution of this popular belief see H. Dehmer, *Primitives Erzählungsgut in den Islendinga Sögur* (1927), 53 f.

<sup>8</sup> R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf, an Introduction* (3rd edition, 1959), 467-8.

<sup>9</sup> See T. E. Page, *The Aeneid of Virgil Books I-VI* (1894), 468-9. It consists of two co-ordinate statements, the second of which functions as a clause defining the first in terms of an antecedent event. The *Beowulf* poet achieves a similar effect with a summarising statement explained by a brief *syððan*-clause, in 1554-6 and elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> See Quinn, *op. cit.*, 55 and note.

<sup>11</sup> See H. Marquardt, *Die altenglischen Kenningar* (1938), 223.

<sup>12</sup> H. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde* (1914), 67.

<sup>13</sup> Verses 60 and 61 (ch. 66) concern this adventure. They cannot be dated. The rime *fjón : kvðnar* (v. 60) would not have been acceptable in court-poetry of the eleventh century; but this is not court-poetry. On these two verses, see P. A. Jørgensen, 'Grendel, Grettir and Two Skaldic Stanzas', *Scripta Islandica* 24 (1973), 54-61.

<sup>14</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, 9 (quoting *Stjórn* 541).

<sup>15</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, 118.

<sup>17</sup> Klaeber's translation "hilted sword" (Glossary, s.v. *hæftmece*) shows the impasse of this interpretation; there is no such thing as a sword without a hilt.

<sup>18</sup> *Hæft* is figurative in O.E. poetry and can mean "bondage", "imprisonment" etc., cf. J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898, reprinted 1973), s.v. *hæft*. Cf. also *hæftnyd* "captivity".

<sup>19</sup> See J. Hoops, *Kommentar zum Beowulf* (1932), 172, 179.

<sup>20</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> *Grettis saga* ch. 54. *Loptr* is here an Óðinn-figure; his face is obscured by a drooping hood. In poetic sources, this appellative is applied to Loki only, and its etymology is uncertain.

<sup>22</sup> See A. R. Taylor, 'Two Notes on *Beowulf*', *Leeds Studies in English and Kindred Languages* 7-8 (1952), 13-17.

<sup>23</sup> Hervor gets Tyrfringr from Angantýr in his grave-mound (A. Heusler and W. Ranisch, *Eddica minora* (1903), 15-20). Miðfjarðar-Skeggi robbed the grave-mound of Hrólfr kraki and took his sword (Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, Íslenzk Fornrit I, 1968, 212).

<sup>24</sup> As observed by W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance* (1908), 202; Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Gísla saga* (Íslenzk Fornrit VI, 1943), xxv; J. de Vries, *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* (1963), 98.

<sup>25</sup> H. Sweet, *The Oldest English Texts* (1885), 163. It is interesting that the next name is Arthan, a Welsh diminutive form for "bear", which appears in early genealogies and in a poem of the twelfth-thirteenth century; see references in J. Lloyd-Jones, *Geirfa Barddoniaeth Gynnar Gymraeg* (1931), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, 302-3, 306.

<sup>27</sup> *Beowulf, an Introduction*, 365-81.

# GODAR AND HÖFÐINGJAR IN MEDIEVAL ICELAND

By GUNNAR KARLSSON

## I

THIS article takes up one of the problems concerning the *goðar* in the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth. It deals with the role of the *goðar* in their home districts, the relationship between the *goðar* and the farmers, and certain changes that the *goðorð* institution underwent in the early thirteenth century. The theme is basically a problem of democracy: does the Icelandic Commonwealth deserve the name of a democratic society? This article is almost entirely based on a more detailed discussion of the problem which I published in Icelandic in *Saga* in 1972.<sup>1</sup> This survey is intended to set out my main conclusions, but of the evidence in support of them only a few examples are included. An unconvinced reader must be referred to the original article for further evidence. I also leave out many reservations about the limitations of the sources and the possibility of different developments in different districts of Iceland. The reader must be asked to keep in mind that we cannot expect everything to have developed in just the same way and at just the same time all over the country.

## II

At first sight the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth seems surprisingly similar to a modern constitutional state. The *lögrétta* of the *alþing* seems to correspond fairly exactly to a modern legislative parliament, and there was a system of courts of justice, clearly distinguished from the legislative body. On the other hand,



there was no bearer of executive power covering the whole country, no sovereign and no central government. The basis of this society was formed by the presumably 48 *goðar*. They were vested with legislative power as they sat in the *lögrétta*, accompanied by men appointed by themselves. They were also vested with judicial power indirectly because they nominated the members of all courts of justice. Each *goði* was surrounded by a group of farmers; they were his *þingmenn* and belonged to his *goðorð*.

Historians have tended to look at this system as something akin to a representative democracy. The *goðar* were supposed to correspond to members of parliament and their *þingmenn* were looked upon as their voters. The elections in this system consisted in the right every farmer had, according to the law, to choose which *goðorð* he belonged to. No one maintains that this was exactly equivalent to modern elections. The farmers could for instance only choose between already existing *goðar*; they could not nominate new ones. But, it has been argued, if a *goði* was very unpopular he would sooner or later lose his *þingmenn*, so that he could not put any force behind his decisions, and then he would have to give up his *goðorð*.<sup>2</sup>

When the constitutional history of medieval Iceland began to be written in the late nineteenth century, historians usually relied on the *Íslendingasögur* as sources for the first centuries of settlement. In these sagas it is on many occasions clear that this apparently democratic system did not work very smoothly. The most outstanding specialist in the field, Konrad Maurer, had to admit that the right of the farmer to change *goðorð* did not help very much in practice. In any case, the farmer had to look to some powerful *goði* in his neighbourhood; he had not an absolutely free choice.<sup>3</sup> In this century confidence in the *Íslendingasögur* as reliable sources has declined very rapidly and historians have tried to write

the history of Iceland during the first centuries without referring to them. The consequence of this is that we have no evidence about the relationship between the *goðar* and the farmers before the beginning of the twelfth century, except the prescription in the laws, where it says that any farmer is free to choose his *goði*. The degradation of *Íslendingasögur* in history has thus strengthened belief in the democratic nature of the earliest Icelandic society.

The pioneer of the new approach is Jón Jóhannesson. In his book on the Icelandic Commonwealth the description of the constitution mainly concerns the period before A.D. 1100 and is almost exclusively based on the laws. This leaves us with the general impression that everything went very smoothly and peacefully, in accordance with law, until the twelfth century. Then Jón meets with the so-called contemporary sagas, the sagas of the *Sturlung* compilation, which describe almost the antithesis of a peaceful and democratic society. He therefore comes to the conclusion that the constitution had begun to break down in the twelfth century and that this led gradually to the severe conflicts of the thirteenth and to the collapse of the Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup>

Other twentieth-century authors seem to share this view, and some of them have gone even further in describing Icelandic society as a democracy. Ólafur Lárússon relates the prescription of the laws about the farmers' rights and then goes on:<sup>5</sup>

Af þessum sökum varð stjórnarfyrríkomulagið demókratískara á Íslandi en þá tíðkaðist annarsstaðar, og má segja, að afstöðu goða og þingmanna svipi að nokkru leyti til afstöðu þingmanna og kjósenda nú á tímum.

The weakness of this view is obvious. The law codes are not on their own sufficient as evidence of the actual state of affairs. Law demonstrates first and foremost what the legislator wanted when the law was enacted. But we cannot be sure that any act of law was necessarily

observed, and when we are dealing with remote times about which we know little, it is often difficult to discern the intention of a given piece of legislation. In this case the only acceptable way seems to be to find the oldest narrative sources that can be considered fairly reliable and see whether they confirm or reject the evidence of the law. The sagas of bishops describe events from the eleventh century onwards and thus come next to *Íslendingasögur* in time. But they are of little help here because they very seldom deal with events which would give any information about the relationship between *goðar* and *þingmenn*. It is not until we come to the earliest "contemporary" sagas of secular chieftains, the first sagas of the Sturlung compilation, that we find extensive material of real interest in this connection. Four sagas prove to be chiefly useful, *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, *Sturlu saga*, *Guðmundar saga dýra* and *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*. These sagas describe events that took place — or are supposed to have taken place — in the period 1120-1220, most of them during the second half of the twelfth century. They are all thought to have been written in the first half of the thirteenth century. The distance between the events and the writing is usually between 10 and 80 years. The only exception is *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* which was probably written more than a century after the events took place.

Although these sagas are not in all cases strictly contemporary sources, they must be considered very reliable, at least when compared with *Íslendingasögur*, which usually describe events 200-400 years back in time. And even though the descriptions of particular events are probably not always strictly true, it can be presumed that their authors have tried to give a true picture of twelfth-century society. They have presumably not attempted to tell anything that could not have happened in Iceland in the twelfth century, and that is the important thing for us.

I think I am right in saying that historians have never paid much attention to these sagas or this period. The reason is probably that the period has not been considered to belong to either of the classical divisions of the free Icelandic Commonwealth, the Saga Age or the Peace Age. Nor did it properly belong to the *Sturlungaöld*, the later period when severe internal strife was fomented by the Norwegian king, who used the dissension to gain power over Iceland. The king does not seem to have made any attempts to interfere in Icelandic politics before 1220. Some historians have stretched the Peace Age down to the mid-twelfth century, but otherwise the period between 1120 and 1220 has been looked upon as a prelude to the *Sturlungaöld*, a period of unrest before anything of significance began to happen. But the lack of evidence about earlier times gives this period a new attraction, and we will therefore start the present study of the *goðorð* institution there.

### III

The twelfth-century sagas reveal first of all that every ordinary farmer was closely dependent upon his *goði*. The main duties of the *goðar* in their home districts were to keep law and order, to protect their district against robbers and to protect their individual *þingmenn* if they got into trouble. If a farmer claimed that he had been wronged in some way the usual thing for him to do was to go to the *goði* and ask him to take over his case. The *goðar* were not legally obliged to do this, as far as we can see, but it was obviously a point of honour for them to be able to help their *þingmenn* in this way. We have hardly any examples of quarrels between two *þingmenn* of the same *goðorð*, but it is very likely that the *goði* normally settled disputes of this kind alone. If, as in most of the recorded cases, the opponents belonged to two different

*goðorð*, the quarrel as a rule became a case between their *goði*.

Of course, a man could go to a court at an assembly and plead his case there without the intervention of a *goði*. But in practice this does not seem to have helped much. Judging by the sagas it was extremely rare in the twelfth century for a dispute to be finally settled by the judgement of a court. Most disputes ended either with the complete defeat of one of the parties or with arbitration. The aim of arbitration was to end the dispute, not necessarily to do justice. Accordingly a man who was more powerful got away with the better half of the bargain, simply because he was more likely to gain victory if the dispute went on and therefore less likely to submit to arbitration if the result was not particularly favourable to him. An example from *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* illustrates clearly the value of having the support of mighty men. At the *alþing* in 1221 Ketill Þorsteinsson, later bishop of Hólar, tried to persuade Hafliði to reach a settlement with Þorgils. Ketill tells Hafliði of his own experience when he tried to use the courts to obtain justice against a man who had wounded him:<sup>6</sup>

Ok þess vilda ek greypiliga hefna með frænda afla ok gera manninn sekjan. Ok bjuggum vér mál til. Ok þó urðu nokkurir aflamenn til at veita honum at málunum, ok ónýttust mín mál. Nú má ok vera, at til verði nokkurir at veita Þorgilsi, þó at þín mál sé réttligri.

This leads inevitably to the conclusion that most ordinary farmers were quite dependent on their *goði* for protection. The significance of this fact obviously depends very much on whether farmers could exercise their legal right to choose a *goði*. In *Sturlu saga* we have one clear example that a farmer actually changed *goðorð*. His name was Álfr Örnólfsson and he lived in Fagradaalr in Skarðsströnd. When his son was wounded, Álfr

went to the nearest *goði*, who was probably his own, Einarr Þorgilsson at Staðarhóll in Saurbær. But the offender was Einarr's friend, therefore Einarr refused to render any help. Then Álfr turned to another *goði*, Sturla Þórðarson in Hvammr. Sturla settled the dispute, and after that Álfr became the *þingmaðr* of Sturla.<sup>7</sup> This incident shows that it was possible for a farmer to exercise this right, but it is no proof that the relationship between *goðar* and *þingmenn* was generally a matter of free choice. On the contrary it is clear that the authority of a *goði* was to a certain extent territorially defined. The task of keeping the neighbourhood clear of robbers had to be carried out by the *goði* living in the district. If a *goði* did not perform that duty properly it was no help to leave him and enter into a *goðorð* with a *goði* living somewhere else, unless the farmer actually moved to the district of his new *goði*. There are also examples of *goðar* refusing to allow men into their neighbourhood other than those they could depend on. Sturla Þórðarson, the hero of *Sturlu saga*, did this repeatedly. For instance, one of Sturla's enemies stayed overnight at the farm called Ásgarðr in the neighbourhood of Sturla's farm, Hvammr. A little later Sturla went to Ásgarðr and met the farmer, Bjarni Steinsson:<sup>8</sup>

Sturla kvaddi hann út ok mælti: "Þat ætla ek," segir hann, "at vit munim skilja verða nábúðina," — ok kveðst eigi vilja, at oftar ætti óvinir hans heimilan gistingarstað í Ásgarði, þá er þeir færi slíkar óspektarferðir, ok kvað annan hvárn þeira færa mundu verða bústaðinn. Síðan reið Sturla heim.

En Bjarni seldi landit Erlendi presti Hallasyni.

Thus the *goðar* seem to have had their own areas of influence, within which everyone had to respect their will. They did not always demand that all men within that area were their *þingmenn*, but if the *goði* was sufficiently dominant in the district he accepted no one whom he considered to be his enemy or suspected of

supporting his enemies. And what was the use of changing to another *goðorð* if the farmer had to keep allegiance to his local *goði* anyway?

Of course, *goðar* also needed the support of the farmers to be able to carry out their tasks as protectors of the district. The *goðar* had no standing armed forces at their disposal, other than the neighbouring farmers and their households. It was insecurity and the constant threat of unrest that bound *goðar* and farmers together.

#### IV

Now the question must arise whether this state of affairs also existed in earlier times as well. If we accept the traditional theory of a marked "age of peace" in Iceland in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, this does not seem likely. But the existence of the "age of peace" must be considered very doubtful indeed. The lack of evidence of conflict from the period in question may be mainly due to the fact that our sources about it are sagas of bishops. It is perhaps quite as likely that the petty struggles described in the earliest sagas of *Sturlunga saga* had been going on constantly for centuries, and in fact they are very similar to the disputes most *Íslendingasögur* describe and attribute to the Saga Age. I see therefore no reason why this general picture of the relationship between *goðar* and farmers could not apply to the preceding centuries as well. In any case, if we disregard *Íslendingasögur*, we have no earlier evidence about these matters. It is thus very important to know how the power of the *goðar* appears in the twelfth century, and it may well be that we glimpse here the last remnants of an old order that already at this time was disappearing in parts of the country.

## V

All the sagas that have been used here as evidence about the old type of *goðar* concern districts where each *goði* normally only ruled over one *goðorð*. It could be a district of some hundred farms on average. At this time however the *goðar* in some other districts had begun to take possession of more than one *goðorð*, and early in the thirteenth century the whole country was ruled by some ten men, most of them belonging to five powerful families. This concentration of power led to a profound transformation in Icelandic society. The big chieftains of the thirteenth century were *goðar* in a strict legal sense, and they kept the legal functions of *goðar*, as far as such functions operated during the strife-ridden *Sturlungaöld*. But these chieftains are only rarely called *goðar* in contemporary literature, and their functions in their home districts were widely different from those of the twelfth-century *goðar*. I have therefore found it convenient to apply the word *höfðingi* to leaders of this new kind.

When we come to the relationship between *höfðingjar* and farmers, described in the younger sagas of the *Sturlung* compilation, we find some interesting examples where farmers are strongly independent of *höfðingjar*. When a new *höfðingi* wanted to take power in a district, the first thing he had to do was to assure himself of the approval of the farmers. This approval was not only a formal thing. The farmers often refused to accept a new *höfðingi*, and then the *höfðingi* had to give up his claims, for the time being at least. On two occasions the farmers even hint that it would be best to have no *höfðingi* at all.<sup>9</sup>

Historians have interpreted this as a remnant of the old freedom of the farmers. That would imply that their freedom was greater before the age of the *höfðingjar* — if the farmers resisted the powerful thirteenth-century *höfðingjar*, they must have been fairly independent of the lesser *goðar* of earlier times.<sup>10</sup> A closer consideration



reveals that this argument is not valid. It seems more likely that the independent farmers of the thirteenth century were an innovation in Icelandic society.

The sagas often indicate that not all farmers were equally important or influential when dealing with *höfðingjar*. Phrases like *stærri bændr*, *stærstu bændr*, *stórbændr*, *betri menn*, *bestu menn* and *bestu bændr* occur frequently. For instance, when Þorgils skarði, the unsuccessful *höfðingi* in Skagafjörður, gave a Christmas feast, his saga says:<sup>11</sup> “Bauð hann þá til sín mörgum stórbóndum ok gaf þeim stórgjafir.”

When *höfðingjar* sought support from the farmers, we find that they turned to quite definite leaders among them. We can take another example from Þorgils skarði's attempts to take power in Skagafjörður. He once went to a man called Broddi Þorleifsson, but Broddi refused to give him any active support. Then Þorgils turned to another farmer, Ásbjörn Illugason in Viðvík. He was very reluctant and said:<sup>12</sup> “. . . eða hví er Broddi eigi hér kominn? Eru þar ráð bóndanna allra, er Broddi er.” Sometimes when the sagas mention an assembly of farmers in support of a *höfðingi* they only name the leaders. When Kolbeinn ungi, a *höfðingi* in Skagafjörður, recruited men to fight against the Sturlungar, the saga mentions four men who came from Eyjafjörður to support him.<sup>13</sup> It would not have been worth mentioning if they had come alone — they must have been there as leaders of groups of farmers. It was so self-evident that these men were leaders that the author did not need to mention it.

There is hardly any evidence of such leaders among the farmers before the thirteenth century. It seems likely therefore that their position is a consequence of the changes that the political structure of the country underwent in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The *höfðingjar* could not keep contact with the individual farmers as the *goðar* had done. They were not able to

keep law and order in every district and solve disputes between neighbouring farmers. During the struggles of the *Sturlungaöld* a district could be without a *höfðingi* for years, either because he was staying in Norway or because he had been killed and no one had the authority to succeed him. The big farmers probably took over some of the old duties of the *goðar* which the *höfðingjar* were unable to perform.

But how could a farmer rise to the status of a leader among his fellow-farmers? If we look at the men who are named as farmers' leaders, we find that most, if not all, of them lived on church-farms. Some of them lived on the most prosperous church-farms in the country. It is known that church-farmers were likely to become richer than ordinary farmers. They received half of the tithe and all the other income of the church, for instance from land belonging to it. In return the farmer hired a priest, if he was not a priest himself, maintained the church building and paid for other duties that were often laid on churches. There is every reason to believe that this business often left the farmer with considerable profit. The authority of the farmers' leaders seems thus to be based on property. Perhaps it was particularly based on support from tenants of lands belonging to them or their churches. The *höfðingjar*, on the other hand, were many of them in constant financial difficulties and had to be maintained by extra taxes. Their authority was based on hereditary rights to the *goðorð* and on high birth.

This begins to remind one of a familiar theme in modern European history, the struggle between nobility and bourgeoisie. And indeed we have an example of an attempted revolution in one district. The story that tells of that is *Svinfellinga saga* in the Sturlung compilation.<sup>14</sup> Sæmundr Ormsson in Svínafell came to power very young as a *höfðingi* in Skaftafellssþing. The church-farmer in Kirkjubær, Ögmundr Helgason, was quite wealthy. Incidentally the saga gives an unusually

detailed account of his wealth.<sup>15</sup> When Sæmundr has come to power the saga says that "Ögmundr helt sér vel fram um heraðsstjórn, ok gerðust margar greinir með þeim Sæmundi."<sup>16</sup> Þórðr kakali, who was a *höfðingi* himself but who seems to have incited Ögmundr nevertheless, commented on the dispute to Ögmundr:<sup>17</sup>

Þórðr kvað Ögmundi sjálfrátt í hvern stað at láta hlut sinn fyrir Sæmundi, — "því at þú hefir fjárkost meira. Þú ert ok vinsælli af bóndum. Þótt þú hafir eigi goðorð, þá heyri ek ok, at bændr vili þér eigi verr en Sæmundi."

This remark reveals some interesting things about the nature of the dispute. Ögmundr is said to be richer than the *höfðingi*, more popular, and though not a *goði* he has no less influence in the district than Sæmundr. The hostilities between the two became more and more bitter, and finally Ögmundr killed Sæmundr and his younger brother as well.

Probably this was not a planned attempt to rebel against the power of the *höfðingjar* in general. Even if it was, it was not successful: Ögmundr lost both his property and his position as the church-farmer of Kirkjubær for the killing of Sæmundr Ormsson. Nevertheless, the incident shows how big farmers could challenge the power of *höfðingjar*. It was therefore no wonder that farmers could come to the conclusion that it was best to have no *höfðingi*. The *goðar* of the twelfth century had served some purpose in the community, the *höfðingjar* of the thirteenth century often did not. Moreover, they could be harmful to the district they lived in, partly because they had to be maintained by extra taxes, partly because they brought large-scale warfare into relatively peaceful districts. On one occasion the farmers asked Þorgils skarði to leave Skagafjörðr, "ok þótti sem eigi myndi á gengit heraðit, ef hann væri eigi þar."<sup>18</sup> The farming community had found its own leaders to take up the role performed by the *goðar* earlier, and a natural next step

would have been to overthrow the *höfðingjar*. But before that could happen the Norwegian king gained power in Iceland, and the next generation of local authorities became royal commissioners.

## VI

These remarks lead to the conclusion that the Icelandic Commonwealth, as we know it in the oldest reliable sources, was not a democracy in any modern sense. The farmers of the twelfth century were strongly dependent upon *goðar* who strove to keep an area of influence around them, within which everyone had to respect their will. The independence of thirteenth-century farmers, which the sagas seem to reveal, was not a remnant of old freedom. It was an innovation of the age of *höfðingjar* and applied only to groups of men under the leadership of wealthy church-farmers.

<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Karlsson, "Goðar og bændur", *Saga X* (1972), 5-57.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld. Drög um íslenska menningu á þrettándu öld* (1940), 9-10; Sigurður Nordal, *Íslensk menning I* (1942), 129.

<sup>3</sup> Konrad Maurer, *Die Entstehung des Isländischen Staats und seiner Verfassung* (1852), 109.

<sup>4</sup> Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* (1956-8), I 72 ff., 280 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Ólafur Lárusson, *Lög og saga* (1958), 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Sturlunga saga* (Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason og Kristján Eldjárn sáu um útgáfunu, 1946), I 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, I 102.

<sup>8</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, I 96.

<sup>9</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 192-3.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. e.g. *Sturlungaöld*, 10; *Íslensk menning*, I 106.

<sup>11</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 216-17.

<sup>12</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 180.

<sup>13</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 87-103.

<sup>15</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 95. Cf. Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga*, I 342.

<sup>16</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 94.

<sup>18</sup> *Sturlunga saga*, II 143.

## TEXTUS, BRAULL AND GANGANDI GREIÐI

By HENRY KRATZ

THE passage in *Parcevals saga* that introduces the Grail — or what corresponds to the Grail in its source<sup>1</sup> — presents difficulties which have yet to be satisfactorily explained. The passage reads as follows:

Því næst gékk inn ein fögr mæð ok bar í höndum sér því líkast sem textus væri; en þeir í völsku máli kalla braull; en vér megum kalla ganganda greiða. Af því skein svá mikit ljós at þegar hvarf birti allra þeirra loga er í váru höllinni sem stjörnu birti fyrir sólar ljósi. Þat var gert með miklum hagleik af gulli ok öllum dýrstum steinum er í váru veröldunni. (30, 15-22)<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally this passage has been construed as follows:

Then there entered a fair maiden who bore in her hands something resembling a gospel-book (*textus*), which in French is called *braull*, and we may call *gangandi greiði*. From it so much light shone that immediately the brightness of all the flames in the palace vanished as does the starlight when the sun appears. It was made with great craftsmanship from gold and all the most precious stones in the world.

The Old Norse text is based on the following passage in Chrétien:

Un graal antre ses deus mains  
Une dameisele tenoit,  
Qui avuec les vaslez venoit,  
Bele et jante et bien acesmee.  
Quant ele fu leanz antree  
Atot le graal qu'ele tint,  
Une si granz clartez i vint  
Qu'ausi perdirent les chandoiles  
Lor clarté come les estoiles

Quant li solauz lieve ou la lune. . .  
 Li graaus, qui aloit devant,  
 De fin or esmeré estoit;  
 Pierres precieuses avoit  
 El graal de maintes menieres,  
 Des plus riches et des plus chieres  
 Qui an mer ne an terre soient:  
 Totes autres pierres passoient  
 Celes del graal sanz dotance. (3220-39)<sup>3</sup>

(A maid who was fair, charming and well-dressed came with the young men, and held a Grail between her two hands. When she had come in with the Grail that she held, such a great brightness came about that the candles lost their brightness as stars do when the sun or moon rises. . . . The Grail, which came in front, was of fine, refined gold; the Grail contained on it many kinds of precious stones of the richest and most valuable anywhere in the sea or on the earth. The stones on the Grail surpassed all others without any doubt.)

The Old Norse version thus contains a threefold rendition of "Grail": the Old French word, *graal* distorted to *braull* (1), which is likened to a gospel-book (2), and which can be translated into Norse as *gangandi greiði* (3). *Braull* is assumed to be due to a misreading of *graal* which probably took place somewhere within the Norse tradition.<sup>4</sup> *Textus* was explained by Richard Heinzel<sup>5</sup> as the result of a confusion of OF *graaus*, *graal* "Grail"<sup>6</sup> with *graal*, *grael* "service book used in the mass",<sup>7</sup> from Latin *gradale*, *graduale*.<sup>8</sup> The one kind of service book (*textus*) was therefore used to explain the other (*gradale*). If such is the case, we must assume that *textus* was a word generally known to a Norwegian audience, whereas *gradale* was not. If this explanation is right, incidentally, this is another reason why the erroneous form *braull* must have arisen within the Scandinavian tradition.

This explanation would do nicely if it were not for the puzzling phrase *gangandi greiði* which then follows as a Norse equivalent for *braull*. Peter Foote construes the words *þvi líkast sem textus væri* adverbially, rather than

adjectivally, so that the passage would mean, "in her hands she was carrying something just as if it were a *textus*".<sup>9</sup> This is a happy thought, and receives some support from the Old French description of the damsel holding the Grail "between her two hands", which could well have inspired the translator to think of the comparison to a gospel-book.<sup>10</sup>

The further description of the Grail both in the Old French and the Old Norse text, with the mention of gold and precious stones, could easily apply to a medieval gospel-book. As Jean Fourquet says:<sup>11</sup> "Cette comparaison n'est pas absurde en soi: les évangélistes anciens étaient des œuvres d'art: les plats étaient revêtus d'une feuille d'or, où étaient serties des pierres précieuses."

To support his view Foote cites Cleasby-Vigfusson's rendering<sup>12</sup> of *því líkast sem* as "most like as if, just as if", but I do not believe that his interpretation necessarily applies. The literal meaning of *því líkast sem textus væri* is something like "most like that, as if it were a *textus*", the meaning of which is quite ambiguous, depending upon what the writer meant by *því*. Like English *that* it can refer to something fairly concrete, or it can refer to a situation or an action. In our passage, now, if *því* is meant to mean "that (concrete) thing", then the clause is adjectival, modifying the missing or understood "thing" the damsel is carrying, and the traditional meaning must apply. If, on the other hand, *því* means "that situation", "that action", or the like, then Foote's interpretation applies. I do not see that the question can be resolved on the basis of grammar, so that we are forced to depend upon the context for help.

The difficulties presented by *textus* and the clause we have discussed are only compounded by the elucidation of *braull* as something which could be called *gangandi greiði* in Norse. Heinzel (p. 6) translated this phrase as "gehende Bewirthing", and Fourquet (p. 44) as "service ambulant". Roger S. Loomis<sup>13</sup> renders it as "walking

hospitality", and more concretely as "ambulant purveyor of hospitality". Heinzel (p. 30) and Loomis (p. 99) believe that this concept must have been derived from some other source, such as the *First Continuation* of Chrétien's work, where in fact the Grail was a self-propelled vessel that dispensed "hospitality".<sup>14</sup>

Apart from not fitting in with the identification of the Grail with a gospel-book, this explanation has the further disadvantage, as Foote points out (p. 55), of "going outside the translated text for an explanation — and elsewhere there is no evidence of the use of information from sources other than Chrétien". Also, he continues, in the other passages in which the phrase occurs "he does not regard the Graal as a container of any kind but as an object complete and sufficient in itself".

Foote's explanation for *því líkast sem textus væri* is not in conflict with the explanation of *gangandi greiði* as "walking hospitality", but he has propounded a theory for the explanation of this phrase that assumes that the translator traced the word *graaus*, *graal* to Latin *grad(u)ale*, and etymologized it as a compound made up of the Latin verbs *gradior* and *alo*. The phrase *gangandi greiði*, then, is in his view a kind of loan translation based on these two Latin words (p. 57).

This is a clever hypothesis; one, moreover, which cannot be absolutely refuted any more than it can be definitely proved. However, Foote does not clearly state whether he means that the translator thought of Latin *grad(u)ale* meaning "service-book" or *grad(u)ale* meaning "bowl". If the former, one wonders how he would have arrived at the association with *grad(u)ale* at all or why he would have etymologized it as derived from *gradior* and *alo*. It would have to be in the following manner: the way the Grail was carried made it seem like a gospel-book (*textus*); the form of *graal* plus the mental association with *textus* caused him to think of another type of service-book, *gradale*, which he etymologized the way he did because



of the way the Grail was used. On the other hand, to assume the translator had *grad(u)ale* "bowl" in mind is to assume too much knowledge on his part of the etymology of a word of which he does not even seem to understand the meaning. The word in Old French is rare, and the Latin word rarer still. As Foote himself says, "the translator did not regard the Graal as a dish bearing physical nourishment of any kind, not even a single wafer" (p. 56).

I think another explanation is possible, and perhaps more plausible. The Heinzel-Loomis explanation contains a weakness that has been overlooked, namely the semantics of Old Norse *greiði*. Fritzner<sup>15</sup> glosses the pertinent meaning as "Opvartning, Hjælp som ydes Gjest eller Reisende ved hans Komme til et Hus" ("attendance upon or help given to a guest or traveller when he comes to a house"). He gives a number of examples, of which the citation from the *Fóstbræðra saga* is typical: "Þorkell fagnar þeim vel ok býðr þeim greiða" ("Þorkell welcomes them and offers them hospitality"). Cleasby-Vigfusson (s.v.) gloss this use of the word as "entertainment, refreshment". "Entertainment" hardly seems the proper word for what amounts to the bestowal of food and drink, or bed and board, and "refreshment" seems to be a little too concrete, although it must be granted that there is a certain semantic ambiguity present in examples like the one cited. Thus, the word means "(bestowal of) hospitality", "the providing (or serving) of food and drink", and possibly by extension, "food and drink". To gloss *gangandi greiði*, then, as "ambulant purveyor of hospitality" goes beyond the semantic limits of the phrase, and is the kind of error that can easily occur when transmutations are made within a target language of a phrase that owes its origin to a phrase in the original that is not subject to such transmutations. Since the meaning "walking refreshment" does not get us very far, we must, I think, stick to "walking hospitality",

that is, "the walking bestowal of hospitality", or, more precisely, "hospitality bestowed while walking", to understand our phrase.

Let us now consider in conjunction with the pertinent passages in the French text the other passages in the work where the phrase occurs. We must bear in mind that the saga is not an exact translation of the French, but rather very often a loose paraphrase.

After being excoriated by the Ugly Maiden, Parceval vows that he will not rest with regard to the Grail "until he knows who is served with it, and until he has found the lance that bleeds, and is told the proven truth of why it bleeds":

Tant que il del graal savra  
Cui l'an an sert, et qu'il avra  
La lance qui sainne trovee  
Et que la veritez provee  
Li iert dite por qu'ele sainne . . . (4735-9)

This is reduced in the Old Norse text to the following:

En Parceval sór at hann skyldi ekki fyrr aptr koma en hann  
vissi hvat gangandi greiði var . . . (41, 31-2)

(And Parceval vowed that he would not return until he knew what *gangandi greiði* was.)

It will be noted that *gangandi greiði* does not translate *graal* precisely, but rather stands for the whole complex of the Grail and the person served with it. Thus, if we render the phrase in its literal meaning of "walking hospitality" ("service"), it will fit very well into the context here: Parceval vowed to find out what the strange procession was all about.

Parceval's cousin asks him if he saw the lance that bleeds, and when he answers affirmatively she asks him if he asked why it bled. He answers negatively, and she reproaches him (3548-55). This is reproduced accurately

in the saga (32, 6-10). The cousin then continues her inquiry:

“ . . .  
 Et veistes vos le graal?”  
 “Oil, bien.” — “Et qui le tenoit?”  
 “Une pucele.” — “Et don venoit?”  
 “D’une chanbre.” — “Et ou an ala?”  
 “An une autre chanbre an antra.”  
 “Aloit devant le graal nus?”  
 “Oil.” — “Qui?” — “Dui vaslet sanz plus.”  
 “Et que tenoient an lor mains?”  
 “Chandeliers de chandoiles plains.”  
 “Et après le graal qui vint?”  
 “Une autre pucele.” — “Et que tint?”  
 “Un petit tailleor d’arjant.”  
 “Demandastes vos a la jant  
 Quel part il aloient einsi?”  
 “Onques de ma boche n’issi.” (3556-70)

(“ . . . And did you see the Grail?” — “Yes, indeed.” — “And who was holding it?” — “A maiden.” — “And where did it come from?” — “From a room.” — “And where did it go to?” — “It went into another room.” — “Was anyone walking in front of the Grail?” — “Yes.” — “Who?” — “Two pages, no more.” — “And what were they holding in their hands?” — “Candelabra filled with candles.” — “And who came after the Grail?” — “Another maiden.” — “And what was she holding?” — “A little silver platter.” — “Did you ask the people where they were going like that?” — “Such never came out of my mouth.”)

This passage is completely lacking in the saga. The epic now contains the passage in which the cousin asks Perceval his name and he guesses it to be “Percevaus li galois” (3572-6), and which the saga more or less faithfully reproduces (32, 10-12). The cousin upbraids him again:

“Tes nons est changez, biaux amis.”  
 “Comant?” — “Percevaus li cheitis!  
 Ha! Percevaus maleüreus,  
 Con fus or mesavantureus  
 Quant tu tot ce n’as demandé!  
 Que tant eüsses amandé

Le buen roi qui est maheigniez,  
 Que toz eüst regaeigniez  
 Ses manbres et terre tenist,  
 Et si granz biens an avenist! . ." (3581-90)

("Your name is changed, good friend." "How?" "Parceval the Wretched! Ha! How unfortunate you were when you didn't ask about all of this! For you would have helped the good king who is wounded so much that he would have regained the use of his limbs and would keep his lands, and so great good would come of it!")

This passage appears in the saga as follows:

Vin, kvað hon, þú hefir nú skipt nafni þínu; illa er þér nú farit, hinn veili Parceval, er þú spurðir ekki um spjótit eða ganganda greiðann, þvíat þá hefði bæzt hinum góða konungi fiskimanni ok hefði hann þegar orðit heill ok kátr. (32, 15-19)

("Friend," she said, "now you have changed your name. You acted wrongly, wretched Parceval, in not asking about the lance or the *gangandi greiði*, because then the good Fisher King would have been helped, and would at once have become healthy and happy.")

Since the passage in which Parceval tells of seeing the Grail had been deleted, it was necessary for the translator to replace the *tot ce* ("all this") of the French text by nouns that referred to the whole event. Again, *gangandi greiði* appears to apply to the whole procession.

Parceval related his visit to the Grail Castle to his uncle the hermit:

"Sire, chiés le roi Pescheor  
 Fui une foiz et vi la lance  
 Don li fers saine sanz dotance,  
 Et de cele gote de sanc  
 Que de la pointe del fer blanc  
 Vi pandre, rien n'an demandai;  
 Onques puis, certes, n'amandai.  
 Et del graal que je i vi  
 Ne soi pas cui l'an an servi,  
 S'an ai puis eü si grant duel  
 Que morz etisse esté mon vuel . . ." (6372-82)

("Sir, I was once at the castle of the Fisher King and saw the lance whose point bleeds, without doubt, and about that drop of blood that I saw hanging from the shining iron I didn't ask anything at all. And I never made up for this, certainly. And with regard to the Grail that I saw there, I didn't find out who was served by it, and since then I've been so grieved that I wished I could be dead.")

The saga reduces this passage to the following:

Síðan segir hann hánun alla atburði þá er hann hafði sét með konungi fiskimanni ok kvezt af því haft hafa jafnan hinn mesta harm, er hann spurði ekki um spjótit eðr ganganda greiðann . . . (52, 12-16)

(Afterwards he tells him all the happenings which he had seen at the home of the Fisher King, and said he had been greatly grieved ever since because he had not asked about the lance or the *gangandi greiði*.)

Once more, *gangandi greiði* refers both to the Grail and the one who is served with it.

The hermit tells his nephew that his mother died when he left her (6392-8), and continues as follows:

“ . . .  
 Por le pechié que tu an as  
 T'avint que tu ne demandas  
 De la lance ne del graal,  
 Si t'an sont venu maint mal . . . ” (6399-402)

(" . . . Because of the sin you committed in this, it befell you that you didn't ask about the lance or the Grail, and so you suffered many ills because of it.")

The causality is lost in the Norse version:

Þat er þér ok mikil synd er þú spurðir ekki um ganganda greiðann ok um spjótit er jafnan blæðir ur oddinum . . (52, 20-2).

(" . . . That is also a great sin on your part that you did not ask about the *gangandi greiði* and the lance that always bleeds from the point.")

In this instance, it must be granted, *gangandi greiði* stands only for the word *graal* in the French text, but the reference is to the same situation that a few lines before had been characterized by a mention of the serving as well. In view of the loose, paraphrasing nature of the translation, the use of the phrase here would have nothing out of the ordinary about it.

The hermit then more or less explains the mystery of the Grail to Perceval:

“  
 Et quant del graal ne seüs  
 Cui l'an an sert, fol san eüs:  
 Cil cui l'an an sert, est mes frere;  
 Ma suer et soe fu ta mere,  
 Et del riche Pescheor croi  
 Que il est filz a celui roi  
 Qui del graal servir se fet.  
 Mes ne cūdiez pas que il et  
 Luz ne lamproies ne saumon:  
 D'une sole oiste li sainz hon,  
 Que l'an an cest graal li porte,  
 Sa vie sostient et conforte;  
 Tant sainte chose est li graaus,  
 Et il est si esperitaus  
 Qu'a sa vie plus ne covient  
 Que l'oiste qui el graal vient.  
 Quinze anz a ja esté ainsi  
 Que fors de la chanbre n'issi  
 Ou le graal veis antrer. . . .” (6413-31)

(“ . . . And when you didn't find out about who was served by the Grail you acted foolishly, for the one who is served by it is my brother. My sister and his was your mother. And I believe that the rich Fisherman is the son of that king who has himself served by the Grail. But don't get the idea that he has pike or lampreys or salmon: this holy man sustains and comforts himself with a single host that is brought to him in the Grail. The Grail is such a holy thing, and he is so spiritual, that he desires nothing more for his life than the host which comes in the Grail. For fifteen years he has not come out of the room that you saw the Grail go into.”)

The saga here changes the sense of the original considerably:

Ek er móðurbróðir þinn, en sá hinn ríki fiskimaðr er son konungs þess er sér lætr með slíku þjóna ok þér fagnaði. En þat er einn heilagr hlutr, er hinn ríki maðr lætr bera fyrir sér til hugganar ok upphalds sálu sinnar ok lífs; er þessi hinn heilagi hlutr andligr, en ekki líkamligr. Þar hefir hann nú verit VII vetr. (52, 24-9)

("... I am your uncle, and the rich fisherman is the son of the king who has himself served in this way and made you welcome. And there is a holy thing that the rich man has brought to him to comfort and support his soul and his life. This holy thing is spiritual and not physical. He has been there for seven years now.")

We must note that here, when he has a chance at the word *graal* no fewer than five times, the translator does not once use the phrase *gangandi greiði* to render it. Instead he uses the paraphrase *hinn heilagi hlutr*, "the holy thing", and he does so, I believe, because *gangandi greiði*, which fits the procession and the serving well, does not fit the object, and he is well aware of it. I suspect he is so vague in his reference because he is not sure in his own mind what the Grail is meant to be. But why did he leave out the host and its magic sustaining power, and put the emphasis completely on spiritual values? Possibly because he simply did not understand the passage — it is not the only one he did not understand<sup>16</sup> — but also possibly because of a strong rationalizing tendency which is evidenced also at other points in the saga where the original must have seemed too far-fetched for him or a Scandinavian audience to accept.<sup>17</sup>

All would be comprehensible if we did not have the very first use of *gangandi greiði*, cited above, where it refers directly to the object of the Grail, further described as being ornamented with gold and jewels. I think the answer is that here we have an interpolation by a thought-

less later scribe, possibly the Icelandic one. If we eradicate the clause "en vér megum kalla ganganda greiða", the whole passage is smoother and entirely comprehensible. Instead of three explanations of the object we have two: the maid bore something like a gospel-book which in French is called a *braull*. It may be noted that in this passage the word for "Grail" occurs four times in the French text, but only once in the Norse translation. Once he had mentioned it the translator did his best not to reveal his ignorance by using it again in a way that might have given him away. He chose instead to use vague referents and circumlocution.

<sup>1</sup> *Parcevals saga* is a rather free, much condensed version, made in Norway, but extant only in Icelandic copies, of Chrétien de Troyes' *Parceval romance*, *Li Contes del Graal* — see Eugen Kölbing, 'Die nordische Parzivalsaga und ihre Quelle', *Germania* XIV (1869), 129-81.

<sup>2</sup> All references to *Parcevals saga* are to the text in *Riddarasögur*, ed. Eugen Kölbing (1872).

<sup>3</sup> All references to Chrétien are to *Der Percevalroman (Li Contes del Graal)* von Christian von Troyes, ed. Alfons Hilka (1932).

<sup>4</sup> In *Wolfram von Eschenbach et le Conte del Graal* (second edition, 1966), 44, fn. 1, Jean Fourquet notes that the form *braull* must have been introduced by a copyist, since it is unthinkable that the Norwegian translator could have thus deformed a word that appears so often in the French text. Since it occurs only once in the Norse text, he had no other reading to go by.

<sup>5</sup> 'Über die französischen Gralromane', *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Wien, Phil.-Hist. Cl.* XL (1891), 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> See Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch* (1915—), IV 491-4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 505.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion of the etymology in Walther von Wartburg, *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1922—), II 1294-5.

<sup>9</sup> 'Gangandi greiði', *Einarsbók. Afmælskveðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar* 12. desember 1969 (1969), 53.

<sup>10</sup> See Foote, *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Fourquet (1966), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (second edition with a supplement by Sir William A. Craigie 1957, reprinted 1969), s.v. *þvi-líkr*.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Grail in the *Parcevals saga*', *Germanic Review* XXXIX (1964), 98.

<sup>14</sup> See William Roach, ed., *The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes* (1949-71), I, lines 13281-305.

<sup>15</sup> Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog* (1883-96, reprinted 1954), s.v. *greiði*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. especially the saga's rendering (9, 30-2) of the passage in Chrétien (1133-8) where young Parceval, trying to get off the Red Knight's armour, says he will have to cut the flesh into little pieces to get it off. In the saga Parceval says he will burn the corpse to cold ashes.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, the saga (8, 15-29) omits all references to the girl who laughed when she saw Parceval after the court fool had predicted that she would not laugh until she saw the one who would be lord over all chivalry (1033-62). It also omits (29, 26-36) all the references to the magic qualities of the sword Parceval received at the Grail Castle (3138-57).



# LAXDÆLA SAGA — A STRUCTURAL APPROACH<sup>1</sup>

By HEINRICH BECK

IN recent years structural approaches to Icelandic family sagas have to a large extent determined saga research. This is probably due to the fact that *Íslendingasögur* have been seen more and more as works with a specific literary form that could be described as a narrative structure.

T. M. Andersson suggested a general structure of sagas, postulating a kind of "Urphänomen der Sagastruktur" as Paul Schach called it in a review of Andersson's book.<sup>2</sup> According to Andersson, the structure of most *Íslendingasögur* has six parts: introduction, conflict, climax, revenge, reconciliation, aftermath. This is a rather general picture. Long ago Aristotle said that an epic narration should be a well-rounded story, with a beginning, middle and end. *Íslendingasögur* easily meet those standards. Belonging to the epic-dramatic genre they develop the middle part in a causal way: ascending to a climax (Andersson's conflict and climax) and descending to an equilibrium (Andersson's revenge and reconciliation). Andersson himself rightly called for further studies of individual sagas.

This has been done for *Laxdæla saga* chiefly by R. Heller<sup>3</sup> and A. M. Arent Madelung.<sup>4</sup> Both show in detail that this saga has a structure determined especially by recurring elements:

- (a) on a linguistic level: men and women, armour, dress and the like are described in a language of highly formulaic character;
- (b) on a narrative level: narrative units (*Motive, Erzähleinheiten* are Heller's terms, *patterns* Arent Madelung's) recur on a smaller and larger scale;

Heller points out the *Motivwiederholungen* in the case of Guðrún and Vígdís, Melkorka, Kjartan and Geirmundr; recurring *Erzähleinheiten* determine the narration of the killings, drownings, wooings, marriages, voyages.

Arent Madelung's monograph transcends the structural level and combines formal analysis (the aspect of expression) with social and moral evaluation of the structure (symbolizing in a way the aspect of form). The results are provocative: according to Arent Madelung, the formal structure reveals a social and moral order that is inflexible, rigid and inescapable. It mirrors an analogous situation in mid-thirteenth-century Iceland. Thus *Laxdæla saga* metamorphoses into a *roman à clef*.

It is not my intention to discuss this hypothesis. My approach will be a mainly structural one, restricting itself to the literary form of *Laxdæla saga* under three headings:

- (1) the time perspective;
- (2) the narrative elements;
- (3) the narrative sequences.

Time constitutes a necessary dimension of every narrative; all that is related happens in time and is told in time. Physical, objective time has thus to be distinguished from narrative time. It is the relationship of objective and narrative time that helps to clarify the time perspective of *Laxdæla*.

The narration forms a manifold fabric of elementary and complex units, narrative elements and sequences, as I call them. Their relation to each other and to the whole determine the structure of the saga.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. *The time perspective of Laxdæla*<sup>6</sup>

Objective time in *Laxdæla* reaches from Ketill flatnefr, contemporary of King Haraldr inn hárfagri, to Gellir Þorkelsson, the son of Guðrún. That is from about 872

(battle of Hafrsfjord) until 1073 (death of Gellir) — two hundred years, about seven generations.

The tempo of narration, narrative time, varies greatly within this space of objective time. Rapid tempo (corresponding to concise narration) alternates with slow tempo (corresponding to detailed narration). The author creates his narrative time by arranging events in accordance with the general intent of his work. There are two clear instances where detailed narration is important in *Laxdæla*.

In the first part of the saga there are biographical stages in the lives of certain characters that are described in detail: birth, youth, marriage, public career, old age, death. Yet there are only a few persons who show a full unfolding of this sequence. These are: Høskuldr (chs. 5-26), Þorleikr (9-39), Óláfr (13-51), Bolli (25-55), Kjartan (28-51), Gellir Þorkelsson (70-78).

Gellir belongs neither to the first nor to the central part of the saga — he is mentioned only in the last eight chapters. Andersson treats him under the heading "aftermath". Is it because he is the grandfather of Ari inn fróði Þorgilsson (who is sometimes named in the saga as an authority) that his life at Helgafell is noted on lines that otherwise especially pertain to the Laxdælir of the first part of the saga? That means that three generations of Laxdælir dominate the first part: Høskuldr and his two sons Þorleikr and Óláfr, and again their sons Kjartan and Bolli. The narrator treats certain biographical stages (not to be interpreted as biographies) in the lives of these persons in a very detailed narration, using narrative units that have both epic and dramatic quality: travels abroad and appearances before the king, courtships and marriages, feasts and land acquisitions, violation of social and moral order and attempts to restore them. In comparison with objective time, the steady flow of narrative time reveals itself as discontinuous. It concentrates on certain events which in

the first part of the saga are related to the Laxdælir from Hǫskuldr to Kjartan and Bolli.

The second part of *Laxdæla* also shows a definite distinction between objective and narrative time and a certain rhythm of detailed and concise narration.

There are instances where the narrator bridges a large span of time with a few words and there are instances where he reckons with weeks, days and even hours. This difference reflects his intention to concentrate on certain time sequences and to treat others cursorily.

A large span of time is mentioned *expressis verbis* after the deaths of Kjartan and Bolli. After Kjartan's death Óláfr manages to settle the conflict. The next event told in detail (with direct speech) is Þorgerð's goading. The time between amounts to three years told in a few lines:

Þat er sagt, at Óláfr lifði þrjá vetr, síðan Kjartan var veginn. En síðan, er hann var allr, skiptu þeir synir hans arfi eptir hann; tók Halldórr bústað í Hjarðarholti. Þorgerðr, móðir þeira, var með Halldóri. Hon var mjök heiptarfingin til Bolla, ok þótti sár fósturlaunin (p. 159).

Apparently the narrator wants to concentrate on the sequence of Kjartan's death, Ólaf's settlement of the conflict, Þorgerð's goading.

We notice the same time perspective after Bolli's death. Snorri proposes *at leita um sættir* but Guðrún opposes. After twelve years Guðrún asks Snorri again *hvar hefnd þessi skal niðr koma*. The long time between these events is filled by two short chapters (57 and 58) which introduce Þorgils and Þorkell. This is a kind of secondary path that leads up to the main theme in chapter 59. The narrator again concentrates on the sequence of Bolli's death, the question of a settlement, Guðrún's demand for revenge. He passes rather rapidly over the intervening time (i.e. twelve years). In the narrator's perspective he leaves Guðrún after Bolli's death and the birth of Bolli Bollason

a little later, and returns again to her at the moment she demands revenge.

There is on the other hand detailed narration about Guðrún's goading and Kjartan's death. The time from the third to the fifth day after Easter corresponds to nine pages of the saga edition (pp. 147-55). Þorgerð's goading and Bolli's death cover half a year of objective time (from winter to summer), corresponding to eight pages of the edition (pp. 161-8). Guðrún's second goading and Helgi's death (twelve years after Bolli's killing) cover a few months (from summer to autumn). For this the narrator uses six chapters, 17½ pages (pp. 176-93). Within these time sequences detailed narration takes into account not only days but even parts of days. Temporal expressions like *fám nóttum síðar*, *um nóttina eptir*, *inn næsta dróttinsdag*, *þriðja dag snimma* etc. illustrate this.

These examples show that narrative time does not correspond to objective time in an unchanging relationship. The narrator's time has its own law that uses the dimensions of objective time as elements but not as standards of measurement.

## 2. *The narrative elements of Laxdæla*<sup>7</sup>

It has been noted before that there are recurring elements in *Laxdæla* — words, phrases, narrative units. On the level of narrative units it shares in the common stock of the saga genre, but one way the individuality of a saga is revealed is in its use of such units. This individuality might be determined by observing the distinction between detailed and concise narration in relation to narrative elements.

There are at least seven narrative elements in *Laxdæla* that are presented in detailed narration and recur up to ten times; briefly, as follows:

(a) The Iclander and the king. This element occurs ten times and applies only to certain persons: Hǫskuldr and

Hrútr, Óláfr pái, Kjartan and Bolli, Þorleikr, Bolli Bollason and Þorkell. These are all descendants of Unnr and Þorgerðr, with the exception of Þorkell, fourth husband of Guðrún. This unit is a means of distinguishing and honouring the Iclander by confronting him with the highest social authority of the time, the king. Significant for this is the use of the verb *reyna*. *Reyndr*, proved, the Iclander leaves the king.

(b) Courtship and marriage. This unit occurs nine times in the saga. It refers to the couples: Óláfr feilan and Álfðís; Hǫskuldr and Jörunn; Óláfr and Þorgerðr; Bolli and Guðrún; Kjartan and Hrefna; Þorkell and Guðrún; Bolli and Þordís. These are again the descendants of Unnr, especially in the Laxdælir line, along with Óláfr feilan, the ancestor of the Hvammverjar, and, once more, Þorkell, Guðrún's last husband. This narrative unit has a manifold function: it shows the grandeur, wealth and reputation of those involved, and it thickens the plot.

(c) Dreams. The saga records ten dreams. They refer to the fate of Kjartan, Guðrún and her four husbands. All the dreams look at something that is to come and span different periods. Interpretation and fulfilment of the dream can follow right away, but may extend over large parts of the saga (as Guðrún's dreams do).

(d) Feasts. The saga depicts two funeral feasts (for Unnr and Hǫskuldr) and three banquets (of the Hjarðhyltingar and Laugamenn). The funeral feasts are preceded by divisions of the inheritance: from Unnr Óláfr feilan receives Hvammr, the ancestral seat of the Hvammverjar; Hǫskuldr grants Óláfr pái an equal hereditary status with his stepbrothers. Banquets usually stand for wealth, gaiety, friendship — the three banquets at Laugar and Hjarðarholt turn out to be the opposite: hatred and hostility are the results.

(e) Acquisitions of land. Four narrative units tell about the acquisition of land: Óláfr acquires Hrappsstaðir

and Ósvífr enlarges Laugar with land from Tunga; Kjartan prevents Guðrún and Bolli from buying Tunga, a provocative act that helps lead to Kjartan's death; Þorkell's attempt to buy Hjarðarholt ends in a humiliating way. Land acquisition functions in the saga somewhat like a touchstone: it brings wealth and honour to one, loss and disgrace to another.

(f) The rescuing and goading woman. Two narrative units show women rescuing a fugitive (Vigdís and Guðrún), and three units women goading sons or brothers (Guðrún and Þorgerðr). In the first case the narrative unit reveals the greatness of personality of Vigdís and Guðrún — their *skörungskapr*. Vigdís's husband Þórðr falls short in this situation, Guðrún's husband Þorkell proves worthy.

(g) Revenge and reconciliation. The three units which have to be mentioned here are the logical continuation of the preceding unit. Victims of the revenge are Kjartan, Bolli and Helgi. Attempts at reconciliation are made by Óláfr and Snorri goði.

One common feature is found in these seven narrative elements: the use of dialogue as a sign of detailed narration by which narrative time approaches objective time.

In these narrative elements we further notice a concentration on certain persons, men and women. It is characteristic of *Laxdæla* that women play a decisive role, as can be seen in the elements listed under (b) and (f) above. There are on the other hand narrative units that mainly or exclusively characterize men: (a), (e) and (g) above.

Like all *Íslendingasögur*, *Laxdæla* belongs to a genre that can be called epic-dramatic. The narrative elements pertain mainly to one or the other side of this poetic presentation. That it is a question of presentation (and not of some immanent quality in the narrative elements) can be seen from "the Icclander and the king". In *Laxdæla* this element has no conflict character. The

*reyna* situation shows the uniqueness, the greatness, of the Icelander, his magnificent appearance — unlike *Egils saga*, for example, or some *þættir* that develop their conflicts out of this narrative element alone.

The feasts are another example of the epic character of some of these units. Two magnificent funeral feasts are reported in detail: those of Unnr and Hǫskuldr. Nine hundred men assembled at Hǫskuldr's *erfveizla* and all *virðingamenn* left with presents. The narrator does not forget to mention that it was second only to the funeral feast of the Hjaltasynir in honour of their father, when 1440 men came together. There are other narrative units with a definite dramatic character. The feasts at Laugar and Hjarðarholt are examples of this. Arranged to cultivate friendship and good will they turn suddenly into the opposite. There is a contrast between the external splendour, the magnificent attire and precious gifts, and the suspicion and offence that govern both parties. Njörður P. Njarðvík has tried to interpret *Laxdæla* on precisely this basis of contrast between external splendour and moral deficiency.<sup>8</sup>

*Laxdæla* not only shares in the common saga stock of narrative elements but is also characterized by the formal way in which it makes recurrent use of such elements. Structural approaches quite often isolate such formal features — sometimes at the expense of content. Only by combining both aspects, form and content, can we expect insight into this structural feature of *Laxdæla*.

Looking at these recurring narrative elements we notice first that they concentrate on certain persons: men distinguished by birth and character who disturb or defend social harmony, women of high *skörungskapr* who challenge their contemporaries.

Most of these men are descendants of Unnr in djúpúðga. The time perspective showed a concentration on a certain group of them: the Laxdælir (Hǫskuldr, Þorleikr, Óláfr, Bolli, Kjartan). There is clearly a



division within this line: Hǫskuldr and his descendants, Þorleikr and Bolli, represent on the one side three generations that threaten the social balance. On the other side, Hǫskuldr and his descendants, Óláfr and Kjartan, are distinguished representatives and defenders of society in its existing form. It is Hǫskuldr who combines in one person the possibilities that divide the following generations.

There is something like a hereditary law determining the fate of these three generations: recurring challenges find recurring answers — a young man proves his worth abroad, returns to Iceland, marries, becomes entangled in conflicts or tries to settle such conflicts. The hereditary disposition corresponds to a formal repetition.

It is different where women dominate in recurring narrative elements. It is not a common hereditary quality that unites Vigdís, Guðrún and Þorgerðr but their personal quality, their *skörungskapr*. This *skörungskapr* represents a challenge to relatives and friends, requiring them to give help to kinsmen in need and to exact revenge for *frændr* who have lost their lives in fighting for their rights. Refusal to give *mannbætr* was one of the reasons why Ketill and his *frændr* left Norway in the days of Haraldr inn hárfagri (according to ch. 2 of the saga). This right to receive *mannbætr* is never questioned in the saga; it is simply the other side of giving help to those in need. It is a question of relationship by blood or marriage and those involved are men of quality (according to the standards of the saga). That is even true of those *sekir menn* who find the help of Vigdís and Guðrún: Þórólfr and Gunnarr Þiðrandabani. Both are guilty of killing. But the narrator emphasizes that both are men of honour and bravery in conflict with *stórir menn*.

The common element in these rescuing and goading motifs may be found therefore in the social ideals that govern *Laxdæla*. According to these ideals, women to a

certain extent guarantee the functioning of the system: *skörungskapr* and the right to *mannbætr* are important factors in the social interplay. The narrator emphasizes this fact by using the formal feature of repetition.

### 3. *The narrative sequences of Laxdæla*

The more complex narrative units in *Laxdæla*, narrative sequences as I have called them, show the same characteristics of recurrence as the narrative units just spoken of.<sup>9</sup> There are five of these narrative sequences constructed in two patterns: 1-3 and 3-5.

Both of them show a structure of four people as elements in functional dependency. In the first pattern the four elements are:

- A. a man of high descent who violates the harmony of a social order;
- B. a woman of comparable descent who is deprived of rights by A's actions;
- C. someone closely connected to A who is injured by A's activities;
- D. someone who tries to restore the social balance.

In the *first narrative sequence* it is Hǫskuldr who questions an existing order: first in regard to Vigdís, grandchild of Óláfr feilan and daughter of Þórðr gellir's sister, second in regard to his stepbrother Hrútr.

The Hrútr conflict (the A-C relation) concerns the heritage of both men: Hǫskuldr refuses to give Hrútr his share, and Hrútr tries to take it by force. The battle in Orrostudalr brings death to four of Hǫskuld's men. An *ættvíg*, a slaying of kinsmen, threatens.

Jórunn's intervention (the A-D relation) prevents this. The opponents settle their conflict. This apparent violation of rights by Hǫskuldr finds a balance in another

conflict when a freed slave of Hrútr wrongly demands land from Hǫskuldr and receives support from Hrútr. The slave is killed and Hrútr has to submit to the legal verdict.

In the A-B conflict Vigdís represents the opposite party: the distinguished line of the Hvammverjar. After the divorce of Vigdís they, under the leadership of Þórðr gellir, demand half of the property, but Hǫskuldr hinders the Hvammverjar from succeeding. Presents given by Hǫskuldr help to allay the quarrel but are not able to restore full harmony.

In the *second narrative sequence* it is Hǫskuld's son Þorleikr who violates the social order, in regard to his uncle Hrútr (A-C) and to Guðrún (A-B), who belongs to the distinguished Laugamenn party.

The conflict with Hrútr arises from different understandings of *virðing* — honour, reputation. Þorleikr believes that he is treated dishonourably and retaliates with a *svivirðing* — Hrútr's son meets his death. Óláfr pái forces the two opponents to leave it at that: Hrútr gets no revenge, Þorleikr has to leave the country.

Þorleik's second conflict concerns the Laugamenn. They want Kotkell punished for the death of Guðrún's husband. Misled by the opportunity of gaining possession of four desirable stud horses, Þorleikr prevents the fulfilment of this demand. Snorri and Ósvífr allow themselves to be satisfied in spite of refraining from action.

The first and the second narrative sequences agree in so far as both B and C are deprived of rights, with A as the violating party. Compared to the first sequence the conflict in the second is more severe, and it will become even more so in the third sequence, where the violation of the rights of B and C can no longer be left unchallenged. A's guilt weighs twice.

In the *third sequence* Þorleik's son Bolli disregards the rights of his foster-brother Kjartan (A-C relation) and of

Guðrún (the A-B relation). The conflict sharpens: it is not property or money or wergild which is now the issue, but the passionate feelings of a great woman. Bolli, who marries Guðrún during Kjartan's stay in Norway, disregards at one and the same time the rights of B and C: Guðrún and Kjartan believe that he has deceived them. This disregard brings death to Kjartan and finally to Bolli too. Snorri forces the opponents to submit to a legal settlement. The peace is kept until Ólaf's death, then a new narrative sequence and a new pattern begin.

There is an intensification in the A-line from Hǫskuldr to Þorleikr to Bolli: Hǫskuldr manages to keep his position, Þorleikr has to leave the country, Bolli meets death.

There is also an increase in the hurt inflicted on C: Hrútr loses some servants in the conflict with Hǫskuldr, he loses his son in conflict with Þorleikr, Kjartan loses his own life.

The involvement of the woman B increases: Vigdís demands half the property from her husband, Guðrún loses a husband through witchcraft, while in the third narrative sequence she sees her love and pride disregarded.

Consequently, the attempts to restore the balance intensify. In the first sequence Jörunn convinces her husband Hǫskuldr by a speech. In the second sequence Óláfr has to use all his authority to keep Hrútr from revenge and to persuade Þorleikr to leave the country. In the third sequence a legal decision has to be arranged to find a balance again, which lasts until Ólaf's death.

The narration reaches its climax in the third sequence. Three times the narrator unfolds the problem and brings it to its height. All that follows comes as a consequence of the third narrative sequence. After that the narration falls back to its equilibrium. The third narrative sequence is the hinge between the first pattern and the second, because it combines both. The second pattern again shows a functional relationship between four elements:

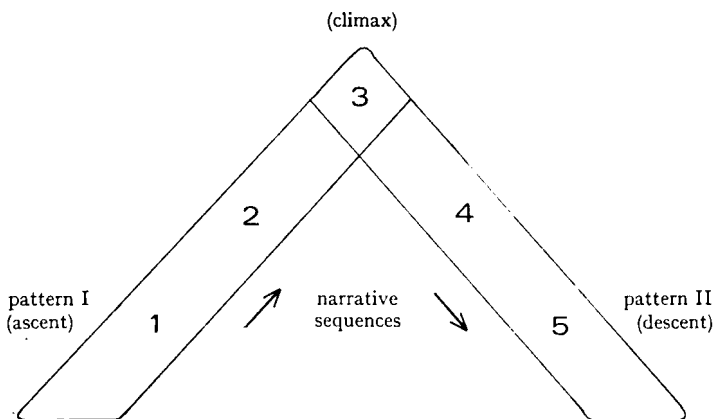
- A. a goading woman;
- B. sons and brothers of A, driven to revenge;
- C. the victim of the goading;
- D. a mediator who attempts to reconcile the opponents.

In the third narrative sequence, where both first and second patterns meet, Guðrún, the goading woman (A), initiates the action: her brothers (B) are blamed for putting up with Kjartan's *súlvirðing* (*dætr einshvers bónda*, Guðrún calls her brothers). Bolli is forced to take part in the action against Kjartan, his fosterbrother — otherwise, Guðrún threatens, it would mean the end of their marriage (*mun lokit okkrum samforum, ef þú skersk undan fœrinni*). Kjartan (C) meets death from Bolli's hand; Óláfr (D) brings about a legal settlement, but without being able to satisfy all members of his own family.

Kjartan's mother, Þorgerðr, incites her sons in the *fourth narrative sequence* to take revenge for Kjartan's death. Three years after Kjartan's death the balance brought about by Óláfr breaks down and Bolli is killed. Snorri offers to negotiate but Guðrún does not abandon her claims for revenge. Since her son, Þorleikr, is four years old, the killing remains unavenged for twelve years (until young Bolli is twelve) — these are the twelve years mentioned earlier which the narrator covers in two short chapters. It is again a disturbance of order that leads to the next narrative sequence.

The *fifth narrative sequence* begins with Guðrún's goading: she incites her sons to avenge the death of their father Bolli. Helgi is killed. Revenge and reconciliation are arranged by Snorri goði. He succeeds in interrupting the automatic *ættvíg*, the slaying of kinsmen. A social balance is found that satisfies both parties.

We notice two patterns in these five narrative sequences:



In 1-3 a member of the Laxdælir group violates certain rights. This brings about conflicts with close kinsmen and members of the distinguished Hvammverjar and Laugamenn parties.

In 3-5 the initiatives are taken by women of the Laugamenn and Laxdælir parties. They try to get the highest compensation for the violation of their rights.

The initiators of actions in 1-3 are therefore men who in pursuing their course violate social rules. The initiators in 3-5 are women who demand rigorous compensation for violation of their personal rights as mother, wife, lover.

The failure of the men in 1-3 corresponds to the stubbornness of the women in 3-5 — both failure and stubbornness are equally threatening for the social balance. The narrator counters these destructive tendencies with men and women who try to restore the balance. They do not reject the right to compensation, do not question the rules on which the society rests. Their dilemma involves the acceptance of an existing society with its rules

and laws and at the same time of individual and group demands that threaten the balance of that society.

According to *Laxdæla*, only those succeed in resolving this dilemma who have a clear insight into the existing social rules, who are able to distinguish right and wrong, like Hǫskuldr's wife Jórunn, who have the reputation, wealth and authority to guarantee a balance, like Óláfr pái, or who know all the shrewd ways of handling social affairs, like Snorri goði.

Let me now sum up the three main points about the structure of *Laxdæla* that I have tried to make:

(1) The time perspective shows a clear discontinuum in the treatment of two hundred years of objective time. We noticed detailed narration in biographical stages relating to Hǫskuldr, Þorleikr, Óláfr, Bolli and Kjartan in the first part of the saga. We saw a culmination of detailed narration in the goading of Guðrún and Þorgerðr and the deaths of Kjartan, Bolli and Helgi in the second part of the saga.

(2) The recurring narrative elements pertain to the epic and dramatic aspects of the saga. The principle of recurrence establishes combinations and parallels on the one hand, variations and contrasts on the other. Common to both is something that remains stable and unchanging — it may be the hereditary disposition of the Laxdælir, it may be the rules the society rests upon.

(3) The narrative sequences 1-5 follow two patterns. The ascent to the third sequence is determined by the Laxdælir, Hǫskuldr, Þorkell, Bolli; the descent from 3 to 5 is ruled by the Laxdælir women, Guðrún, Þorgerðr and again Guðrún. The third sequence leads up to the climax: here the conflict-initiatives of the male and female protagonists meet. The sequences are related to each other by ascent-climax-descent.

The relations within the sequences can be seen to entail a functional dependency between the elements protagonist-antagonist-mediator.

If my analysis is correct, the author of *Laxdæla* must have set about organizing his narrative in a remarkably clear-headed and systematic way.

### POSTSCRIPT

According to the preceding interpretation, an important part of the structure of the saga lies in the successive arrangement of two patterns, each consisting of an equal number of narrative sequences. Recognition of the logic of the narrative structure enables us to see the story from a particular angle or in the light of a dominant idea. We might call the first pattern "Provocation". The questioning and violation of social rules are the cause of the complications in the first three sequences; inheritance claims and rights of ownership, the moral criteria of a community, are disregarded. This disregard extends from deeds that can hardly be considered legal offences to clear-cut cases of violated legal norm. The provocation is against a very delicate equilibrium of complicated ideal norms that has not been secured judicially and institutionally but rather left to the free play of the various forces. A man must fight for his rights in the Icelandic Commonwealth. There is no social hierarchy as in the mother country, Norway — from *bóndi* to *hersir*, *jarl*, *lendr maðr* and *hirðmaðr*. One's status must be defended constantly, positively and steadfastly. The first three sequences are not disconnected but constitute a clear and grave intensification of the conflict: they are in an ascending order. This can also be seen from the ever more serious failure of the opposing measures, until finally in the third sequence a situation is reached that allows only one choice: to give up property with disgrace or to solve the conflict by killing.

What follows also comes in three sequences, in the form of a chain reaction. The author uses the term



*ættvig* for this. A chain reaction is in danger of becoming uncontrollable, and in the last three sequences it is certainly a difficult problem to stop the succession of *ættvig*. Snorri goði finally succeeds through his superior tactics. One should also notice that in all three sequences women egg their menfolk on to do what is expected of them. In the first three sequences it is men who in each case disturb the balance, in the last three it is women who espouse a principle in order that the balance may be redressed.

The narrative principles of repetition and concatenation as used in *Laxdæla* have caused commentators to interpret the saga as the pessimistic expression of a society threatened with destruction by *ættvig*. This interpretation is dubious. The narrative sequences are not simply strung together but show an ascending and descending tendency, so that the equilibrium of the beginning is reached again at the end of the narrative. In the second chapter the narrator gives as reasons for emigrating from Norway *at hafa frændr óbætta, at vera górr at leigumanni*. The saga neatly shows the dangers for a pre-feudal order (in which there were no *leigumenn* and no fiefs) when matters reach the point where a system of *mannbætr* threatens to degenerate into *ættvig*. This narrative attitude may be viewed against a cultural and political background of a particular kind. The saga is to be dated between 1230 and 1260, the period during which Iceland suffered from the disorders of the so-called Sturlung age and struggled for its independence. Sturla Þórðarson, a nephew of Snorri Sturluson, wrote in his *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* of this Norwegian king (1204-63) who finally subjugated Iceland:

ættvig oll let hann af taka. sva at engi skylldi giallda annars tilverka. nema bæta at þeim luta sem segði a hann.<sup>10</sup>

The lawbook, *Járnsíða*, accepted in Iceland in 1271, included the section of the Frostaping law which says:

Öllum mönnum man þat kunnict vera um þann hinn mycla oc hinn illa úsið er lengi hefir í þessu landi verit. at þar sem maðr verðr aftekinn. þá vilia frændr hins dauða þann or ættinni taca er beztr er. þó at hann se hvárki vitandi viliandi verandi um aftac hins dauða. oc vilia eigi á þeim hefna er drap. þó at þeim se þess kostr. oc nýtr hinn vándi svá sinnar illzku oc úgiptu. en saklauss gelldr sinnar spectar sem góðrar mannanar. oc hefir margr maðr af því mykit ættarskarð fengit. oc ver mist hinna beztu þegna várra í landinu. oc fyrir því leggium ver við þetta úbóta sök oc aleigumál hverium þeim sem hefnir á öðrum en þeim er drepr eða ræðr.<sup>11</sup>

This is the same line of argument as that found in *Konungs skuggsjá* (originating in the 1250s) where the author lists the dangers to law and order that a period with little or no authority may pose:

þvi at heimskr mugr virðer sva firi ser at konongr se þeim skipaðr gangstaðlegr oc þykkiz heimskr maðr iþvi vera væl sœmðr oc mætr sec mykels firi o snotra manna aughum. æf hann ma noccora (stund) sec iþvi hallda oc vera firi utan konongs riki eða loghlegar sætningar oc æf i noccorum stað æigu þeir sialfir malum at skipta sin amillum þa trœysta fol hinn heimska sva at hann skal rikaztr vera iþeira viðr skipti en hinn retlati oc hinn spaki væðr af svipttr sinum lut. Oc æf hinn agiarni oc hinn o spaki væðr dræpinn firi sina agirnð þa virða sva heim(s)ker frænndr þeir er æptir liva at þeim se iþvi gorr mykill skaðe oc ættar skarð. oc æf noccorr hæfir sa værit dræpinn fyr or þeiri ætt er bæðe hævir værit spacr oc vitr oc margum hæfir hans vit oc spæct at gagni orðet oc æf sa hæfir mæð fe værit aptr bœttr frænndum þa skal þvilicra bota beiðazc firi hinn heimska sœm fyr varo tæcnar firi hinn vitra eða ælligar skal hæfna mæð manndrapi.<sup>12</sup>

*Ættvig* and *ættarskarð* are chiefly concepts associated with the intellectual and political struggle in Norway. The central authority that established itself there was bound to come much more sharply into conflict with the old forms of private justice than a state with a structure like the Icelandic *þjóðveldi*. In Iceland *ættvig* had not been a problem in the Saga Age itself but was probably becoming one in the Sturlung age.

It is possible that the author of *Laxdæla saga* was moved to transfer the concept from a Norwegian to an Icelandic context because of the events of this period. *Laxdæla* is not the expression of an elementary desire to tell a story, timeless and unconcerned with the events of the day, such as one might describe in terms of simple literary forms — that is shown by a structural analysis. Nor is it simply an expression of a renaissance, a recalling of the Viking past. Rather it is art that has been consciously inserted into the struggles of the thirteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in University College London, 6 March 1975.

<sup>2</sup> T. M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga* (1967); P. Schach, in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 67 (1968), 508-12.

<sup>3</sup> R. Heller, 'Studien zu Aufbau und Stil der Laxdæla saga', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* (= *ANF*) 75 (1960), 113-67. Heller emphasises the structural point of view: "wesentliche Besonderheiten in Aufbau und Darstellung sollen gesammelt und gesichtet werden" (p. 114).

<sup>4</sup> A. M. Arent Madelung, *The Laxdæla Saga: Its Structural Patterns* (1972).

<sup>5</sup> The main editions of *Laxdæla* are by K. Kålund in Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 19 (1889-91), and in Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 4 (1896), and by Einar Ól. Sveinsson in Íslenzk Fornrit 5 (1934). The quotations follow the Fornrit edition.

<sup>6</sup> Conceptions of time in the *Íslendinga sögur* are treated by: W. Lehmann, *Das präsens historicum in den Íslendinga sögur* (1939); U. Sprenger, *Præsens historicum und Praeteritum in der altisländischen Saga* (1951); M. C. van den Toorn, 'Zeit und Tempus in der Saga', *ANF* 76 (1961), 134-52; C. C. Rokkjær, 'Om tempusblandingen i islandsk prosa indtil 1250', *ANF* 78 (1963), 197-216; M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, 'Tidsforestillingene i íslendingesagaene', *Edda* 68 (1968), 351-61 (taken up again in the author's book *The Saga Mind*, 1973, 123-40 — cf. P. Hallberg's review in *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 7, 1974, 102-17). In connection with the time perspective the *modus narrationis* (the relationship between concise and detailed telling, between dialogue and narrative) has to be considered. See W. Ludwig, *Untersuchungen über den Entwicklungsgang und die Funktion des Dialogs in der isländischen Saga*; M. Jeffrey, *The Discourse in Seven Icelandic Sagas* (1934); I. Netter, *Die direkte Rede in den Isländersagas* (1935); O. Springer, 'The Style of the Old Icelandic Family Sagas', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 38 (1939), 107-28; M. C. van den Toorn, 'Erzählsituation und Perspektive in der Saga', *ANF* 77 (1962), 68-83; idem, 'Die Saga als literarische Form', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 24 (1961), 125-39; L. Lönnroth, 'Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas', *Scandinavian Studies* 42 (1970), 157-89; P. Schach, 'Some Forms of Writer Intrusion in the *Íslendingasögur*', *Scandinavian Studies* 42 (1970), 128-56.

<sup>7</sup> The narrative elements of the saga-genre (and their structural functions) have not yet been treated in detail. But there are a number of useful observations on individual sagas and some on the genre itself: Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *A Njálshúð* (1943), 43, points to the *mörg dæmi um endurtekin "minni" i sögunni, hvort heldur eru atvik eða orð*. Hermann Pálsson has recently classified "certain stock situations" (like skirmishes, killings, voyages), "stock characters" (like berserks, vikings, brave heroes, beautiful heroines, villains) and ritualistic elements (like courtings, betrothals, weddings, assem-

blies, divorce, expulsion) as narrative elements of archetypal quality ('Death in Autumn. Tragic Elements in Early Icelandic Fiction', *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies*, 1973, 7-39). In a study of 31 þættir J. C. Harris ('Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga þættir*', *Scandinavian Studies* 44, 1972, 1-27) comes to the conclusion that they share a common narrative structure consisting of introduction, journey in, alienation, reconciliation, journey out, conclusion.

<sup>8</sup> Njörður P. Njarðvík, 'Laxdæla saga — en tidskritik?', *ANF* 86 (1971), 72-81.

<sup>9</sup> Hermann Pálsson, 'Death in Autumn', sees five basic roles in a complete paradigm of characters connected with a hero: the instigators, the attackers, the mitigators, the spectators and the avengers. His examples are taken mainly from *Laxdæla*. Narrative elements that are common to *Íslendingasögur* and heroic poetry have been studied with special reference to *Laxdæla*: K. Liestøl, *Upphavet til den islandske ættesaga* (1929), 162-5; J. van Ham, *Beschouwingen over de literaire betekenis der Laxdæla saga* (1932), 87-90, 134-45 (cf. A. Heusler's review in *Kleine Schriften* 1, 1969, 364); Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Laxdæla saga* (Íslenzk Fornrit 5, 1934), XLV-XLVII; M. Schildknecht-Burri, *Die altertümlichen und jüngeren Merkmale der Laxdæla saga* (1945), 101-5; A. C. Bouman, *Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature* (1962), 133-47.

<sup>10</sup> *Codex Frisianus* (ed. C. R. Unger, 1871), 582.

<sup>11</sup> *Norges gamle Love I* (ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch, 1846) 123, 266.

<sup>12</sup> *Konungs skuggsiá* (ed. L. Holm-Olsen, 1945), 54.

# THE RIDDARASÖGUR: A MEDIEVAL EXERCISE IN TRANSLATION

BY GERALDINE BARNES

## *Materials*

WITH the exception of the *Strengleikar*, *Elis saga ok Rósamundu*, and fragments of *Karlamagnús saga* and *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, the *riddarasögur*<sup>1</sup> are preserved only in Icelandic copies of the translations made into Norwegian at the court of King Hákon the Old (1217-1263). These works and their principal MSS are as follows:

*Strengleikar* (the *Lais* of Marie de France and some additional *lais*). These are preserved in the Norwegian DG 4-7 II fol. (c. 1250).<sup>2</sup>

*Elis saga ok Rósamundu* (the *chanson de geste*, *Elie de Saint Gille*). The saga is preserved in DG 4-7 II fol., SKB perg. 6, 4to (c. 1400), AM 533, 4to (early fifteenth century), AM 179 fol. (before 1672) and SKB chart. 46 fol. (1690).

*Tristrams saga ok Ísondar* (Thomas of England's *Tristan*).<sup>3</sup> Extant are three leaves from AM 567, 4to (fifteenth century), AM 543, 4to (seventeenth century), ÍB 51 fol. (seventeenth century) and JS 8 fol. (early eighteenth century).

*Möttuls saga* (the *fabliau*, *Le mantel mautailié*). Preserved in SKB 6, 4to, AM 598 I, 4to (fragment), AM 181b fol. (c. 1650), AM 179 fol. and BM Add. 4859 (1693-96).

*Ívens saga* (Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain* or *Le chevalier au lion*).<sup>4</sup> Preserved in SKB 6, 4to, AM 489, 4to (fifteenth century), AM 181a fol. (c. 1650), AM 179 fol., BM Add. 4857 (c. 1670), SKB chart. 46 fol., BM Add. 4859, AM 588a, 4to (late seventeenth century) and AM 395 fol. (eighteenth century).

*Erex saga* (Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*).<sup>5</sup> The work is preserved in AM 181b fol., SKB chart. 46 fol. and BM Add. 4859.

*Parcevals saga* and *Valvers þáttur* (Chrétien's *Le roman de Perceval* or *Le conte du graal*).<sup>6</sup> Both saga and *þáttur* are preserved in SKB 6, 4to, AM 179 fol., AM 181a fol. and BM Add. 4859.

*Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (the older "aristocratic" version of

*Flore et Blanche-flor*). There is a short Norwegian fragment dating from *c.* 1300 (NRA 36) and two fifteenth-century Icelandic MSS, AM 489, 4to and AM 575a, 4to (fragment).

*Karlamagnús saga (chansons de geste)*.<sup>7</sup> These translations and adaptations of *chansons de geste* are preserved in AM 180a fol. (fifteenth century), AM 180c fol. (*c.* 1400), AM 180d fol. (*c.* 1700), AM 531, 4to (seventeenth century) and three groups of fragments, one of which is Norwegian.

The main groupings, according to MSS, are:

DG 4-7 II fol. (Norwegian *c.* 1250)

Strengleikar

Elis saga ok Rósamundu

SKB 6, 4to (Icelandic *c.* 1400)

Elis saga ok Rósamundu

Möttuls saga

Ívens saga

Parcevals saga and Valvers þáttr

AM 489, 4to (fifteenth century)

Ívens saga

Flóres saga ok Blankifúr

AM 181a fol. (*c.* 1650)

Ívens saga

Parcevals saga and Valvers þáttr

AM 181b fol. (*c.* 1650)

Möttuls saga

Erex saga

AM 179 fol. (before 1672)

Elis saga ok Rósamundu

Möttuls saga

Ívens saga

Parcevals saga and Valvers þáttr

SKB chart. 46 fol. (1690)

Elis saga ok Rósamundu

Ívens saga

Erex saga

BM Add. 4859 (1693-96)

Möttuls saga

Ívens saga

Erex saga

Parcevals saga and Valvers þáttr

### *The problem*

These Icelandic copies are generally assumed to be unreliable guides to the original form of the translations because scholars have attributed to successive generations of scribes a mania for drastic omission and revision, possibly owing to influence from the style of *Íslendinga-sögur*.<sup>8</sup> Two somewhat contradictory observations on *Tristrams saga* by H. G. Leach point to a need for caution in any generalisations about the present state of the *riddarasögur* MSS. At one point in *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* he comments that "Like most Northern romances, *Tristrams saga* is preserved to us in Icelandic copies only, and one can never be sure how much the Icelandic scribes may have tampered with the text".<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere he notes that:<sup>10</sup>

A comparison of surviving passages from Thomas with the Norwegian text shows that when Robert does translate he is so faithful that if both were rendered into English they would be nearly identical.

In addition to the inconsistency of these statements, the use of "Norwegian" to refer to closely translated passages of the original and of "Icelandic" when Leach considers that there may be room for doubt, even though no Norwegian MS of *Tristrams saga* has survived, is symptomatic of prevailing attitudes towards the work of the copyists.

Confusing remarks such as Leach's about the *riddarasögur* MSS have played their part in discouraging exploration of this branch of Old Norse literature. The

following examination is by no means exhaustive, and the intention is only to sketch possible "positive" guidelines for future study of this group, whose doubtful status as "second-class sagas" rather than important examples of translated courtly and epic literature has meant that they only recently have become the object of detailed investigation after decades of neglect. Considering that it is only on the basis of the Icelandic texts that reconstruction of Thomas's fragmentary *Tristan* is possible,<sup>11</sup> reconsideration of the texts may be long overdue.

In this discussion the *riddarasögur* are considered not only from a textual viewpoint, but also as representative examples of medieval translation. In Norway itself they are part of a well-established tradition. The Norse translations of Prosper of Aquitania's version of Augustine's *Epigrams*, Gregory's *Homilies* and *Dialogues*, and the Pseudo-Cyprian could have been made as early as the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>12</sup> These translations of Latin religious works and the "historical" translations and compilations, *Trójumanna saga*, *Breta sögur*, *Rómverja saga* and *Veraldar saga* are older than any extant *Íslendingasögur* MSS. The Old French poem, *Un samedi par nuit*, was translated into Norwegian around 1200.<sup>13</sup>

The absence of any contemporary theoretical work on the art of translating prohibits generalisations about ideas and methods of translation in thirteenth-century Norway, but a brief glance at the contents of DG 4-7 II fol. reveals some basic patterns in the approach. Latin, for instance, appears to have inspired a more literal rendition than French. The translation of the *Pamphilus de amore* (*Pamphilus saga*), preserved, along with the *Strengleikar* and *Elis saga* in DG 4-7 II fol., follows the original word for word.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, it is only in isolated instances that a verbatim translation from French is found. The *Strengleikar* are quite free in their treatment of the Anglo-Norman of Marie's *Lais*.<sup>15</sup> *Elis saga* is discussed below.



*Medieval translation*

Comparison with the work of Middle English, German and French translators of epic and romance helps to place the *riddarasögur* in their proper historical context. Attitudes to translation in the Middle Ages differed considerably from modern demands for accuracy and objectivity. The medieval translator was not excluded from the creative process and might alter his source to conform to his own taste and purpose, even to the extent of adding material from other sources. "Translation" was itself a very loose term in England until the sixteenth century.<sup>16</sup> When Halvorsen stated that "those who wrote the Norse versions of French romances and *chansons de geste* were translators, not poets or authors in their own right",<sup>17</sup> he was making a distinction which, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was blurred, to say the least.

For example, when Thomas Chestre says he "made" his Middle English tale of *Sir Launfal*:<sup>18</sup>

Thomas Chestre made pys tale  
Of þe noble knyzt Syr Launfale,  
Good of chyualrye:  
Jhesus, þat ys Heuenekyng,  
Ȝeue vs alle Hys blessing,  
And Hys modyr Marye!  
Amen

he is, in fact, giving us an unacknowledged "translation" of the anonymous *Sir Landevale* (from Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*) and the French romance, *Graelant*.<sup>19</sup>

Gottfried von Strassburg, on the other hand, assures us that his medieval German *Tristan* is the only true account of Thomas's tale and comments on the inaccuracy of previous writers:<sup>20</sup>

They did not write according to the authentic version as told by Thomas of Britain . . . I began to search assiduously for the true and authentic version of Tristan such as Thomas narrates,

and I was at pains to direct the poem along the right path which he had shown. Thus I made many researches till I had read in a book all that he says happened in this story. And now I freely offer the fruits of my reading of this love-tale to all noble hearts to distract them.

Unlike Brother Robert in *Tristrams saga*, however, Gottfried has rewritten the romance completely and made an "original" work of it. Hartmann von Aue's versions of *Erec et Enide* (*Erec*) and *Yvain* (*Iwein*) are also individual interpretations of their sources.

Some medieval translators begin with a statement of purpose and its relation to the form or style which they have adopted. English translations, for example, are sometimes expressly designed for the unsophisticated and the uneducated. In his *Chronicle of England* (1338), based partly on Wace's *Roman de Brut* and the Anglo-Norman *Chronique* by Pierre de Langtoft, Robert Mannyng of Brunne declares that his translation will be clear and simple for the benefit of unlearned men:<sup>21</sup>

I mad noght for no disours,  
ne for no seggers, no harpours,  
Bot for þe luf of symple men  
þat strange Inglis can not ken.

I made it not forto be praysted,  
bot at þe lewed men were aysed.

Mannyng's pedagogical zeal may perhaps be compared with the quasi-historical spirit of these words from the translator's foreword to the *Strengleikar* wherein he states his intention to inform the present and coming generations of those tales which learned men have made about deeds of days gone by:<sup>22</sup>

þa syndizc oss at frœða verande oc viðrkomande þeim sogum  
er margfroðer menn gærðo um athæve þeirra sem i fyrnskunni  
varo oc a bocom leto rita til ævenlægrar aminningar til  
skæmtanar oc margfrœðes viðrkomande þioða.

The translator's prologue to the Middle English version of Marie de France's *Le lai del Fraisne*, the *Lay le Frayn* (c. 1330), consists of a definition of the Breton *lai*:<sup>23</sup>

We redeþ oft & findeþ [ywri]te,  
& þis clerkes wele it wite,  
layes þat ben in harping  
ben yfounde of ferli þing.  
Sum beþe of wer & sum of wo,  
& sum of ioie & mirþe also,  
& sum of trecherie & of gile,  
of old auentours þat fel while;  
& sum of bourdes & ribaudy,  
& mani þer beþ of fairy.  
Of al þinge[s] þat men seþ,  
mest o loue for soþe þai beþ.  
In Breteyne bi hold time  
þis layes were wrougt, so seiþ þis rime.  
When kinges miȝt our yhere  
of ani meruailes þat þer were,  
þai token an harp in gle & game  
& maked a lay & ȝaf it name.  
Now of þis auentours þat weren yfalle  
y can tel sum ac nouȝt alle.  
Ac herkneþ lordinges, soþe to sain,  
ichil ȝou telle Lay le Frayn.

This passage bears an interesting resemblance to the second part of the *Strengleikar* foreword, as illustrated by these lines concerning the nature of Breton *ljóð*:<sup>24</sup>

En bok þessor er hinn virðulege Hacon konongr let norrœna or  
volsko male ma hæita lióða bok. Þui at af þeim sogum er  
þæssor bok birtir gærðo skolld i syðra Brætlande er liggir i  
Frannz lióðsonga. þa er gæræzç i horpum gigiom simphanom  
organom timpanom sallterium oc corom oc allzkonar oðrum  
strænglækium er menn gera ser oc oðrum til skemtunar þæssa  
lifs. oc lykr her forræðo þæssare. oc þesso nest er upphaf  
sanganna.

In addition to the general statements of method, inten-

tion and circumstance often found in their prologues, medieval translations of romance frequently contain implied, and occasionally specific, acknowledgements of alteration. In the Middle English *Floris and Blancheflour* (c. 1250), which is translated from the same French source as *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, a greatly condensed version of a passage of description in the original is introduced thus:<sup>25</sup>

I ne kan telle ȝou nowt  
How richeliche þe sadel was wrout :

The equivalent passage in *Flóres saga* is more detailed, though still shorter than the French, but there is no acknowledgement of the reduction.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, when omitting twenty-one lines describing a feast in *Erec et Enide* (also omitted in *Erex saga*), the writer of the fifteenth-century French prose translation, *Erec*, says:<sup>27</sup>

Du souper et esbatemens qui furent fais ceste nuyt se taira  
nostre compte.

The author of the Middle English *Partonope of Blois* (c. 1430) from the *chanson de geste*, *Partenopeus de Blois* (Norse *Partalopa saga*), acknowledges the abbreviation of a long descriptive passage of dress in these words:<sup>28</sup>

Butte who so luste to here of hur a-rye,  
Lette hym go to the ffrensshe bocke,  
That Idell mater I forsoke  
To telle hyt in prose or els in ryme.  
For me þoghte hyt taryed grette tyme,  
And ys a mater full nedeles.

Flora Amos makes this pertinent remark about these lines:<sup>29</sup>

One cannot but suspect that this odd mingling of respect and freedom as regards the original describes the attitude of many other translators of romances, less articulate in the expression of their theory.

The fourteenth-century *Ywain and Gawain*<sup>30</sup> is a case in point. An otherwise fairly close translation of *Yvain*, it omits without acknowledgement over 2,000 lines of the original in the form of theoretical discussions of courtly love, accounts of courtly flirtations and details of ceremony and dress.

Like most Middle English translations of French epic and romance, the *riddarasögur* never indicate specifically where they are abridging or diverging in any other way from their sources. The translation process, however, follows a well-defined pattern of reduction similar to that found in *Ywain and Gawain* and other English romances. The similarities between *Ivens saga* and *Ywain and Gawain* are particularly striking.<sup>31</sup> Generally speaking, the *riddarasögur* either abbreviate or omit descriptions of nature, dress, physiognomy and the lengthy analyses of mental states often found in French romances. Dialogue is usually reduced to a functional minimum and expressions of sorrow, joy and passages of authorial comment are either compressed or suppressed entirely.

Curiously, in the two instances where reduction is implied in *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* it barely exists. In the course of a long, faithful description of the precious cup given in exchange for Blancheflor by Babylonian merchants, the saga writer states that there is *mart annat, þat er hér er eigi talt* (VII: 5) and, later in the same passage, that *þetta var allt á kerinu grafit, ok enn mart fleira* (VII: 8). Three lines of the original, at most, are missing.

A possible explanation for these uncharacteristic statements is that the translator was working closely from a manuscript of *Flore et Blancheflor* no longer extant which,

at this point, contained a line such as the following where the writer, to give an impression of abundance, says that he cannot and will not describe each of the jewels on the harness of Flore's horse:<sup>32</sup>

Ne vous puis pas, ne ne me plest,  
a aconter que cascune est.

The *riddarasögur* share their prose form (possibly because of a contemporary lack of suitable native metres for long narratives) with French prose translations of verse romances.<sup>33</sup> These *romans en prose*, which first appeared in the thirteenth century and became enormously popular in the fifteenth, have many features in common with the *riddarasögur* such as the lack of interest in opulent description specified in the quotation from the prose *Erec* (Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*) above. For the most part, however, the prose romances are also characterised by the absence of reference to departures from their sources. The frequent amplification of sections in their originals concerning kings and kingship is another feature of the *riddarasögur* and the *romans en prose* illustrated in *Erex saga* and the prose *Erec*. Both append an epilogue, describing the glories of Erec's reign, to Chrétien's romance.<sup>34</sup>

However, although consistent with the Middle English and fifteenth-century French approach to the translation of epic and romance, the continual absence in the *riddarasögur* of any acknowledgement of alteration compounds the problem of establishing conclusively whether or not their deviations from the originals are the work of Icelandic copyists or of Norwegian translators working to a specific pattern and purpose.

The Norwegian *Strengleikar* cannot, unfortunately, be used as a yardstick by which to judge the state of other *riddarasögur* in the matter of abbreviation and omission of description and emotional states since the *Lais* are, in

form, simple narratives untouched by the descriptive and "psychological" flamboyance of the French courtly romance. However, like all the *riddarasögur*, the *Strengleikar* expand sections of the lays dealing with the duties and obligations of kings and rulers. In *Equitans lióð* two chapters which moralize on the vices of greed and injustice and condemn the unjust lord are added to Marie's *Equitan*.<sup>35</sup> It seems unlikely that generations of scribes over many centuries would have retained this pattern of abbreviation and expansion if the copyists were individually and drastically tampering with their texts.

The syntactic-stylistic research of Peter Hallberg, who has classified the MSS of the *Strengleikar*, *Tristrams saga*, *Möttuls saga*, *Elis saga* (to chapter 59), *Ívens saga*, *Parcevals saga* and *Valvers þáttr* as a stylistically homogeneous group (mainly because of the frequent use of *kveða* to introduce *oratio recta* and particular patterns of tense and word order), confirms this impression. Slightly outside this inner circle, but having much in common with it, he places *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, *Elis saga* (from chapter 59) and *Erex saga*.<sup>36</sup> Foster Blaisdell has pointed out flaws in Hallberg's procedure in as much as he mixes his texts, basing results for *Ívens saga* on Kölbing's eclectic edition of 1872, and for *Erex saga* using Cederschiöld's 1880 edition, which is also based on more than one MS.<sup>37</sup> However, the fact that Hallberg can isolate a "Tristram group" is interesting, and a more scientific and thorough analysis of individual MSS would doubtless shed further light on this question.

On the other hand, some stylistic features of the "Tristram group" have been cited as evidence of later scribal interference. For example, the alliteration, synonymous doublets and present participles, which give the *riddarasögur* their affinity with *den lærde stil*<sup>38</sup> of translations and adaptations of Latin works and *den florissante stil*<sup>39</sup> of later translated religious literature, have more than once been attributed to the copyists.<sup>40</sup>

However, the *Strengleikar* exhibit a considerable amount of alliteration, and the occurrence of ten present participles in *Ianuals lióð* alone implies that present participles in later texts have, on the whole, been preserved rather than added.<sup>41</sup> Blaisdell's comparison of the two main MSS of *Erex saga* (AM 181b fol. and SKB chart. 46 fol.) with two copies of the saga in BM Add. 4859 and Kall 246 fol. (second half of the eighteenth century) supports this assumption. In AM 181 the present participle occurs thirty-five times and, in SKB 46, thirty-four. Similarly, although there is not complete agreement between the forms, there are thirty-five examples of the present participle in BM Add. 4859 and thirty-two in Kall 246.<sup>42</sup>

Like other medieval translations, the *riddarasögur* often refer to the circumstances in which they were written. The *Strengleikar* foreword has already been mentioned. *Tristrams saga* also begins with a reference to its commissioner, King Hákon the Old; in addition it names a certain "Brother Robert" as translator and gives the date of composition:<sup>43</sup>

Var þá liðit frá hingatburði Christi MCCXXVI ár, er þessi saga var á norrænu skrifuð eptir boði ok skipan virðuligs herra Hákonar konungs. En bróðir Robert efnaði ok upp skrifaði . . .

In *Ívens saga*, both Hákon and the language of the original are mentioned at the conclusion of the work:<sup>44</sup>

Ok lýkr hér sögu herra Ívens, er Hákon konungr gamli lét snúa ór Franzeisu í Norrœnu.

The translator of *Möttuls saga* also identifies Hákon as his patron and makes reference to the language of the original:<sup>45</sup>



Enn þvílík sannendi, sem valskan sýndi mér, þá norræna ek  
yðr áheyrðumdum til gamans ok skemtanar, svá sem virðuligr  
Hákon konungr, son Hákonar konungs, bauð fákunnugleik  
mínum at göra nökkut gaman af þessu eptirfylgjanda efni.

The Norwegian section of *Elis saga* ends with a similar passage, slightly reminiscent of the concluding lines of *Sir Launfal*, referring again to Hákon and Robert:<sup>46</sup>

en Roðbert aboti sneri, oc Hakon konungr, son Hakons konungs,  
lét snúa þessi nærrænu bok yðr til skemtanar. Nu gefi guð  
þæim, er þessa bok sneri oc þessa ritaði, þessa heims gratiam, en  
i sinu ríki sanctorum gloriam. AMEN

It can be seen from these extracts that there was no specific verb "to translate" in Old Norse. *Þýða*, the Modern Icelandic term, meant "explain, interpret, comment on" (of dreams and books). The most frequently used verb to describe the process in the *riddarasögur* is *snúa* "to turn". *Skrifa á norrænu* (*Tristrams saga*), *norræna* (*Strengleikar*, *Möttuls saga*) and *venda* "to turn, change" (used of *riddara sögur* in *Viktors saga ok Blávus*),<sup>47</sup> are also found.

The similarities in form and content between the *riddarasögur* and other medieval translations suggest that Norwegian attitudes to the process were as free as those of their English and French counterparts who, as indicated by the examples of Robert Mannyng of Brunne, the translator of *Partenopeus de Blois*, and others, added, subtracted and otherwise diverged from their originals for a variety of reasons. It is interesting to note that the Middle English translator of the French *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* (1450), a volume of parental advice, also prefers prose to the verse of his original "forto abregge it, and that it might be beter and more plainly to be understood".<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere I have tried to show that the distinctive pattern of

abbreviation and expansion in the *riddarasögur* serves its own didactic purpose in enlightening an uneducated audience in matters of royal and chivalric duty and conduct.<sup>49</sup>

### *Elis saga*

The various MSS of *Elis saga* are perhaps the best examples for Norwegian/Icelandic textual comparison and evaluation. However, as it is preserved in BN 25516, the conclusion of *Elie de Saint Gille* has inconsistencies which suggest that it is not that of the original version. An additional complication is the narrative divergence of French and Norse from line 2418 (chapter 59). The Norwegian account ends here and chapters 60-70 are known only in Icelandic. It is possible that the Icelandic scribe worked from a now lost version of the *chanson de geste* but, in his 1879 edition of the work, Gaston Raynaud made the plausible suggestion that neither the extant French nor the Norwegian MS gives the original conclusion and that an Icelander was inspired to add ten chapters by the inviting words at the end of the Norwegian text:<sup>50</sup>

En huessu sem Elis ratt þæim vandræðum oc huessu hann kom hæim til Frannz með Rosamundam, þa er æigi a bok þessi skrifat.

In an attempt to disprove Eugen Kölbing's assertion that the Icelandic texts are more faithful to *Elie* than the Norwegian, Rudolph Meissner made a detailed comparison of the French, Norwegian and Icelandic MSS.<sup>51</sup> Kölbing based his case on what he claimed were sixty-two instances in which the Icelandic SKB perg. 6, 4to (B), AM 533, 4to (C) and SKB perg. 7 fol. (D) were closer to the source than the

corresponding passages in Norwegian DG 4-7 II fol. (A), and attributed the variations to the independence of the Icelandic fragments.<sup>52</sup> Meissner did not regard Icelandic B, C and D as independent of A, considering that D (last quarter of the fifteenth century) in particular bore a marked similarity to it. He argues that Kölbing's sixty-two examples of supposedly superior readings are either the result of attempts by later scribes to explain or expand points which may not be clear in the Norwegian or else simply coincidental: the products of a copyist who did not confine himself to the exact word order and phrasing of his text.<sup>53</sup>

Halvorsen's comment that "Meissner has compared the Icelandic and Norwegian texts and shown in some detail how extensively the text has been modified by successive generations of scribes"<sup>54</sup> is something of an exaggeration. Meissner rationalizes and dismisses every one of Kölbing's examples as groundless but his own conclusions are no less speculative. Since the Norwegian text apparently follows a version of the French no longer extant, both Meissner and Kölbing are without any solid criteria on which to base their evaluations. What Meissner does show, however, is that the differences between the Icelandic and Norwegian versions of *Elis saga* are no greater than the differences between the text of the vellum (three leaves from AM 567, 4to) and the paper MSS of *Tristrams saga* which, according to Paul Schach, consist largely of "the reduction of collocations to single words".<sup>55</sup>

Most of Kölbing's "superior readings" in B, C and D involve merely a difference in tense or an insignificant variation in phraseology. Meissner's comparison of Icelandic and Norwegian MSS reveals that the Icelandic texts consistently reduce only excessive alliteration and synonymous doublets. He also observes that in the later fragments of *Elis saga* one alliterative phrase is sometimes replaced by another, D in particular containing

a considerable amount of new alliteration. Nowhere, however, does Meissner suggest that the tendency to curtail alliteration and synonymous doublets in the Icelandic copies extends to the suppression of narrative material to the extent that, as Halvorsen claims, "in the cases where we have both Norwegian and Icelandic MSS, we can see how successive generations of scribes have cut down or omitted monologues and descriptions, and tried to create order and coherence as in the Icelandic sagas".<sup>56</sup>

### *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*

Another opportunity to compare Norwegian and Icelandic treatments of the same material is provided by the Norwegian fragment of *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*. The saga is complete in only one Icelandic MS, AM 489, 4to (Kölbing's M), which both he<sup>57</sup> and Cederschiöld (the latter also on the basis of comparison with the Swedish *Flores och Blanzefflor*)<sup>58</sup> regarded as an extremely shortened and modified version of the Norwegian. The text in AM 575a, 4to (N), which Kölbing considered superior to M, is incomplete and does not contain the material covered in the Norwegian extract. This fragment, NRA 36, dates from about 1300 and includes the narrative from ch. XVII: 6 to ch. XVIII: 1 in Kölbing's edition.

In the four-way comparison of French (F), Norwegian (R), Icelandic (M) and Swedish (S) versions of *Flore et Blanchefflor* on the following pages, R is given in its entirety as printed by Kölbing (pp. 54-7), who expands the lacunae without comment (of no significance for our analysis), and the corresponding section in M is taken from p. 85 of the same edition. The French text is from the edition by Wilhelmine Wirtz (1937) and the Swedish from Emil Olson's *Flores och Blanzefflor* (1956).<sup>59</sup> The

passage concerns Daires' instructions to Flore about the method of persuading a gatekeeper to smuggle him into a tower in which Blancheflor is being held by the emir of Babylon. Flore must ingratiate himself with the man by allowing him to win at draughts and then bribing him with a gold cup—which he duly does. References in the following analysis are to the numbered sections of the four extracts.

F (ll. 2130-246)

R (pp. 54,2-57,23)

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | des eskés a vous jüera,<br>car il mout volentiers i juie;<br>quant trueve a cui, mout se deduie.                                 | “ . . leikr þat mjök gjarna.  |
| 2 | Et vous en vostre mance arés<br>cent onces d’or que porterés.  | En þú haf með þér í þússi þínum C aura<br>gulls ok legg við;  |
| 3 | Mais sans avoir n’i alés mie,<br>si con vous amés vostre vie.<br>Car a engien, si con j’espoir,<br>le decevrés par vostre avoir. | en fyrir utan fé leik þú eigi, fyrir því<br>at með fénu máttu blekkja hann, ef<br>svá er, sem ek ætla.  |
| 4 | Se gäaigniés, tout li rendés,<br>et vos cent onces li donés,<br>et il moutl s’esmerveillera.                                     | Ok ef þú fær taflit ok féit, þá gef honum<br>sitt aptr ok þar með C aura gulls þess<br>er þú bart til, ok seg, at þú átt yfrit fé.<br>En hann mun undraz harðla mjök ok<br>þakka þér gjöfina. |
| 5 | por çou a vous jüer volra.<br>Et l’endemain la repairiés,<br>et moutl tresbien li otroiés;                                       | En síðan mun hann biðja þik, at þú<br>komir aptr annan dag eptir at leika.<br>En þú játa honum því,   |
| 6 | au ju a double porterés.   | ok þar með tak þú með þér hálfu meira<br>fé.  |
| 7 | Se gäaignies, tout li rendés,<br>le vostre et le sien li donés,<br>que vous ja plus n’i atendés.                                 | Ok ef þú vinnr, þá gef honum bæði<br>sitt ok þitt, fyrir því, kveð þú, at þér<br>þykkir slíkt lítils um vert.   |
| 8 | Por le don grasse vous rendra,<br>del revenir vous proiera.  | Ok mun hann þá taka at þakka þér ok<br>biðja þik koma aptr þangat;  |
| 9 | Vous li dirés: Sire, de gré,<br>je vous ai forment enamé;  | en þú seg, at þú vill gjarna, fyrir því,<br>kveð þú, ‘at mér þykkir þú góðr maðr;   |

M (p. 85, 1-42)

S (ll. 1245-332)

ok bjóða þér at tefla við sik,

Han bidher thagar ther om thik  
skaktafuill leka mædher sik,  
thy han thet gerna göra wil,  
tha han hafwer ther thima thil.

ok haf með þér C merkr brends silfrs  
ok legg við;

Thu haff een lithen posa full,  
ther ij ær hundradha øra gull;  
lat thet tafuel swa mykit halda,  
æ hua som thet skal gialda!

en leik eigi utan fé, þvíat með fénu  
máttu blekkja hann, ef svá er, sem ek  
ætla;

For vtan pæninga leek ey vidh han!  
Ther medh vinder thu thæn man.

ok ef þú fær taflit, gef honum aptr, ok  
þat með, er þú hafðir, ok seg, at þér  
þykkir lítills um slíkt vert; en hann mun  
mjök þakka þér.

Om thu mat tafflith vinna,  
læt han ey annath finna,  
æn thu honum gifua vil  
hans eghith ok thet thu bær til,  
ok sigh, at thu æst øfrith rik!  
Tha vndra han thet sannelik

Annan dag skaltu koma,

ok bidher thik thiit ater ga;  
tha skal thu swara honum ia.  
Then annan dagh thu komber ther,

ok haf með þér C merkr gulls,

tu slik gull thu medh thik bær!

ok ger sem fyrri dag, gef honum  
hvárttveggja;

Ma thu vinna, thu gør thik gaman,  
thu giff honum thit ok hans alt  
saman!

mun hann þá taka at elska þik, ok mun  
biðja þik enn koma:

Tha takkar han thik ok hafuer tik kær,  
bidher thik ater koma ther.

“sakir þess, at mér þykkir þú góðr  
maðr,

Tha sigh, at thu thet gerna vil,

- 10 or et argent a plenté ai.  
Saciés k'assés vous en donrai,  
car vous m'avés bien acueli.  
Bel a parlé vostre merci. —  
en gull ok silfr skortir mik eigi, ok  
yfrít skal ek þér þat gefa, fyrir því at  
þú hefir við mik kurteisliga gørt ok  
mikla vingan birt.'
- 11 Quatre onces d'or a l'endemain  
et vostre coupe en l'autre main  
reporterés a l'eskekier.  
En þá um morgininn haf þú með þér  
C marka gulls til tafsins, ok ker þitt et  
góða.
- 12 S'il vous avient a gäaignier,  
vostre or et le sien li rendés,  
mais vostre coupe retenés.  
Ok ef þú vinnr enn tafit, þá gef  
honum bæði sitt gull ok svá þitt; en  
kerit haf þú!
- 13 Donc vaura que por li jüés  
et que vous au ju le metés;  
et vous ne vaurés mais jüer.  
Ok mun hann þá biðja þik leggja fram  
kerit, ok þú ger svá ok fá honum eigi,  
ok kveð, at þér leiðiz, lengr at leika.
- 14 Dont vous menra a son disner.  
Liés se fera de son tresor  
que il avra fait de vostre or,  
en menra toi a son mangier  
et durement te tenra chier.  
Þá mun hann bjóða þér til náttverðar  
með sér, en þú þigg, þvíat hann mun  
vera mjök glaðr fyrir gullsins sakar,  
þess er hann fekk af þér, ok mun hann  
sæma þik sem mest ok fagna þér, sem  
bezt má hann.
- 15 De la coupe iert moult covoiteus  
et de l'acater angoisseus;  
moult offera por acater,  
mil mars vous en vaura doner.  
En til kersins mun hann mjök girnaz,  
ok mun hann bjóða þér fyrir þat  
þúshundrað marka gulls.
- 16 Dont li dites, rien n'en prendrés,  
mais par amistiés li donrés.  
En þú seg, at þú vilt eigi selja honum,  
nema heldr gefa.
- 17 Dont par ert il si decëus  
et de vostre amour embëus  
que de joie a vos piés karra  
et homage vous offera.  
En þá muntu verða honum svá  
ástfolginn, at hann mun falla til fóta  
þér ok geraz þinn maðr.



en mik skortir hvárki gull né silfr, ok  
vil ek gefa þér, þvíat þú hefir við mik  
kurteisliga gort''.

Enn þriðja morgin haf með þér C merkr  
gulls til tafs, ok ker þitt;

ef þú vinnr enn, þá gef honum sem  
áðr;

þá mun hann biðja þik, at þú leggir  
við kerit; en þú seg, at þér leiðiz at  
tefla.

Mun hann bjóða þér til náttverðar, en  
þú þigg, þvíat hann mun vera glaðr  
við þik, sakir gullsins, er þú gaft  
honum, ok mun hann þér vel fagna.

En til kersins mun hann mjök fýsaz,  
mun bjóða fyrir nær þúshundrað  
marka gulls,

ok seg, at þú vill eigi selja, ok gef  
honum

thik brister ey gull ey silff ther till;  
thet vil thu honum gifua  
oc meðh glædhe meðh honum blifua,  
thy han hafuer thik glædhe teet,  
sidhan första dagh, thu hafuer han seet!

Tha skal thu hundradha mark til bæra  
ok thet rika kar, thu hafuer hæræ.

Kan thu vinna æn tafflith tha,  
badhe thit ok hans skal thu honum fa,  
æn karith gørm thu siælfuum thik!

Tha bidher han thik swa innerlik,  
at thu skal til bordh meðh honum ga;  
thu skal ok gerna göra swa.  
Tha plæghar thik væl then godhe man  
medh alle the høfuizsko, ther han kan,

ok falar aff thik thet rika kar,  
ther a hans bordhe fore thik star,  
ok biudher tik then sama stundh  
aff gul for karit thusand pundh.

Tha skal thu honum ther swara til,  
at thu thet ække sælia vil,  
ok giff thet honum thaghar ij stadh!

Tha vardher han ij sit hierta gladh,  
thet han ængin sinne kan;  
han falder a knæ ok vardher thin  
man,

- 18 Et vous en prendés bien l'omage  
et la fiance, s'estes sages.  
Lors vous tenra il a amor,  
con li hon liges son signor.
- 19 Puis li porrés tot descovrir  
le mal que si vous fait languir.  
Se il puet, il vous aidera;  
et s'il ne puet, nus nel porra.»
- 20 Floires a Dairon mercié  
del conseil qu'il li a doné.  
A tant boivent, si vont gesir;  
por le penser laist le dormir.
- 21 Flories se lieve par matin,  
et Daires le mist au cemin.  
Es le vous au pié de la tour.  
A esgarder le prent entour.
- 22 Es vous l'uissier qui l'arasone  
si roidement que tot l'estone:
- 23 «Estes espie u traitour  
qui si espyés nostre tour?»
- 24 «Sire,» dist il, «naie, par foi,  
mais por içou l'esgar et voi  
k'en mon päis tele feroie,  
se jamais venir i pooie.»
- En þú tak gjarna viðr honum ok lát  
hann handselja þér sína hollustu ok  
slíkan tryggðleik, sem maðr skal vinna  
sínum herra.
- En síðan máttu segja honum þinn  
vanda; en hann mun hjálpa þér, ef  
hann má. Ok ef hann má eigi vinna  
þér hjálp, þá kann ek þér aldrigi ráð  
síðan.”
- En Flóres þakkaði þá mjök Daire,  
húsbónda sínum, öll heilræði. En  
síðan drukku þau lengi ok váru kát,  
ok fóru at sofa síðan. En fyrir íhuga  
sakir svaf Flóres lítit þá nótt ok langaði  
mjök at finna durvörð kastalans.
- Ok þegar er dagr var, þá stóð hann  
upp. En húsbóndi hans fylgði honum  
út ok vísaði honum til turnsins. En  
þá er Flóres kom þar, þá gekk hann  
um ok sá á turninn, mældi hann bæði  
á lengð ok svá á breiðleik, sem sá er  
hagr er.
- En þegar er durvörðrinn sá þat, þá  
nefsti hann honum fæliliga ok mælti  
svá:
- “Hvárt ert þú heldr njósarmaðr eðr  
svikari, eðr hví sér þú svá á turn  
várn?”
- “Hvártki em ek þeira,” kvað Flóres;  
“því mæli ek kastalann, at ek vil láta  
gera annan slíkan, þegar ek kem heim.”

með þeim skildaga, at hann gefi þér trú sína, at hann sé þér í bróður stað um þat, er þú þarft.

En síðan máttu segja honum þitt mál; mun hann þá hjálpa þér; ef hann fær þat eigi gort, þá kann ek eigi ráð at ráða þér"

En Flóres þakkaði honum ok langaði mjök at finna dyrvörðinn.

Ok er dagr kom, þá kómu þeir þangat húsbóndi hans; ok er Flóres kom þar, þá sá hann turninn ok mældi lengð hans ok breidd, sem hann væri hagr.

Ok er dyrvörðr sá þetta, leit hann á Flóres mjök reiðuliga ok mælti:

"Ertu njósnarmaðr ok svikari?"

"Nei", sagði Flóres, "því mæli ek kastalann, at ek vil láta gera annan slíkan, er ek kem heim."

ok thu tagh mot honum blidhelik ok bidh han sidhan lofua thik, at han skal thik vara hull ok tro ok alla hans dagha göra swo.

Sidhan sigh honum thin vanda ij fra ok fresta, huath han thik hiæpa ma! Kan han ey lösa thin wadha, tha kan iak thik ænkte radha.»

Flores thakkadhe honum margha lunda. Darias, ij the sama stunda. The drukko ena stund ok varo kaat, ok huar bødh annan godha nat; the gingo i sæng sidhan at sofua huar ij sina kofua.

Thet första daghin sit liws tedhe, tha var Flores all til redhe; hans husbonde meðh honum gik, til thæs han tornith se fik. Thaghar Flores kom swa nær, han mælte tornith, huru viit thet ær, længd ok breed ther op a.

Tha portanærin thetta sa, han ropadhe høgth ok sagdhe swa:

»Hua æst thu, her mon ga?  
Æst thu komin her fore swik, kompan, thet skal thu sighia mik!  
Æller æst thu mæster man?»

»Iak ær huarkin,» sagdhe han.  
»Jak skodhar thetta torn thy swa innerlik,  
iak vil tholkith göra hema at mik.»

- 25 Cil l'ot parler tant ricement  
et cil le vit tant bel et gent;  
por çou k'en lui vit tel biauté,  
tote entrelaist sa cruauté  
et s'il ne puet, nus nel porra.
- 26 De jüer a eskés l'envie,
- 27
- (2217-18)
- 28 Au roc en prist un grant tropel  
et dist eskec; moult li fu bel.
- 29
- 30 et Floires ensi exploita  
comme ses osten li loa.
- (2213-16)
- 31 Cil le vit, moult s'esmerveilla  
et por le don l'en mercia.  
Moult li a proié au premier  
d'a lui jüer a l'eskekier.
- 32
- 33
- 34
- 35
- Ok er durvörðrinn heyrði hann svá  
ríkuliga um tala, ok hann sá hann svá  
góðfúsliga láta, sem son gøfugs manns,
- þá mælti hann til hans: "Viltu leika at  
skáktafli við mik?"
- "Gjarna vilda ek, ef þú vilt mikit við  
leggja." "Hversu mikit viltu við  
leggja?" sagði durvörðrinn. "C aura  
gulls!" kvað Flóres. Þá sagði dur-  
vörðrinn: "Sá er vinnr, skal ráða  
viðrlogunni."
- En síðan reisti hann taflborðit ok vildi  
sjá, hvárr betr kunni.
- En þat var Flóres, er vann.
- En jafnskjótt gaf hann durverðinum  
féit allt, þat er við lá taflit.
- Enn hann undraðiz harðla þetta ok  
þakkaði honum mjök gjöfina, ok bað  
hann koma aptr til sín annan dag  
eptir.
- En Flóres játaði honum því gjarna ok  
skundar í brott.
- Kom hann aptr um morguninn ok bar  
með sér CC aura gulls, en durvörðrinn  
lagði fram annat slíkt í móti, ok léku  
síðan.
- En Flóres vann enn, ok gaf honum fé  
þeira beggja síðan, hans ok sitt.
- En hinn varð geysiglaðr ok orðlauss;  
ok síðfremi fekk hann þakkat honum  
ok kvað hann enn gjöflasta.

Ok er dyrvörðr heyrði, at Flóres mundi  
vera ríkr maðr,

»Thu mat wel vara een donde man;

bauð hann honum at tefla við sik.

vil thu skaktafuil leka?» sagðhe han.

Flóres segir: "Hversu mikit viltu við  
leggja?" "Ráttu!" sagði hann. "C  
marka brent", sagði Flóres.

The leko sidhan ok giordho swa,  
som bokin hafuer idher fœrra sakt fra,  
ther til han ær vordhin hans man  
ok iætte honum thiæna slikt han kan  
til aldra handa saka,  
ther hanom matte wara til maka.

Ok svá gerðu þeir, ok lét dyrvörðr,

ok var þá mjök reiðr; en Flóres gerði,  
sem húsbóndi bauð, gaf honum aptr  
þat sem hann lét, ok sitt með;

en dyrvörðr þakkaði honum ok bað  
hann koma til sín á morgin.

Ok Flóres hafði með sér hálfu meira fé  
en fyrr; þá léku þeir,

ok fór þat sem fyrra dag, at Flóres gaf  
honum aptr, ok sitt.

- 36 En er Flóres gekk brott, þá bað durvörðrinn hann koma aptr til sín um morguninn. En Flóres játaði því
- 37 ok kom enn þriðja daginn, ok hafði með sér hálf C marka gulls, ok kerit sitt et góða.
- 38 Ok hann lagði fram allt gullit, ok hinn annat slíkt í móti. En síðan léku þeir af öllu kappi.
- 39 Adonques a l'uissiers vœu que il a bien le ju perdu.  
Son avoir rent forment iriés,
- En þá varð durvörðinum mát enn, ok lét mikit fé, ok þótti honum svá illa, at hann vissi sín varla.
- 40 et Floires li rent; dont est liés.
- En Flóres huggaði hann ok gaf honum allt saman, þat sem viðr lá af beggja hálfu. En hann varð svá feginn, at hann vissi eigi, hvat hann skyldi at hafaz, nema þakkaði á allar leiðir.
- 41 Ne juera mais, Floires dist.  
Tot maintenant del ju en ist.
- En síðan bað hann Flóres leggja viðr kerit. En hann kvaz eigi vilja lengr leika.
- 42 A tant l'en maine li huissier o lui a son ostel mangier.  
Forment l'oneure, et tot por l'or dont tant a crœu son tresor.
- En síðan leiddi durvörðrinn hann inn í grasgarð einn, at mataz með sér, ok fagnaði honum sem hann mátti beztr.
- 43 Mais de la coupe ert angoisseus et de l'avoir moult covoitheus et dist, moult bien l'acatera, mil onces d'or por li donra.
- En hugr hans var æ á kerinu, ok bað hann segja sér, ef hann vildi þat selja, ok kvaz vilja gefa honum fimm C marka gulls fyrir, ef hann vildi selja.
- 44
- En þá er Flóres sá fýst hans mikla til kersins, þá setti hann þat fram á borðit fyrir sik
- 45 Floires dist: «Ja or n'en prendrai, mais por amor le vous donrai, por çou qu'il m'ert guerredonés se mon besoing jamais veés.»
- ok sagði svá: "Eigi vil ek selja kerit, en ek vil gefa þér til þess, at þú sér vin minn hvargi sem þú kemr viðr þörf mína."

Ok enn þriðja dag kom Flóres, ok hafði með C marka gulls ok ker sitt et góða;

setti nú fram C marka gulls hvárr þeira,

ok lætr dyrvörðr;

gaf Flóres honum enn aptr ok sitt með; varð hann þá feginn, svá at varla vissi hann.

Þá bað dyrvörðr Flóres leggja við kerit; Flóres kvez eigi lengr vilja leika.

Bauð dyrvörðr honum til matar með sér. Þeir fóru til borðs, ok var dyrvörðr mjök kátr;

falaði hann opt kerit at Flóres, ok bauð honum fyrir C marka gulls ok C marka silfrs.

Þá mælti Flóres: "Gefa vil ek þér kerit, en eigi selja, til þess, at þú gefir mér trú þína, at þú skalt allt gera eptir mínum vilja, ok mik eigi svíkja í nökkuru.

46 Cil prent la coupe et puis li jure  
 k'en lui servir metra sa cure.  
 De s'amor est tous embœus  
 et de l'avoir tous decœus.  
 Il l'en maine sans l'atargier  
 esbanoier ens el vergier.  
 As piés li ciet, offre s'oumage,  
 Floires le prent, si fait que sage;  
 cil fiance que par amor  
 le servira comme signor.

En síðan tók hann við kerinu ok  
 þakkaði honum. En síðan leiddi hann  
 Flóres út í þann enn góða eplagarðinn  
 ok sýndi honum þá dýrð alla, sem  
 þar var . .

It is immediately obvious that the Icelandic text by no means drastically deviates from the Norwegian. Generally speaking, S, which is probably derived from the original Norwegian MS,<sup>60</sup> eliminates more narrative material than M (esp. sections 13 and 28-46). Although M is slightly shorter than R, in content and sentence structure the two are essentially in agreement. M occasionally eliminates or reduces an epithet (11), repetition (31-8) or short subordinate clauses (1, 4, 25), some of which do not appear in the French. The Icelandic text also explains the feudal ceremony of homage in more pedestrian terms than the Norwegian and Swedish (18). In section 8, M and S are closer to each other than they are to R.

Curiously, R expands F at some length with an extremely detailed and repetitive account of the result of Flóres' encounter with the gatekeeper. The excessive repetition in R makes it a less than ideal example for textual comparison because it leaves a wider margin than usual for scribal error. "Error" rather than deliberate distortion is the operative word here as is clearly indicated in the following example:

In M (4-8) it appears that the scribe, confused by the repetition of R (4 and 7), has glanced down the page, missed out a small portion of the text and attached part



Ok svá gerðu þeir, at dyrvörðr sór  
honum trú sína.

---

of 7 to 4. Thus, after copying down the first part of R (4):

Ok ef þú fær taflit ok féit, þá gef honum sitt aptr ok þar með  
C aura gulls þess er þú bart til, ok seg .

with reasonable accuracy as:

ok ef þú fær taflit, gef honum aptr, ok þat með, er þú hafðir,  
ok seg . . .

the M scribe has ended his sentence with the words:

at þér þykkir lítils um slíkt vert; en hann mun mjök þakka  
þér.

These lines appear to have been copied from R (7-8) which is a repetition of the instructions given in R (4), slightly differently phrased:

Ok ef þú vinnr, þá gef honum bæði sitt ok pitt, fyrir því, kveð  
þú, at þér þykkir slíkt lítils um vert. Ok mun hann þá taka at  
þakka þér . . .

The result is that the intervening sections of R (5 and 7) are noticeably reduced in M. Possibly M (6): *ok haf*

*með þér C merkr gulls* for R (6): *ok þar með tak þú með þér hálfu meira fé* has been copied from R (4): *ok þar með C aura gulls*, a phrase omitted in M (4).

M (9) is also a corrupt reading of R (9). It is Flóres (R), not Daires (M), who says *mér þykkir þú góðr maðr*. S leaves out the line altogether, which suggests that the reading in the Norwegian MS which M and S used may have been slightly ambiguous at this point.

After R (4-9), M continues with a fairly close copy until R (17-18) which contains the description of homage. After this, reduction in M increases in proportion to repetition in R, although the essentials of the narrative are abbreviated rather than eliminated entirely as they are in S (29-46). R (44), omitted in M, does not appear in F.

M's noticeably shortened version of R (39-40) is possibly another instance of the kind of telescoping found in M (4-8). In R (39-40) the verb *vita* appears twice. In R (39) we read that *þótti honum svá illa, at hann vissi sín varla* and in R (40) that his mood had improved so much that *hann varð svá feginn, at hann vissi eigi, hvað hann skyldi at hafaz*. Either by error or through a desire to avoid further repetition, M (40) has compressed these two sections and arrived at *varð hann þá feginn, svá at varla vissi hann*.

Bearing in mind the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of R in this passage, it seems an exaggeration to describe M as "eine vielfach gekürzte und abgeänderte redaktion des textes".<sup>61</sup>

### *Ívens saga*

Kölbing considered the Icelandic texts of *Ívens saga* to be similarly abridged, his hypothesis being that the fifteenth-century AM 489, 4to (B) and SKB 6, 4to (A) shared a common source which was itself a shortened

version of the Norwegian. This assumption is based on five instances where material necessary for the smooth flow of the narrative is supposedly lacking.<sup>62</sup> Kölbing fails, however, to produce conclusive evidence that the reductions were not first made by the Norwegian translator. Comparison with the Swedish *Herr Ivan* is unprofitable in this case because its author did not work directly from the Norwegian text.<sup>63</sup> The five points are considered below with quotations from Kölbing's edition which uses B to XI: 21 and thereafter follows A, with some readings from AM 588a, 4to (C), a copy of A from the end of the seventeenth century. Where appropriate, variants from A before XI: 21<sup>64</sup> are given in parenthesis. Passages from the French are from the 1912 text of Wendelin Foerster,<sup>65</sup> based on BN 794 and BN 1433 which are of the same MS tradition as that upon which the saga is based.<sup>66</sup>

(1) *at miðjum degi sá ek vinvið(inn) yfir kapellunni* (II: 29). Kölbing regarded the absence of previous reference to a *viðr* as evidence of scribal mutilation. In *Yvain* Calogrenant has already been informed of this tree and the wonders of the spring beneath it (382-8) and the essentials of the description are repeated on his arrival there (413-15). The line from *Ívens saga* above translates *Yvain* 411-12. A's use of the definite article to refer to it might indicate that the tree had already been mentioned in the Norwegian text. However, the following points should also be taken into consideration:

(i) In its translation of *Yvain* (370-482), *Ívens saga* (II: 24-40) is, for the most part, unusually faithful. *Yvain* (370-94) and *Ívens saga* (II: 24-6) where Calogrenant is first told of the spring and the tree are compared below:

370-3

Mes se tu voloies aler  
 Ci pres jusqu'a une fontaine,  
 N'an revandroies pas sanz painne,  
 Se tu li randoies son droit.

II: 24

En ef þú ferr skamt heðan til einnar  
 keldu, þá muntu þaðan komaz eigi  
 háskalaust, nema þú gjaldir þat, sem  
 rétt er;

374-80

Ci pres troveras ore androit  
 Un santier, qui la te manra.  
 Tote la droite voie va,  
 Se bien viaus tes pas anploier;  
 Que tost porroies desvoier,  
 Qu'il i a d'autres voies mout.  
 La fontaine verras, qui bout,

ok ef þú ríðr þenna litla veg, þá kemr  
 þú skjótt til þessarar keldu.

381

S'est ele plus froide que marbres.

II: 25

Hon er kaldari öllum vötnum, en hon  
 vellr þó harðara en nokkurr hituketill.

382-5

Onbre li fet li plus biaux arbres,  
 Qu'onques poist feire Nature.  
 An toz tans la fuelle li dure,  
 Qu'il ne la pert por nul iver,

386-8

Et s'i pant uns bacins de fer  
 A une si longue chaainne,  
 Qui dure jusqu'an la fontaine.

Ok yfir keldunni hangir mundlaug fest  
 við rekendi, ok má síga ofan í kelduna.

389-94

Lez la fontaine troveras  
 Un perron tel, con tu verras,  
 (Je ne te sai a dire, quel,  
 Que je n'an vi onques nul tel),  
 Et d'autre part une chapele  
 Petite, mes ele est mout bele.

II: 26

Hjá keldunni stendr einn stólpi, ok  
 þar hjá ein kapella fagr.

The omissions and reductions in the Icelandic are confined to the mention of other paths along which Calogrenant might lose his way (377-80), an allusion to certain possibly magical attributes of the stone beside the fountain (391-2)

and a reference to a beautiful tree with wonderful properties (382-5). It would be quite consistent with the general pattern of translation throughout the *riddarasögur* for all of these to be omitted. There is a brief addition to 381, remarking on the bubbling waters of the spring (II: 25).

(ii) When the tree is first mentioned in the saga, it is in a sentence which translates the French exactly:

411-12	II:29
Et pot estre pres de midi,	ok at miðjum degi sá ek
Quant l'arbre et la chapele vi.	vínvið(inn) yfir kapellunni.

(iii) Although in A the translator refers to the tree in a way which could perhaps imply a previous reference, there is no suggestion that he has already indicated its function, which is to provide support for the chain holding the magic basin (386). When Calogrenant first sees this basin in the saga he does not say that it is hanging from a tree. Compare the following:

419	II:30
A l'arbre vi le bacin pandre	Ek sá, hvar mundlaug hekk.

Lack of arboreal interest on the part of the translator is further demonstrated by his failure to record Calogrenant's remarks upon the density of its foliage which, he thinks, would prevent a single drop of rain from penetrating it (416-18).

(iv) Since the greater part of this incident is so faithfully translated, it seems highly unlikely that a scribe bent on wholesale reduction and omission would take such care with the rest of the passage, which includes an excruciatingly literal translation of the description of the birds' song after the storm at the spring (459-77) (II: 35-9), and omit the translator's first reference to this tree.

(2) Þvíat ek má eigi kenna þik, útan ek hafa heyrt þik

*nefndan* (VIII: 12). Here the Icelandic text eliminates one of two reasons given by King Arthur for his inability to identify Yvain after his combat with Kay. Arthur explains himself thus in *Yvain*:

“Ne vos conoistroie des mois,  
Se je nomer ne vos ooie  
Ou desarmé ne vos veoie.” (2276-8)

It is characteristic of the *riddarasögur* translators to omit one of two such alternatives which are often useful in the composition of metrical romance but contribute little to the narrative.

(3) Kölbing regarded the omission of 3087-137, which describe the hasty disposal of an empty jar of magic ointment by a servant girl who has used more than necessary to cure Yvain's wounds, as a breakdown in the narrative. However, this episode has been aptly described as “probably the most inconsequential detail in the whole romance”,<sup>67</sup> and the elimination of such inconsequential detail is one of the most distinctive qualities of the *riddarasögur*.

(4) The saga also omits 3356-61 which explain why Yvain chooses to help the lion rather than the serpent in their tussle. He debates with himself and eventually rescues the lion. Because *Ívens saga* says that *ihugaði hann með sér, hvárum hann skyldi veita ok hjálpa* (X: 25) and continues immediately with *Hann steig af hesti sínum ok batt hann, at eigi skyldi ormrinn granda honum* (X: 26) without intervening reflection, Kölbing concluded that there had been some scribal tampering with an earlier MS. But since reflective mental processes are not, as a rule, recorded in the *riddarasögur*, and because Íven's subsequent actions on behalf of the lion speak for themselves, the omission of his private debate does not hinder the narrative.

(5) XII: 15 forms part of a long description of Íven's

combat against three knights. Kölbing regarded the omission of these lines, which say simply that an unjust seneschal died from his injuries in a pool of blood, as evidence of textual mutilation:

De la mort ne puet eschaper  
Li seneschaus, qui se tooille  
Et devolte an l'onde vermoille  
Del sanc chaut, qui del cors li saut. (4534-7)

The translation is faithful in its description of the injuries as given in 4526-31:

allt holdit ok húðin gekk af ofan af ǫxl ok á síðuna, svá at ǫll  
sýnduz innýflin hans. (XII:15).

With wounds of this nature death seems inevitable and further gory details unnecessary.

### *Some residual points*

Halvorsen's comparison of the Norwegian fragment of *Runzivals þáttur* with the version in AM 180a fol. shows that, as in *Elis saga*, some small details in the Icelandic may appear to be closer to the French.<sup>68</sup> There is no positive evidence that the Icelandic is a direct copy of the particular surviving Norwegian extract. Further, most of the additions which are found in AM 180a fol. "are unimportant and do not lead to any changes in the actual story".<sup>69</sup>

Recent investigation of some of the youngest *riddarasögur* MSS has produced more evidence in their favour. For example, although Kölbing dismissed BM Add. 4859 (1693) and 4857 (c. 1670) as unworthy of consideration as texts of *Ívens saga* (possibly without having seen them), Blaisdell's examination of the MSS has proved that as a copy of SKB 6, 4to (c. 1400), 4859 is

superior to AM 588a, 4to (end of seventeenth century), from which Kölbing gives some readings in his editions of 1872 and 1898. BM Add. 4857, which derives from both SKB 6, 4to and AM 489, 4to (fifteenth century), also appears to be a better text than AM 588a, 4to.<sup>70</sup>

Sometimes a copyist can be seen to have incorporated material from another MS where his original is defective. For example, BM Add. 4857, which Kölbing thought was a copy of SKB 6, 4to, is actually derived from AM 489, 4to but follows SKB 6 from the point where AM 489 breaks off.<sup>71</sup> Two more seventeenth-century copies of SKB 6 (AM 179 fol. and AM 181 fol.) have a particular value in that they fill lacunae which have since appeared in their exemplar.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Nks. 1144 fol. (written by Þorlákur Ísfjörð, c. 1748-81), a copy of the defective AM 576a-c, 4to (c. 1700), contains a synopsis of *Erex saga* now missing in the earlier MS.<sup>73</sup> Desmond Slay has indicated that copies of *Mirmanns saga* in two other seventeenth-century MSS (Papp. fol. nr 47 and Papp. fol. nr 17) may represent traditions even older than SKB 6.<sup>74</sup>

### Conclusion

Comparison with other medieval translations of French epic and romance reveals that, in deviating occasionally from their sources, the *riddarasögur* merely conform to contemporary attitudes towards translating. There is, therefore, no reason why translators at Hákon's court should not have made the alterations which are often attributed to later copyists. For purposes of literary and historical analysis, at least, it seems safe to assume that in their present state the *riddarasögur* MSS accurately represent the material translated, abbreviated or amplified by Brother Robert and his nameless colleagues.



<sup>1</sup> Those works in Old Norse with identifiable sources in Old French romances and *chansons de geste*.

<sup>2</sup> On DG 4-7 II fol. see Mattias Tveitane, *Elis saga, Strengleikar and other texts* (Corpus Codicum Norvegorum Medii Aevi, Quarto Serie IV, 1972), 9-16. See also the description by D. A. Seip in *Norsk språkhistorie til omkring 1370* (1955), 91-2. Ludvig Holm-Olsen dates the MS around 1270 or a little before in *Den gammelnorske oversettelsen av Pamphilus* (Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo. II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse, 1940. No. 2), 87-9.

<sup>3</sup> On the *Tristrams saga* MSS see three articles by Paul Schach: 'Some observations on *Tristrams saga*', *Saga-Book XV* (1957-9), 102-29; 'An unpublished leaf of *Tristrams saga*', *Washington State University Research Studies* 32 (1964), 50-62; 'The Reeves fragment of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*', *Einars-bók: Afmæliskevæðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar 12. desember 1969* ed. Bjarni Guðnason *et al.* (1969), 296-308.

<sup>4</sup> On the MSS of *Ivens saga* see Foster W. Blaisdell Jr., '*Ivens saga*: Names', *Scandinavian Studies* (=SS) 41 (1969), 30-40.

<sup>5</sup> On the *Erex saga* MSS see *Erex saga Artuskappa* ed. Foster W. Blaisdell Jr. (Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, Series B 19, 1965), xi-lvii.

<sup>6</sup> On the MSS of *Parcevals saga* see Eugen Kölbing, 'Die nordische Parzival-saga und ihre Quelle', *Germania* XIV (1869), 129-32; Helen S. McLean, *Parcevals saga* (University of Leeds M.Phil. thesis, 1968), xix-xxxviii.

<sup>7</sup> On the *Karlamagnús saga* MSS see E. F. Halvorsen, *The Norse version of the Chanson de Roland* (Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana 19, 1959); P. G. Foote, *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland: a contribution to the study of the Karlamagnús saga* (London Mediaeval Studies 4, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Halvorsen, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> H. G. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (1921), 184.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. S. Loomis, *The Romance of Tristram and Ysolt* (1923, repr. 1967).

<sup>12</sup> Didrik Arup Seip, *Nye studier i norsk språkhistorie* (1954), 32, 65.

<sup>13</sup> On this work see Ole Widding and Hans Bekker-Nielsen, 'A Debate of the Body and Soul in Old Norse literature', *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959), 272-89.

<sup>14</sup> On this work see Ludvig Holm-Olsen, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> For examples see Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen, 'Den høviske litteratur' in *Norron fortællekunst: Kapitler af den norsk-islandske middelalderlitteraturs historie* by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen and Ole Widding (1965), 110-11.

<sup>16</sup> Flora Amos, *Early theories of translation* (1919), 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> *op. cit.*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> A. J. Bliss, *Sir Launfal* (1960), 1039-44.

<sup>19</sup> On Chestre's use of his sources see Bliss, *op. cit.*, 24-31.

<sup>20</sup> A. T. Hatto, trans., *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan* (1960, repr. 1965), 43.

<sup>21</sup> F. J. Furnivall, *Robert Manning of Brunne: The Story of England* (Rolls series, 1887), 75-8, 83-4.

<sup>22</sup> R. Keyser and C. R. Unger, *Strengleikar eða liðabók* (1850), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Wattie, *The Middle English 'Lai le Freine'* (Smith College Studies in Modern Languages X, 1929), 1-22.

<sup>24</sup> Keyser and Unger, *op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> A. B. Taylor, *Floris and Blancheflour* (1927), 383-4.

<sup>26</sup> Eugen Kölbing, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 5, 1896), X: 10-12.

<sup>27</sup> Printed in Wendelin Foerster's 1890 edition, *Erec und Enide von Christian von Troyes* (Sämtliche Werke 3), 281: 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> A. T. Bödtker, *Partonope of Blois* (Early English Text Society (=EETS) Extra Series 109, 1912), 6169-74.

<sup>29</sup> *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> Albert B. Friedman and Norman T. Harrington, *Yvain and Gawain* (EETS Original Series 254, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> For example, *Yvain* (Y) 1302-1540, which includes the hero's first monologue, is reduced in *Yvain and Gawain* (E) to forty lines (869-908); cf. *Ivens saga* (Iv.) IV: 14-15. E manifests no interest in Laudine's problem

of how to marry her husband's slayer with a clear conscience Y (1735-80); cf. *Iv.* (V: 18). Only the essentials of Gauvain's exhortation to Yvain to abandon Laudine Y (2484-538) are preserved in E (1455-78) and *Iv.* (VIII: 24). The discourse on Yvain's conflict of emotions towards Gauvain before their duel Y (5998-6107) is omitted in E and greatly reduced in *Iv.* (XIV: 16). Also eliminated in E and *Iv.* are the "Sun and Moon" flirtation between Gauvain and Lunete Y (2395-441) and the description of the beauty of the daughter of the lord of the *Chastel del Pesme Avanture* Y (5374-96). Lunete's distinction between the true and the false lover Y (2722-41) is excised in both E and *Iv.* Line and chapter references are to T. B. W. Reid, *Yvain (Le chevalier au lion)* (The critical text of Wendelin Foerster with introduction, notes and glossary, 1942. Repr. with minor corrections, 1967), Friedman and Harrington, *op. cit.* and Eugen Kölbing, *Ivens saga* (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 7, 1898) respectively.

<sup>32</sup> Wilhelmine Wirtz, *Flore et Blancheflor* (1937), 1200-4.

<sup>33</sup> On these works see Georges Doutrepont, *Les mises en prose des épopées et des romans chevaleresques du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1939) and C. E. Pickford, *L'évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du moyen âge* (1960).

<sup>34</sup> Blaisdell, *op. cit.*, 72; Foerster, *op. cit.*, 294.

<sup>35</sup> Keyser and Unger, *op. cit.*, 29-30.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Hallberg, 'Norröna riddarsagor. Några språkdrag', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 86 (1971), 114-38.

<sup>37</sup> Foster W. Blaisdell Jr., 'The so-called "Tristram-group" of the *Riddarasögur*', *SS* 46 (1974), 134-9.

<sup>38</sup> The term used by M. Nygaard in *Norrøn syntax* (1905), 1-3, 48, 57, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Ole Widding's term in 'Jærtegn og Mariu saga. Eventyr', *Norrøn ortællekunst*, 132-6.

<sup>40</sup> For example, by Kölbing in 'Die nordische Erex saga und ihre Quelle', *Germania* XVI (1871), 470, and Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie* (1894-1901), II, part 2, 964-5.

<sup>41</sup> Foster W. Blaisdell Jr., 'A stylistic feature in the *Erex saga*' in *Studies in language and literature in honour of Margaret Schlauch* (1966), 44.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-47.

<sup>43</sup> Eugen Kölbing, *Tristrams saga ok Ísondar* (1878), 1.

<sup>44</sup> XVI: 29.

<sup>45</sup> G. Cederschiöld and P. A. Wulff, *Versions nordiques du fabliau français 'Le mantel maulaillié'* (Lunds universitets årsskrift XIII, 1876-7), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Eugen Kölbing, *Elis saga ok Rosamundu* (1881), LIX.

<sup>47</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson, *Viktors saga ok Blávus* (1964), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry* (EETS Original Series 33, 1868), 3.

<sup>49</sup> 'The *riddarasögur* and medieval European literature', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 8 (1975), 20-38.

<sup>50</sup> Gaston Raynaud, *Elie de Saint Gille* (Société des anciens textes français 13, 1879), xl.

<sup>51</sup> Rudolph Meissner, *Die Strengleikar* (1902), 138-86.

<sup>52</sup> Kölbing, *Elis saga ok Rosamundu*, xviii-xxxvi.

<sup>53</sup> Meissner, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>54</sup> Halvorsen, *op. cit.*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Schach, 'The style and structure of *Tristrams saga*' in *Scandinavian Studies: Essays presented to H. G. Leach* ed. Carl F. Bayerschmidt and E. J. Friis (1965), 66.

<sup>56</sup> Halvorsen, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>57</sup> *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (1896), xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Gustaf Cederschiöld, *Fornsögur suðrlanda* (Lunds universitets årsskrift XVII, 1881-2), xviii.

<sup>59</sup> Emil Olson, *Flores och Blanzeflor* (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet 61, 1956).

<sup>60</sup> Olson, *op. cit.*, viii.

<sup>61</sup> Kölbing, *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr*, xviii.

<sup>62</sup> Kölbing, *Ivens saga*, xii-xiv.

<sup>63</sup> Erik Noreen, *Herr Ivan* (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet 30, 1931), vi. See also Kölbing's *Ivens saga*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>64</sup> Printed on pp. 116-33 of Kölbing's *Ivens saga*.

<sup>65</sup> T. B. W. Reid, *Yvain (Le chevalier au lion)* (cf. note 31 above).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>67</sup> Robert G. Cook, 'The ointment in Chrétien's *Yvain*', *Mediaeval Studies* 31 (1969), 338.

<sup>68</sup> Halvorsen, *op. cit.*, 84-8.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Foster W. Blaisdell Jr., 'The value of the valueless: a problem in editing medieval texts', *SS* 39 (1967), 42-3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> On SKB 6, 4 to see Desmond Slay, 'The original state of Stockholm Perg. 4:0 nr 6' in *Afmælisrit Jóns Helgasonar 30. júní 1969* (1969), 270-87.

<sup>73</sup> On this MS see Blaisdell (1965), liv-lvi and Agnete Loth, 'To afskrifter af AM 576 a-c, 4to', *Opuscula III* (Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana 29, 1967), 161-72.

<sup>74</sup> In his Presidential Address to the Viking Society, 1972.

### THREE NOTES ON *DUGGALS LEIZLA*<sup>1</sup>

By PETER CAHILL

1. Attention has been drawn to the apparent echo of the *Skirnismál* in the Norwegian translator's choice of words for a phrase in the scene *De pena gluttonum et fornicantium*:<sup>2</sup>

Doloribus quoque verendorum locorum cruciabantur quam maximis (*W* 24<sup>20-1</sup>).

ædi og opoli j þeim stodum likams þeira sem skop þeira hofdu uerit (AM 681a; AM 624 reads: j þessvm stodum lijkamsins, cf. *HMS* I 342<sup>24-5</sup>).

Þurs ríst ec þér      oc þríá stafi,  
ergi oc æði      oc ópola.<sup>3</sup>

The precise meaning of *ópoli* in these contexts is perhaps not recoverable, but the reading of AM 681b (second half of 15th century), if it is not simply a scribal attempt to make good an illegible exemplar, may be helpful:

ędi ok opolanligur brune j þeim stavdvm likams þeira er glęper hofdv verit.<sup>4</sup>

2. The story of Duggall is related in part in Bergr Sökkason's *Michaels saga*.<sup>5</sup> Christine Fell has given reasons for believing that this extract derives from *Duggals leizla* itself rather than from any of the Latin versions (or an independent translation).<sup>6</sup> A detailed comparison of the texts shows that this conclusion is undoubtedly correct, but the example she gives, from the "Signs of Death" passage, is unfortunate, since the presumed common "deviation or mis-translation" in AM 681a and *Michaels saga* is in fact supported by 12th-century manuscripts of the *Visio*, and Unger's emendation is therefore unjustified. The relevant readings are:

*pui* [næst] fellu oll sonn dauda mork aa *hann* har *hans* fell en enni roknadi (AM 681a, cf. *HMS* I 331<sup>34-5</sup>).

*pvi* næst fellv avll davða mork aa *hann* haar *hans* fell enni *hans* hroknaði (AM 657a, cf. *HMS* I 686<sup>28-9</sup>).

*pui* næst fiellu aull dauda maurk aa *hann* · *har* *hans* fiell j enni · (AM 624).

Assunt signa mortis, crines cadunt,<sup>7</sup> frons obduratur (*W* 8<sup>9-10</sup>).

An alternative might be the following, where *Michaels saga* agrees with AM 681a, but the Latin agrees with AM 624:

fagnadi uinur *hans* *honum* uel og ueitti *honum* med godum fagnadi þria daga (AM 681a, cf. *HMS* I 331<sup>22-3</sup>).

*honum* þar komannda faggnandi felagi *hans* *honvm* vel ok veitti *honvm* goðan fagnat þria daga (AM 657a, cf. *HMS* I 686<sup>18-19</sup>).

fagnadi uinur *hans* *honum* uel ok ueitti *honum* med godum fagnade · iii nætur · (AM 624).

Qui cum bene receptus perendinaret tribus noctibus (*W* 7<sup>19-20</sup>).

3. The *Visio Tnugdali* is also found in Swedish, in two versions.<sup>8</sup> The later of these — the “b-redaction” — is a translation of the *Speculum Historiale* abridgement,<sup>9</sup> but the earlier — the “a-redaction” — contains details of the *Visio* which Vincent does not have, as well as other material, some of which corresponds to passages in, e.g., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*,<sup>10</sup> and the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*.<sup>11</sup> A new edition of this redaction is obviously needed, but here I give a few brief examples from each of the versions, with the readings of AM 681a for comparison. It will be noticed that there is sometimes a certain verbal coincidence between *Duggals leizla* and the “a-redaction”, precisely in those places where the latter has matter absent from Vincent, but whether any special significance should be attached to this is a question for a future editor.<sup>12</sup>

i. Swa fooro the fram aat enom wægh, och kommo til eth hws; thz war swa skapt, som en bagare wggñ (*Tungulus*, 32 ¶ 29).

Thøm nw fram gongande om mærkæ ok stenoga væghæ Syntes thøm som eeth størstæ hwss Thet huset var stort som største bergh Ok ypit swa som brinnande vghn (*Twndalus*, 106<sup>33-5</sup>).

Cumque irent per loca tenebrosa et arida, apparuit eis domus aperta maxima, quasi quidam mons arduus præ nimia magnitudine, rotunda quasi furnus (*SH* Lib. xxvii, cap. xciii).

Cum autem irent per tenebrosa loca et arida, apparuit eis domus aperta. Domus autem ipsa, quam viderant, erat maxima, ut arduus mons præ nimia magnitudine, rotunda vero erat quasi furnus, ubi panes coqui solent (*W* 23<sup>6-9</sup>).

Sem þau geingu um myrkua stadi og hardan uæg þa syndiz þeim opit hus og sua mikít sem it hæsta fiáll at mikileik enn þat uar kringlot sem ofn er menn baka braud j (*AM* 68ra, cf. *HMS* I 341<sup>14-16</sup>).

ii. ther la lucifer a gruffuo, swarter som en ram (*Tungulus*, 35 ¶ 47).

Jacet autem illud horribile monstrum Thet vidherstyggeliga spooket ligger þa eeno brinnande jærn haastre (*Twndalus*, 112<sup>30-2</sup>; cf. 112<sup>17-18</sup>; Han laagh fasuligin ok swarter som swartaste korper).

Erat illa bestia nigerrima sicut corvus . . . Jacet autem illud horribile monstrum super cratem ferream (*SH* Lib. xxvii, cap. xcvi).

Erat namque prefata bestia nigerrima sicut corvus . . . Jacet itaque illud horribile spectaculum (*al.* monstrum) pronum super cratem ferream (*W* 36<sup>3-4</sup>, 15-16).

þat it boluada kuikendi uar suart sem hrafn þetta et ogurliða dyr la aa grufu aa iærngrilli (*AM* 68ra, cf. *HMS* I 349<sup>32-3</sup>, 350<sup>3</sup>).<sup>13</sup>

iii. Jnnan then mwr war ee dager, och aldrik nath, ther war glædi, och aldrik sorgh (*Tungulus*, 38-9 ¶ 61).

*Twndalus* and *SH* both lack this passage, but:

Nox ibi non erat, tristitia aberat (*W* 45<sup>22-3</sup>).

not uar þar eingi og hrygleikur (*AM* 68ra, cf. *HMS* I 335<sup>10</sup>).

iv. for thy at then tiidh iach war hungroger, tha  
(*Tungulus*, 39 ¶ 63).

*Twendalus* and *SH* both have only the introductory words of the quotation;<sup>14</sup> *W* has a form which is thought to derive from a pre-Vulgate text (*Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare, silivi et dedistis mihi bibere, hospes fui et suscepistis me*),<sup>15</sup> but *Tungulus* and AM 681a both have versions closer to the Vulgate:

pier gafut mier hungrudum mat og þystum dryk og klæddu  
pier mig nocktan og gestur uar eg og olut pier mig siukur uar  
eg og j myrkvastofum og komu pier til min (cf. *HMS* I 355<sup>22-4</sup>).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used:

*W* A. Wagner, *Visio Tnugdali: lateinisch und altdeutsch* (1882).

*HMS* C. R. Unger, *Heilagra Manna Sögur* (1877).

*SH* *Speculi Maioris Vincentii Borgundi . . . Tomus Quartus. Qui Speculum Historiale Inscibitur* (1591).

The quotations from *Duggals leizla* and *Michaels saga* are taken from photographs of the manuscripts, for which I am grateful to the Arnarnagðæan Institute in Copenhagen.

<sup>2</sup> See for example B. Sijmons, H. Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda* (1888-1931), *Kommentar*, I 233 and *Wörterbuch*, col. 811. Cf. *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1956—), s.v. *Skirnismál* and *Kjærlighetsmági*.

<sup>3</sup> G. Neckel, *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* I (4th ed., revised H. Kuhn, 1962), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. I. Reichborn-Kjennerud, 'Eddatidens medisin', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 40 (1924), 116, and the comments on the sexual implications of *brúni* in R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (2nd ed., 1954), 155-6.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *HMS* I 686<sup>3</sup>.<sup>921</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> C. Fell, 'Bergir Sökkason's *Michaels saga* and its sources', *Saga-Book* XVI (1962-5), 354-71. The Duggall episode is discussed 361-4.

<sup>7</sup> This is the reading of Erlangen 403 and Vienna 815, both 12th-century. Unger takes his Latin text from the edition of O. Schade, *Visio Tnugdali* (1869), which uses a 13/14th-century manuscript, Giessen 777 (formerly 126<sup>4m</sup>), and differs from Wagner's text in many points of detail.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1956—), s.v. *Tundalus*. The editions I have used are: "a-redaction" — G. Stephens och J. A. Ahlstrand, *S. Patriks-Sagan* (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet Band I: Häft. 2, 1844), 27-48 (*Tungulus*); and "b-redaction" — O. F. Hultman, *Jöns Buddes Bok. En handskrift från Nådendals Kloster* (Skrifter utgivna av Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland 31, 1895), 99-121 (*Twendalus*).

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful for this information to Miss B. Shepherd, of University College London, who also drew my attention to the problem of the source of the "a-redaction".

<sup>10</sup> The list of sinners hanging from various parts of their anatomy, *Tungulus*, 31 ¶ 27. Cf. K. Warnke, *Das Buch vom Espurgatorie S. Patrice* (1938), 76 and xvi, note 6.

<sup>11</sup> The soul's question, *Tungulus*, 34 ¶ 40. Cf. U. Morrica, *Gregorii Magni Dialogii* (1924), 278-80.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting coincidence is the reading: *Thu ær dæðzens dotter, heluites modher* (*Tungulus*, 27-8 ¶ 4). AM 681a reads: *þuiat hon er dotter daudans og moder oslockuilligs elldz* (AM 624: *matur ok fæda*; W 10<sup>8-7</sup>: *quia filia est mortis et cibus ignis inextinguibilis*). It would be rash to assume direct influence here, but cf. note 13 below.

<sup>13</sup> At "Iacet . . ." there is a sudden change of tense in all the Latin versions, including Helinandus, *Chronicon*, Lib. xlviii, *sub anno* 1149 (J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus. Series Prima*, 1844—, vol. 212, cols. 1038-55), which is Vincent's source. Up to this point the present tense has only been used in the initial account of the geography of Ireland, in the description of Duggall's death, and in direct speech. It will be noticed that both the "a-redaction" and *Duggals leizla* ignore the change, although the "b-redaction" reproduces it.

<sup>14</sup> *Matthew* xxv 35-6.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H. J. Lawlor, 'The Biblical Text in Tundal's Vision', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy XXXVI* (1924), 355-6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the list of saints, W 52<sup>16-20</sup> = *Tungulus*, 41 ¶ 75, but absent from *SH* and *Twndalus*. (The manuscripts of *Duggals leizla* break off before this point.)



## NOTES

### ON ELMER H. ANTONSEN'S *A CONCISE GRAMMAR OF THE OLDER RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS* (1975)

BY MICHAEL BARNES

THIS BOOK covers much the same ground as Wolfgang Krause's *Die Sprache der urnordischen Runeninschriften* which I reviewed in *Saga-Book* XVIII. The two works are nevertheless very different. Krause's description is unsystematic. The basic structures of the language tend to become obscured by a mass of detail about individual forms, and in the interpretation of certain inscriptions extra-linguistic criteria are used. Antonsen has tried to "follow a rigorous linguistic approach", and to "interpret them [the inscriptions] from a strictly linguistic point of view", for "To tamper with the linguistic evidence by prematurely introducing unconfirmed assumptions concerning the social and religious milieu of the writers of the inscriptions is to condemn the entire field of runic studies to the status of conjecture" (VIII).

The book is divided into two main parts. The first consists of seven brief chapters on the language of the inscriptions and one on dating. The second is devoted to a Corpus of Inscriptions.

Chapter 1 of the linguistic analysis, "The runes, their phonological values and transliteration", is a convincing attempt to demonstrate that there was a more or less perfect fit between the runes of the 24-symbol *futhork* and the phonological system of Proto-Germanic. In chapter 2, "Runic graphemes and their variations", the distinctive features of the runes are isolated. This clear demonstration of which features were distinctive and which redundant makes it much easier to understand the many variant forms of individual runes that occur. It also makes the interpretation of a number of doubtful runes much more positive. In chapter 3, "Dating and relative chronology", Antonsen argues that the relative chronology of linguistic (and runic) forms is a better basis for dating than archaeological evidence, at least where "Archaeologists themselves take recourse to a relative chronology based on changing styles in ornamentation and workmanship" (10). Accordingly, he proposes different dates

from those in Wolfgang Krause's *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* (1966) for a number of inscriptions. In chapter 4, "Orthographic peculiarities", several interesting theories are advanced. After commenting on well-known matters such as the non-designation of nasals before homorganic stops and the representation of long vowels and consonants by a single graph, Antonsen turns his attention to the disruptive effects of mutation, breaking and other sound-changes on the orthographic-phonemic fit of Northwest Germanic. He argues, *inter alia*, that the change \*/ɔ/ > /ō/ and the phonemicisation of /o/ in Northwest Germanic made possible the correlation of /o/ and /ō/, so that /o/ could be written **o**. However, where a low vowel remained in the following syllable in Northwest Germanic (e.g. **horna**), [o] could still be analysed by the carver as a conditioned variant of /u/. Later, when the conditioning /a/ was lost, the spelling alternation **u** ~ **o** became arbitrary. That is why we find not only **-wulafz** and **-wolafz** but also **worte** ~ **wurte** and even **-ronoz** (/rūnāz/, according to Antonsen) with a long root vowel. This failure to mark the contrast high vs. mid in the rounded vowels spread to **i** and **e**, and this was what led to the elimination of **e** and **o** from the younger *futhark*. A fresh look at the Blekinge stones in this chapter produces striking results. In Antonsen's view the linguistic evidence of the inscriptions shows that mutation, breaking, syncope, the monophthongisation of falling diphthongs and the lowering of /ē/ > /æ/ had taken place in East Norse by the time they were carved (A.D. 600-650). Furthermore, "Stentoften and Björketorp represent one and the same linguistic stage and both make use of 'modern' and 'traditional' spellings according to the carver's command of traditional spellings and his own analysis of the sounds he wishes to represent" (14). If I understand Antonsen correctly, what he envisages is the following (/ between the symbols = arbitrary variation, cf. above):

	phoneme*	spelling	mutated	phoneme*	spelling	
			by		traditional	new
1	/a/	<b>A</b>	/i/	/x/	<b>A</b>	<b>e/i Ai</b>
2	/ā/	<b>A</b>	/i/	> /æ/	<b>A</b>	<b>e/i Ai</b>
3	/e/	<b>e/i</b>		> /x/	<b>e/i</b>	<b>A Ai</b>
4	/ē/	<b>e/i</b>		> /æ/	<b>e/i</b>	<b>A Ai</b>
5	/ai/	<b>Ai</b>		> /æ/	<b>Ai</b>	<b>e/i A</b>

\*The phonemic changes apply only to syllables which normally have full or secondary stress.

	phoneme*	spelling	mutated by	phoneme*	spelling traditional	spelling new
6	/ū/	<b>o/u</b>	/i/	> /ȳ/	<b>o/u</b>	<b>iu</b>
7	/iu/	<b>iu</b>	/i/	> /ȳ/	<b>iu</b>	<b>o/u</b>
8	/ā/	<b>A</b>	/u/	> /ȳ/	<b>A</b>	<b>AU</b>
9	/au/	<b>AU</b>		> /ȳ/	<b>AU</b>	<b>A</b>
10	/ō/	<b>o/u</b>	/i/	> /ȳ/	<b>o/u</b>	<b>AU A</b>
11	/ō/ < /au/	<b>AU A</b>		> /ȳ/	<b>AU A</b>	<b>o/u</b>

\*The phonemic changes apply only to syllables which normally have full or secondary stress.

Not all of these orthographic developments are postulated in chapter 4, but those which are not must be inferred for systematic reasons. Thus it is not stated specifically that /æ/ can be written **ai**, but we are told that **haidera** is a variant of **hedera**, and clearly if /æ/ < /e/ can be written **ai** so can /æ/ < /a/. Similarly, if /ō/ of whatever origin can be written **A** or **AU**, it follows that after the change /ō/ (< /au/) > /ȳ/, /ȳ/ of any origin may be spelt **A** as well as **AU** or **u**, and indeed this is borne out by the forms **heramalás** and **weladuds**, both in the Stentofte inscription. We should probably also be right to postulate a spelling **o/u** for /ō/ < /ā/, but this is less certain. In later runic writing **u** is not found as a representation of /ō/ < /ā/, and only occurs once or twice for /o/ < /a/. Examples from the Blekinge inscriptions of the type of orthographic variation assumed by Antonsen are: 1. **mag[i]u** vs. **gestumz**; 3. **-eka**, **felah-**, **hedera** vs. **-ak**, **falah-**, **haidera**; 4. **wela-**; 5. **haidz-** vs. **hidez-**; 7. **bariutip** vs. **barutz**; 8. **sba** (on p. 88 this is said to represent *sp̥ō*, but *sp̥ō* must be what is meant); 9. **-lausz** vs. **-las**; 11. **-daude**, **-las** vs. **-duds**. In addition, Antonsen sees /u/ mutation of /a/ in **Hapuwolafz** (*hɔpʊ-*) and breaking in **haeramalaus** (*hjar<sup>a</sup>m<sup>a</sup>-*) and **haeruwolafz** (*hjaru-*). Naturally, if syncope was well advanced, breaking, as well as mutation, must have taken place. The difficulty is to reconcile the spelling with the supposed pronunciation. Antonsen ingeniously assumes that "the *āra*-rune . . . continues its original value /j/ in noninitial position . . . while **e** = /æ/ . . . and /o/ (regarded by the rune-carver as a positional variant of /æ/ before /u/)" (14). Chapters 5 and 6, "Phonology" and "Morphology", trace the forms found in the inscriptions back to Proto-Germanic and Proto-Indo-European. Of particular interest is the suggestion: "The reverse spellings in EN [East Norse; here: the Blekinge stones] **af<sup>a</sup>tz** =

/afr/ and **hid<sup>z</sup>-**, **haidz-** = /hædr-/ indicate that PG \*/r/ (originally a uvular trill) and PG \*/z/ have coalesced in an apical trill after apicals" (17). It will be remembered that inscriptions in the younger *fuþark*, all except the very earliest, have **r** after **t** or **p**, whether it represents the reflex of Germanic \*/r/ or \*/z/, while these two sounds are still distinguished in other environments. Chapter 7, "Syntax", deals almost exclusively with word order. Attention is drawn in particular to a change from S+O+V, which seems to have been the normal unmarked order in indicative sentences in Northwest Germanic, to S+V+O in North Germanic (A.D. 450-600) and later Scandinavian. During the same period there appears to have been another important development whereby an older unmarked order in noun phrases, head+modifier, was replaced by one where demonstratives and attributes could appear before the head: **runazþaiaz**, but also **þatazina**. No explanation is offered for either of these changes, although the first in particular must be regarded as fundamental. Chapter 8 is entitled "Delimitation of languages/dialects represented in the Corpus". The linguistic forms which occur and the age of the inscriptions are the criteria by which the various branches of Germanic are distinguished and assigned to a particular period. There is a good deal of overlapping between Northwest Germanic (A.D. 100-550) on the one hand and West Germanic (A.D. 200-600) and North Germanic (A.D. 450-600) on the other. This is for two reasons. First, "NwG underwent a restriction in its geographic distribution after the splitting off of Ingv. [Ingveonic] WG, but the linguistic features of that part of the NwG area which did not undergo the WG changes remained essentially the same and the language lived on. Therefore, even though Ingv. WG split off by 200 A.D., it is still possible to say that the language of later NwG inscriptions reflect [sic] a parent stage of Ingv. WG" (27). Second, "It must be borne in mind that in some instances an inscription has been assigned to NwG simply because it displays no features which would lead us to assign it to a different linguistic area or stage. . . This is undoubtedly the major reason for the overlap of about 175 years between NwG and NG, although we must also reckon with the possibility that phonological changes may be hidden behind a conservative orthography" (28).

The Corpus of Inscriptions consists of "only those which lend themselves to linguistic interpretation" (VIII), and "new readings, interpretations, and/or analyses of forms" (IX) are given for a good many of them. Each inscription is treated in the same way. Following the title, geographic location and approximate date,

there is 1. a transliteration of the text, 2. discussion of difficult readings and/or (ortho)graphic peculiarities, 3. the transliterated text in words (without further emendation and naturally only where the inscription consists of more than one word), 4. notes on the etymology of each word (compounds are divided and each element discussed separately), 5. a translation into English, and 6. bibliographical references, mainly to the principal editions, handbooks or grammars in which the inscription is treated.

Following the Corpus, there is a comprehensive Index of Forms (90-105) arranged according to language, a List of Works Cited (106-9) and an Index of Inscriptions Treated (110-11).

From what I have said so far, it will be clear that Antonsen's book has much to recommend it. Unlike his predecessors in the field, he is entirely systematic in his approach to the language of the older runic inscriptions. He is also systematic in his notation, something I regard as crucial since it enables the reader to understand with the minimum of difficulty what he is trying to say. Also praiseworthy is the attempt to interpret the inscriptions without recourse to extra-linguistic criteria, often another name for wild phantasy. Finally, it speaks well of Antonsen and is extremely helpful to the reader that every word in his corpus is discussed, however intractable the problems it presents. Difficulties are not so cheerfully ignored as they have often been in the past.<sup>1</sup>

Having said this, there are many points on which *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* is open to criticism. To begin with, the criteria by which runic inscriptions may be classed as "older" are nowhere set out. None dated later than A.D. 600-650 is included, so the long and important Eggjum inscription is missing; yet if Antonsen is correct in his interpretation of the Blekinge stones, the language spoken by those who carved them cannot have differed fundamentally from that of the Eggjum rune master.

A book which introduces many "new readings, interpretations, and/or analyses of forms" ought to justify these fully. How otherwise is the reader to judge the likelihood of their being correct? The reasons for the re-analysis of many forms are given in the first eight chapters, but arguments in support of the new readings and interpretations are few and far between. Antonsen blames this on the publishers: "For inclusion in the present series [Sprachstrukturen], it has been necessary to reduce considerably the original scope of this grammar. As a result, much of the argumentation for the new readings and interpretations I propose in the Corpus of Inscriptions has had to be omitted" (VII). For

the reader it is immaterial whether the publishers, the editors of the series, or the author are to blame. Together they are responsible for producing what is really only half a book. Antonsen's grammar is entirely corpus-based, and that is as it should be; yet he is denied the opportunity of persuading us that his reading and interpretation of significant parts of the corpus are valid.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate this deficiency. Antonsen's reading of the Reistad stone (Vest-Agder, A.D. 450, pp. 52-3) is **idringaz ekwakraz : unnamz wraitha**. He disagrees with Krause's statement about what follows rune 21, **m**: "Rechts neben der letzten Rune der zweiten Reihe *m* erkennt man noch einen senkrechten Strich und einige Querrisse nach der vorangehenden *m*-Rune zu. Hierbei handelt es sich wohl um bedeutungslose Schrammen" (Krause 1966, 171). According to Antonsen, "**z** is located directly on the edge of the stone, somewhat more weather-worn than the others" It is impossible to say who is right. Since no illustration is provided, we have only Antonsen's word for the existence of **z** after **unnam**. The inscription is translated: "Idringaz [i.e. of memorable lineage]. I, Wakraz [i.e. watchful, brave one] the untakeable, wrote (this)" The alleged cognates of **idringaz** Antonsen produces mean, according to him, "atonement, to regret, ruminate, reg[r]etful, regretted, other, anew" How this word or name comes to mean "of memorable lineage" is not easy to see. **unnamz** is connected with what are clearly adjectival derivatives of the strong verb *\*neman* in various Germanic languages. However, no distinction is made in Antonsen's grammar between substantives and adjectives; **-namz** is a "masc. nom. sg., cons. stem" But, if correctly translated by him, is not **unnamz** an example of just the type of phrase where one would expect a substantivised adjective with *weak* form to appear? **wraitha**, normally taken either as an infinitive or as the object of **unnam** ("know, understand", or "undertook") is here said to be 1st sing. past indic. of a class I strong verb. It provides Antonsen with his only example of the retention of the end-vowel in this form. Contrary to the views of other scholars, he considers that final *\*/a/* was not lost in Proto-Germanic, but remained well into the Northwest Germanic period. This is presumably why he states with complete assurance that the sequence **ana** in the notoriously obscure **anahahai** on the Möjbro stone (Uppland, A.D. 300, pp. 33-4) is the preposition "on" As for **hahai**, it means "steed", and the spelling **-ai** in the dat. sing. ending indicates that the inscription should be dated to A.D. 300 rather than the

generally accepted A.D. c. 450. Antonsen's interpretation of the Strøm whetstone (Sør-Trøndelag, A.D. 450, pp. 54-5) requires us to believe that the sequence **hahaskapihapuligi** contains, *inter alia*, "*hah-a*, masc. nom. sg., *ōn*-stem. . .cf. E.[English] *haugh* 'hoe', (with different ablaut grade and/or grammatical change) Go. *hoha*, OHG *huohili* 'plow' . .OIc. *haki*. 'hook' . ." (many more alleged cognates given), and "*hap-u*, neut. nom. (voc.), sg., *w*-stem. . .cf. . .OE *headu-*, OIc. (*ā*-stem) *hǫð* 'battle', *Hǫðr* name of a god. . .[further] OInd. *sātayati* 'beats up, throws down'. ", and means "Scathe, scythe! Lie, that which is mown down!"

In the absence of any accompanying argumentation it is difficult to distinguish interpretations such as those just instanced from the conjecture Antonsen deplores in his Foreword. Even with the argumentation it might be difficult to persuade some readers that his views are necessarily to be preferred to those of other scholars. Given that so much in the book is, or appears to be, educated guesswork, the absolute certainty with which almost all the conclusions are presented is misleading. Antonsen seems to have been deluded into thinking that modern linguistic investigation, whatever the topic, is something approaching an exact science, but there can be few fields of study less amenable to the strictly scientific method than the older runic inscriptions where most of the data are so uncertain. Words and phrases suggestive of doubt like "perhaps", "possible", "uncertain", "could be", "in my view" etc. are hardly to be found in the book. The rare "etymology obscure" (77) implies erroneously that all etymologies not so marked are well understood.

The author's confidence in the correctness of his own conclusions manifests itself in other ways. The practice of placing dots under the transliteration of runes which for one reason or other are difficult to read is abandoned. Notes on difficult readings follow the transliterations, but by and large these serve merely to establish the "correct" version and little room is left for doubt. I assume that Antonsen has examined personally all the inscriptions contained in his corpus, but he nowhere mentions that he has done so.

The Foreword tells us that only inscriptions which can be interpreted linguistically are included; uninterpretable sequences are omitted. It is obvious, though, that one man's message will be another man's uninterpretable sequence. I find, for example, the translation of the Setre inscription (Hordaland, A.D. 550-600, pp. 82-3) **hal maz mauna alunaalu'nana**: "Halmaz [i.e. towhead], Mauna [i.e. aloof one?]. Magic, Nanna [i.e. bold one],

magic, Nanna" charming, but I cannot see why it is more likely to be right than any of the several other improbable interpretations which have been offered.

Also in the Foreword it is stated that "the translations of proper names indicate only the probable basic meaning of their elements, which may very well have been no longer apparent to those giving or bearing the names, since in many instances these name-elements are very archaic (e.g. *bīdawarijaz* = 'defender of the covenant or oath')" (VIII). That the first element of **bīdawarijaz** is to be interpreted *bīda-* (cognate with OIcel. *bīða*) is a hypothesis. To claim without further ado that it is "very archaic" suggests, however, that there is no dispute about the meaning. Even supposing Antonsen's interpretation to be right, how do we know that the name-elements in **bīdawarijaz** are "very archaic", or indeed that the probable meaning of the word is "defender of the covenant or oath"? That **hadulaikaz** (Kjøllevik, Rogaland, A.D. 450, pp. 50-1) is made up of elements meaning "battle" and "dance" is perhaps more certain, but why does Antonsen translate it "[i.e. battle-dancer]"? Similar doubts and questions attach to the interpretation of many other names and alleged names.

In the chapter on "Dating and relative chronology" new dates are given for a number of inscriptions, but these are not always justified there and it is difficult to find reasons elsewhere in the book. The bracteates from Vadstena, Motala and Grumpan are assigned to the period A.D. 450-550, somewhat earlier than the dating A.D. 550-600 given, according to Antonsen, by Krause. However, examination of *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, where Krause goes into greatest detail about the dating of the bracteates, reveals that he is nothing like as specific as this or as Antonsen: "Alles in allem scheinen die Runenbrakteaten der Typen A und C dem Zeitraum etwa von 450 bis 550 oder etwas später zuzugehören" (238).

In his identification of the so-called 'ĕ'-rune with Proto-Germanic \*/ǣ/ Antonsen is adamant. He argues that Proto-Germanic had the following vowel phonemes: \*/a/, \*/ā/, \*/ǣ/, \*/ǔ/, \*/ĩ/, \*/e/. Ignoring the length contrast, this system would require six symbols. It is therefore clear that the so-called 'ĕ'-rune was in fact an 'æ'-rune. The change \*/ǣ/ > /ā/ in root syllables resulted in the displacing of the 'æ'-rune, though it may have continued to be used for a time in unstressed syllables where Proto-Germanic \*/ǣ/ remained. However, 3rd sing. past indic. forms (Proto-Germanic ending \*/ǣ/, Northwest Germanic /ē/) such as **talǥidai** (Nøvling, North Jutland, A.D. 200) and **maridai** (Vimose, Fyn, A.D. 250-300), which clearly exhibit backward



spellings made possible by the change  $*/ai/ > */\tilde{a}/$  in unstressed syllables (e.g. in the dat. sing. of *o*-stems, cf. **hahai** vs. **woduride**, Tune, Østfold, A.D. 400, with Northwest Germanic  $/\tilde{e}/$  for late Proto-Germanic  $*/\tilde{a}/$  as in the verbal ending), indicate that in this position an alternative spelling soon arose which finally made the 'æ'-rune entirely superfluous. The existence of the 'æ'-rune together with the backward spelling **-ai** for original  $*/\tilde{a}/$  is "incontrovertible evidence that the *fupark* was devised to represent a language which had the PG vowel structure and had not yet undergone the monophthongization of vowel clusters in unstressed syllables", and therefore "The history of writing in runes must predate our earliest inscriptions by a fairly long period, long enough to antedate the phonological changes which separate even Gothic from the rest of the Gmc. speech area" (5-6). Personally I find Antonsen's analysis attractive because it is more in keeping with the linguistic evidence than earlier theories about the value of the thirteenth rune. Objections do, nevertheless, suggest themselves. If the conclusions about the age of the *fupark* are a corollary to the theory, it is surprising that we find no traces of this alphabet before A.D. c. 200 after which time inscriptions are relatively plentiful. The lack of any such common Germanic runic text means also that there is no direct evidence that the thirteenth rune originally designated  $*/\tilde{a}/$ . On the basis of the evidence Antonsen adduces it is equally possible to argue that  $*ansuz$ , the fourth rune, stood for  $*/\tilde{a}/$ , and that the thirteenth rune represented  $*/a/$ . After the change  $*/\tilde{a}/ > /ā/$  in stressed syllables the fourth rune continued to be used, but now with the value  $/ā/$ , thus displacing the thirteenth. Since  $*ansuz$  could no longer represent  $*/\tilde{a}/$  in unstressed syllables, we find expedients like **-ai** being adopted. That runes could survive sound changes and be used with new values is evident from the later history of runic writing both in England and Scandinavia. If the *fupark* is as old as Antonsen supposes, the only evidence that the fourth rune originally had the value  $*/a/$  comes from the supposed name,  $*ansuz$ . But the actual rune-names in later sources do not point unambiguously to a Germanic  $*ansuz$ . We can in any case dismiss them as secondary. This is what Antonsen does with the Anglo-Saxon names *eoh* or *ih* for the thirteenth rune.

Finally, a few residual matters of importance. Readers will have noticed that in transliterating inscriptions I have followed Antonsen in abandoning **R** in favour of **Z**. He argues that linguistically the so-called 'R'-rune cannot be anything but  $/z/$  until it alternates with the 'r'-rune, attesting to the coalescence

of /z/ with /r/. Phonemically this may be so, but although I have never been happy with **R**, I would prefer some way of representing the phoneme which takes account of the feature [+palatal] which it undoubtedly had in Northwest and/or North Germanic. Various possibilities will be found in *The Principles of the International Phonetic Association* (1949).

As we have seen, Antonsen considers that the Blekinge stones show evidence of mutation, breaking, syncope, the monophthongisation of the falling diphthongs /ai/ > /æ̃/, /au/ > /ō̃/, the lowering of /ē̃/ > /ǣ̃/ and the coalescence of /r/ and /z/ after apicals. This view is very radical and, if correct, would alter our conception of the time-scale of many sound changes in early Scandinavian. However, as is so often the case with inscriptions in the older *futhork*, some of the evidence depends on acceptance of one of a number of differing interpretations of the text. Stentoft's **heramalasaz** does seem to exhibit monophthongisation if compared with Björketorp's **haeramalaus** (although Antonsen is prepared to assume copying errors elsewhere), but the existence of the 3rd sing. pres. indic. of the verb *vesa* in the form **Az** (= /æz/) with the assimilation of /sz/ > /ss/ as a corollary depends on a reading *heramalas Az* with which few other scholars would seem to agree. Similarly, the view that the reverse spellings in **Afatz** and **hidez-**, **haidz-** are evidence of the coalescence of /r/ and /z/ after apicals depends on the belief that **-z** in **Afatz** is a reverse spelling and not an indication of an analogical sound-change (cf. later runic **aft**, **aftiz** etc.), and that in **hidez-**, **haidz-** we have a word cognate with OIcel. *heiðr* "clear, cloudless" which had the form \*/haidr/ in Proto-Germanic. Apart from questions of interpretation, it would be surprising indeed if the Blekinge inscriptions, dated by Antonsen to A.D. 600-650, exhibited linguistic forms which do not reappear until A.D. c. 900. One will search the Rök stone (A.D. c. 850) in vain for examples of monophthongisation, the lowering of /ē̃/ > /ǣ̃/ and the coalescence of /r/ and /z/ after apicals. Indeed in one or two cases it lacks even syncope of unstressed /i/ and /u/. The distinction between /ǣ̃/ < /ǣ̃/ (through *i*-mutation), /ǣ̃/ < /ē̃/ and /ē̃/ < /ai/ is preserved not only in literary Old Swedish but even in the modern language (*gäst*, *kväde*, *väst(er)*, *knä* vs. *ren*), so it is hard to imagine that these phonemes had coalesced in seventh-century Blekinge.

There are a number of mistakes in the book. Old Icelandic words given in support of etymologies are sometimes incorrectly or tendentiously translated. Thus, *heðra* (86), *sárr* (43), *lǫðuðr* (63) do not mean "hither", "sore, wound", "invitation", but

"here", "wounded", "inviter" To give "hedged-in land" as the meaning of *hagi* (46) and "preserve, reservation" as that of *vgr* (68) also seems misleading, while the forms (apparently verbal) *skað*, *skōð* meaning "hurt, harm" (54) are mystifying. There is a lack of consistency in the Icelandic orthography too. We find both *ende(r)*, *heite*, *hýske*, *sefe*, *ritom*, and *hagi*, *mæki*, *reynir*, *systir*, *lqðuðr* without any apparent reason for the distinction (cf. Index, 94-6). Printing errors are also to be found. A brief glance at the List of Works Cited revealed "akeologi" and "betraktininger", while Icelandic names lacked accents in the appropriate places. Whether abbreviated periodical titles are left unexplained because of carelessness or lack of space is impossible to say, but not all of them are transparent.

To conclude: Antonsen's book contains many interesting new ideas, and he argues a good case for a number of them. I wish, though, that he had expressed himself more cautiously about a subject where there can never be certainty.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., for example, Krause 1966, 176: "**swestar** [= *swestær*] ist die Vorstufe von an. *systir*", which is irritatingly vague and begs several important questions.

## REVIEWS

SCALDIC POETRY. By E. O. G. TURVILLE-PETRE. *Clarendon Press*. Oxford, 1976. lxxx+102 pp.

Skaldic poetry is probably the most inaccessible area of Old Norse literature for the student. Merely in order to be understood, it requires not only absolute mastery of the language and wide knowledge of mythology and heroic legend, both desirable in themselves, but also an intensity of concentration and an intellectual daring to match that of the poetry itself. In addition to these inherent difficulties, there is for the English-speaking student an almost total lack of *Hilfsmittel*. The poetry itself has not been available in suitably annotated editions since the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* of 1883, apart from the odd verses scattered through such saga-texts as are available with English apparatus. The only adequate dictionary is into Danish; the only general commentary is in Swedish.

Professor Turville-Petre has for many years taught skaldic poetry as a basic part of Old Norse literature, which it is. Those of us privileged to attend his classes have been illuminated by his own understanding and appreciation of the poetry, and any present resurgence of interest in skaldic studies in the English-speaking world may be seen as a direct consequence of his teaching. Now, at his retirement, he has been persuaded to formulate this teaching in a book. *Scaldic Poetry* is thus a basic teaching book, and its excellence is such that no teacher of Old Norse literature in the English-speaking world can afford not to use it.

The book falls into two halves: an introductory essay of some seventy pages, and an annotated anthology of some hundred pages. The essay, although ostensibly limited merely to technical matters, constitutes a wide-ranging and humane discussion of Old Norse poetry at large. In analysing, for instance, the many variables which collectively define skaldic poetry, the author is obliged to discuss problems of metre, diction, content, literary function and authorship within the entire corpus of Old Norse poetry. This width of reference in itself will make the essay prescribed reading for students of Old Norse poetry generally. The book's undogmatic approach should increase its value for teaching; it is not necessary to hold specific doctrines in order to be able to use it. Further, the author never forgets the ultimate purpose with which he writes: full understanding and enjoyment of the poetry itself in all its aspects; he is not led astray

from this by an excessive concern with his own opinions. For instance, his discussion of the origin of *dróttkvætt* is a model of lucid objectivity, from which an innocent reader would hardly deduce that the author was himself a major protagonist in the controversy.

The anthology is a selection of poetry from Bragi to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, i.e. from the first two centuries of recorded skaldic poetry, ending abruptly at Stamford Bridge in 1066. The texts are newly edited; each verse or group of verses is preceded by an introduction and accompanied by a parallel translation, usually fairly literal, and is followed by a brief textual apparatus and a commentary. The principle of selection has in general been width rather than depth; many verses have been included which fall in the ambiguous area between skaldic and Eddaic verse, e.g. the five verses chosen from the *Haraldskvæði* of Þorbjörn hornklofi, pp. 12-15. Similarly, the author has chosen to represent most of the major poets from the period, even if only sometimes by two or three strophes, rather than to present the surviving poetry of any individual in detail. To this there is one major exception: at the heart of the selection, and occupying approximately a quarter of the anthology, stands poetry ascribed to Egill Skallagrímsson, ten incidental verses followed by the *Sonatorrek*, edited in full. This is most valuable: it provides the one example of a text edited in its surviving entirety; the edition is a model of textual criticism of a very corrupt text; above all, however, the *Sonatorrek* is the emotional heart of the book. It is a poem which speaks as directly to the uninitiated as to the professional. Although very untypical, it is therefore an excellent (if courageous) choice for a student reader.

Two general criticisms of the book may be made. Firstly, there is no glossary. A parallel translation cannot replace a glossary; in the case of skaldic poetry, both are necessary. The author appears to be aware of this, for he sometimes glosses hard words in the commentary to a verse. But it would be very difficult for an undergraduate student to work through these texts without constant reference to a dictionary as well as to the translations, and it would still be difficult with any dictionary other than the *Lexicon Poeticum*. Glossaries are thankless things, but when a second edition of the book is required, it would be much improved by one. Secondly, bibliographic references are somewhat scanty at places in the introductory essay, although reasonably full in the commentaries to individual verses. Thus on p. xx, the author mentions Kuhn's Law (not by name), but makes no reference to Hans Kuhn's article, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (1929) Nr. 4, pp. 193-202, nor to L. M. Hollander's

criticisms of Kuhn's view, 'Some Observations on the *dróttkvætt* Meter of Skaldic Poetry', *JEGP* 52 (1953), pp. 189-197. On p. xxxviii there is a reference to Jón Helgason's article on Egill's *Höfuðlausn*, but not to Dietrich Hofmann's reply, 'Das Reimwort *gior* in Egill Skallagrímssons *Höfuðlausn*', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 6 (1973), pp. 93-101. Again, in both introduction and select bibliography, there is no mention of L. M. Hollander's *A Bibliography of Skaldic Studies*, 1958. Other instances might be cited. Such references are admittedly superfluous for the undergraduate approaching skaldic poetry for the first time, but they provide a bridge for the more advanced student to other work on the subject.

The introductory essay is divided into eleven sections. Following an exemplary discussion of the position of skaldic verse within the total corpus, the author describes *dróttkvætt*. On p. xiv, in the introductory discussion, a definition of syllable-length is given, which includes the statement that "Syllables are also counted short if they contain a long vowel followed by another vowel without intervening consonant, e.g. the first syllables of *róa*, *búa*, *bláan*" This statement, derived from classical metrics, is difficult to prove for Old Norse; a contrary view may be suggested by lines such as *íþróttir kann ek níu*, Rognvaldr Kali 1<sup>2</sup>, as also perhaps by the modern phonological development of such syllables in Icelandic. I owe this observation to A. R. Taylor and Tor Ulset. The description of *dróttkvætt* makes no mention of Craigie's Law (hardly an earth-shattering matter, but worthy of mention somewhere, perhaps). On p. xx, and again on p. xxxii, the term "feet" is used, without explanation. I am uncertain of its relevance to *dróttkvætt*.

From *dróttkvætt*, the author moves on to a discussion of its origins, prefaced by a discussion of Bragi and his date: a remarkably clear exposition of these complex problems. On p. xxvi the discussion of *Bragi* as god-name is perhaps rather brief: see, e.g., Hans Kuhn, *Festgabe für Karl Helm*, 1951, pp. 42-3, reprinted in *Kleine Schriften* II, p. 336, and cp. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v.

The fifth section of the essay describes various skaldic modifications of the basic metres: this largely follows Snorri, apart from a clear and illuminating discussion of end-rhyme as introduced in Egill's *Höfuðlausn*.

From metrics the author then turns to diction: a brief section on poetic diction generally, followed by a discussion of the kenning. This last is easily the best analysis of this subject which I have read. On p. xlvi, 'Duke of Cornwall' is not a *sannkenning* for "King of England", but is a *heiti* for "the king's eldest son at

birth, or on his father's accession to the crown" On p. li, repeated pp. lv and 4, *Hergauts vina* (Bragi c<sup>8</sup>) as a kenning for "earth" is perhaps not a safe example of *ofljóst*, since the word-substitution basic to *ofljóst* kennings is here merely substitution of the proper noun, *Jörð*, mistress of Óðinn, for the common noun, *jörð*, "earth" If this in fact refers to a nature-myth of a union of sky(-god) and earth(-goddess), the *Jörð* and *jörð* are in any case identical.

After the sections on diction, there follows a brief discussion of word-order and sentence-structure, which analyses specific examples rather than presenting any theoretical principles. This is wholly justifiable within the context of a student introduction, and, happily, the author gives references to the major literature on this subject. There then comes a section on the authenticity and historical significance of the poetry: a treacherous and difficult subject, of which, again, this is the best general discussion of which I know. Then the author gives a brief history of critical response in the English-speaking world to skaldic poetry, and, lastly, discusses his own choice and presentation.

Among points that may merit comment in the anthology, I mention the following. On pp. 3-4, it would have been worthwhile to mention the word-play in Bragi c<sup>3-4</sup>, *segls naglfara siglur / saums andvanar*, where *naglfara* is probably to be taken as genitive singular of both the common noun *naglfari*, "sword" and the proper noun *Naglfar(i)*, and where *saums* is probably to be taken with the meaning "seam", and so both "cloth of a sail", and "nailing of a ship". The ship-imagery of *segls*, *siglur* and *saums* requires the proper noun *Naglfar(i)*, a mythological ship, if the kenning is not to be *nykrat*, and the associations of this ship with the last battle at the end of the world is very appropriate to the last battle of Hamðir and Sörli against Jörmunrekkr. But the masts of the sail of this ship are stitch-less: both a paradox and a possible reference to the protective clothing which renders the warriors invulnerable to weapons. Further, the masts of the sail of the nailed (i.e. riveted) sword are themselves nail-less. A similar play on words may be involved on p. 5, Bragi c<sup>4</sup>, *allra landa endiseiðs*, where *seiðr* meaning both "fish" and "evil enchantment" would be appropriate. On p. 9, Þjóðólfr a<sup>1-4</sup>, an easier interpretation might be *fastr . . í böndum*, translated 'stuck fast in bonds', in which case l. 3 is a separate sentence. On p. 10, Þjóðólfr b<sup>6</sup>, the emendation *þungr* (from *þungs*) is not strictly necessary, if the v.r. *málunauts*, l. 7, is accepted, and the main sentence translated "then Þórr's friend had to beg for the peace of the oppressive (*þungs*) companion of the giant" In the following verse (p. 10, Þjóðólfr c<sup>5-6</sup>) an entirely spurious

problem has arisen: *brunnakra* . *bekkjar* . *disi* is a perfectly acceptable woman-kenning, "goddess of the well-acre of the bench" The well of the bench is a drinking-horn, its acre is a hall-floor where men drink, its goddess a woman who passes the horn round the hall. Cp. R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, pp. 417-18. On p. 13, Þorbjörn b<sup>5</sup>, the ravens have accompanied Haraldr, almost as retainers, rather than followed him; similarly p. 19, Egill e<sup>2</sup>. Also on p. 13, Þorbjörn b<sup>7</sup>, Haraldr is merely the "young Yngling" (*ungum Ynglingi*). On p. 17, Egill b<sup>7</sup>, "treats" loses something of the force of *eiri*; "spares" might be better. On p. 23, Egill j<sup>1</sup>, *fyri stáli* is not translated. On p. 31, *Sonatorrek* 4<sup>3</sup>, Magnus Olsen's emendation and interpretation of *-barmr* for *-baðmr*, "t:ee", is hardly possible. According to Noreen, *Altisländische . . . Grammatik*, 4th ed., §238, Anm. 14 (not §239 as printed), the form *-barmr* arises by dissimilation in compounded forms where the preceding syllable also ends in *ð*, *hofuðbarmr* from *hofuðbaðmr*, and *hróðrbarmr* from *hróðrbaðmr*. In the case of *hofuðbarmr*, "male line of descent", the dissimilation may have been aided by a folk-etymology relating the word to *barmi*, "brother" In the sense of "male line of descent", the *-barmr* form is extended from *hofuðbarmr* into *ætibarmr*, "genealogy", as apparently a *hapax legomenon* occurring as a v.r. for *ætibaðmr*, Þulur iv j 9<sup>7</sup> (*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 1912-15, A I, p. 661). There is no possible reason for such dissimilation or for such extension in a form *\*hræbarmr*, "carriage-tree" On p. 32, *Sonatorrek* 7<sup>3</sup>, "deprived" is only a partial translation of *ofsnaudr*. On p. 44, Eyvindr b<sup>4</sup>, *brums* is singular, not plural. On p. 48, Kormákr b<sup>6</sup> could be much improved by the emendation of *hádyrnis* into *háðýris*; the kenning *Eir háðýris geira* would then mean "the Eir (goddess) of the spears of the tall beast" The spears of the tall beast are (drinking-)horns; their goddess is a woman. See the reference to Meissner above, and cp. the splendid kenning *svigðis geira* | *vágr vindlauss*, p. 7, Þjóðólfr a<sup>6-7</sup>. Also compare OE *hēahðeor*, "stag". Also on p. 48, in the translation of Kormákr c<sup>2</sup>, "shore Haki's . . ." should read "shore of Haki's . . ." Similarly, p. 54, Gísli c<sup>1</sup>, *i heimi* is translated in the commentary but not in the translation. On p. 55, Þórarinn a<sup>2</sup>, it is a pity to translate *vega þorði* as "joined battle"; the literal translation "dared to strike/kill" is much more appropriate, since Þórarinn is defending himself against the taunt of cowardice as well as the accusation of horse-stealing. On p. 58, the author presents a new interpretation of *Víga-Glúmr* b (i.e. 2), differing from that presented in his edition of the saga (p. 64), where he had followed E. A. Kock. Both these interpretations are preferable



to that of Finnur Jónsson and that presented in the edition of the saga in *Íslensk Fornrit IX*. The relevant references to *Notationes Norrænæ* for this verse are paragraphs 382, 1829 and 1947; those given apply to the preceding verse. On p. 60, Einarr b<sup>1</sup>, *ell* is not translated. On p. 65, to the bibliographic references given on Björn Breiðvíkingakappi b there can now be added Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Proceedings of the Sixth Viking Congress* (1976), pp. 141-152. On p. 67, Steinunn b<sup>7</sup>, *hart* probably agrees with *hregg*, rather than agreeing with *skíð* or adverbial, as (ambiguously) translated. On p. 80, Sigvatr c<sup>8</sup>, *konan* is singular not plural; in the same verse, I. 1, "maidens", translating *ekkjur*, although perfectly possible, is perhaps a trifle strained; Sigvatr's implication is surely that "(even) women of experience will rush to look (at us)". On p. 95, Arnórr c<sup>4</sup>, "cruel" translates no term in the text, and is not particularly implied in the word *garmr*. The reference in the commentary might also be to *Mánagarmr* (apparently the same as Hati Hroðvitnissón), the wolf which pursues the moon to devour it, so that it rushes in its course (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1931, pp. 18-19). So the storm-wind, *fýris garmr*, pursues the glittering ship to swallow it up, and so causes it to rush on its course. On p. 96, Arnórr d<sup>8</sup>, *unnar* (omitted in translation) is probably gen. sg. of place, rather than a (very) irregular acc. pl. of direction, as suggested in the commentary. On p. 99, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson d<sup>2</sup>, *innðrótt* is not translated, though discussed in the commentary. In the same verse, II. 3-4, *bauga . . . vøluspakra* is translated as "rings which cling to the joints". Alternatively, or as a play upon words, it might well mean "rings of the witch-wise ones", since the rings so described have been plundered from Aðils, who is described in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (ed. D. Slay, p. 37) as *hinn mesti blotmaður og fullur af fjölkyngie*; he could thus well be termed "witch-wise". The word *vøluspakra* would thus corroborate the other references in the verse to the gold which Hrólfr kraki took from Aðils. On pp. 100-101, Þjóðólfr Arnórsson e<sup>5</sup>, *húða* is not translated nor mentioned in the commentary; it presumably goes with *hrækkvískafs* (so *Lexicon Poeticum*). In the very last verse of the book, Þjóðólfr's proud and bitter lament for Haraldr Sigurðarson at Stamford Bridge (p. 102), there must be a grim play on words in I. 2, *nú kveð ek her stilltan*. Beside the rare sense of *stilla*, "bring into peril; deceive", the usual sense of "put into order, control" must also be present. But this army has been brought into no well-meant order; it is ruled by defeat and death. So, perhaps, ended the Viking Age; with it ends this book.

*Of misprints and minor slips, apart from those mentioned above*

the following are perhaps significant. On p. xxix, I. 22, "plaits" should read "plates". On p. xxx, the half-strophe attributed to Bishop Klængr needs more punctuation; similarly p. 6, Bragi g. On p. 14, Þorbjörn c<sup>8</sup>, "and of mittens" should read "or of mittens". On p. 30, I. 25, *þóla* should read *þjóla* (and perhaps be translated "roar rushingly"). On p. 32, I. 11 from below, the reference to M. Olsen should read 64 ff., not 54. On p. 41, I. 5, K reads *ad* (for *at*), not *at*. On p. 86, Sigvatr a, the reference to *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (1912-15) A I should read 272, not 273. On p. 91, II. 7-6 from below, "prows / land's" should read "prows' land's".

The book is very attractively produced, apart from some rather curious capitalisation, and an unfortunate choice of type-face for *P/p*. These are almost indistinguishable from each other in the type-face used in the texts, e.g. p. 20, I. 3 of the verse, unlike the italic type-face (e.g. *benþidurr*, I. 4 of prose, compared with *Pundar*, I. 13 from below on the same page).

Such small points as the above can in no way detract from the value of this book. A reviewer may pick such nits only in the midsummer light of the author's achievement; may it illuminate many a scholarly midnight!

PAUL BIBIRE

EGILS SAGA. Translated and edited by CHRISTINE FELL. Poems by JOHN LUCAS. *J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.* London, 1975. xxxi + 221 pp.

Any new translation of *Egils saga* ought now to offer something usefully different. Christine Fell's close, quiet-toned rendering is a valuable corrective to Gwyn Jones's sometimes excessive panache, and particularly effective in passages of "dead-pan" understatement or extreme brutality, as when we are allowed to feel the author's detachment from the culmination of the feast on Atloy (ch. 44):

"Egil threw down the horn, grasped his sword and drew it. It was dark in the entrance. He thrust the sword through Bard and the point came out through the back, and he fell down dead with blood running from the wound. Then Olvir fell down, vomit pouring from him. Egil ran out of the hall." (p. 63).

I have found no out and out errors and few instances of vagueness, though one might point out "from the front of the king's ship" (p. 11) for *á konungsskipinu fyrir framan siglu*.

But close translation has pitfalls as well as advantages, as where

an Icelandic idiom comes too close to an English one with a different meaning, e.g. "Skalla-Grim had by now more than one leg to stand on" (p. 42) (*Stóð þá á mörgum fótum fjárafti Skalla-Grims*). There are also a few oddities in English, e.g. "east in Vik" (p. 2), "south along (*fyrir*) Germany and Flanders" (p. 74) and some slightly awkward syntax, though this may sometimes be defended as a dramatisation of unease in the speaker, as perhaps in ch. 12.

" 'I think', said Harek, 'if you, Sir, heard what people are saying when they speak their minds in their own homes. ' " (pp. 15-16).

It is true, as Christine Fell points out in her "Note on the Translation" (p. xxv), that "Saga style has sometimes been called colloquial, but the colloquialism is more apparent than real". All the same, the surface of apparent colloquialism is itself part of the style and ought to be preserved. There is occasional resort to words with the right sense but the wrong tone, as in ch. 71, in another alcoholic orgy:

"Everyone, all the household of Armod who were there, said that Egil should be reviled as the worst of men, and it was disgusting behaviour for a man not to go outside when he wanted to vomit . ." (p. 133).

But before asking what a well-brought-up word like "reviled" is doing in this sort of company, one ought to consider what could be put in its place. As often, no exactly suitable word exists in English, and the number of such tonal clashes in this translation is as small as one could reasonably hope for.

John Lucas's introductory "manifesto", "The Translation of Egil's Poems", makes a valuable point about Egil's imagery:

"He means exactly what he says. He doesn't mean that the mew-path is really the sea. His language isn't imagistic in our sense, it doesn't have to pump life into dead abstractions . . . On the contrary, for Egil the sea really *is* a mew-path (among other things)" (p. xxxi).

One could of course find images of which this can hardly be true — e.g. silver being called "the dripping snow of the hawk's high hill" (see note 5 on p. 201 and Nordal's ed. (*Íslensk Fornrit*, ii), p. 270; Lucas's otherwise excellent rendering of the verse omits this beautiful image — p. 153). But Lucas's statement of his aims and intentions is modest yet vigorous and his characterisation of *Hofuðlausn's* "meretricious and slightly tongue-in-cheek glitter" (p. xxx) memorable, though he also makes some more questionable judgments, as when he finds coincidence of alliteration with stress "either hectoring or funny".

His versions of the poems aim at imitation or re-creation within syllable-counting metres, using alliteration regularly (sometimes on stressed syllables, sometimes not) and assonance less consistently. The results are more satisfying as poetry than previous attempts to convey Egil's poetic genius in English, and some are also highly successful in rendering the attitudes and imagery of their originals — notably where these are simple (e.g. p. 113), or motivated by dignified respect (e.g. pp. 83, 153) or by sarcasm (e.g. pp. 134-5). Others are effective poetry in English without being altogether satisfactory as renderings of Egil's Icelandic; an example is Egil's "duck-egg" verse in ch. 31 (p. 46). Perhaps this doesn't matter, since the notes provide an accurate "de-coding" of each verse, but the occasional dropping of striking rhetorical organisation is to be regretted, e.g. in the verse at the bottom of p. 119 (cf. Nordal's ed. p. 204). Of a very few more serious lapses, the worst are the line "Patience, impatient heart". (p. 33), of which Barbara Cartland might have been proud; the padding at the end of Egil's verse praising Æthelstan — "And his suave strength (!)/stirs up our fiercest love" (p. 85); and a piece of ornithological nonsense in the first verse in ch. 64 (p. 117), which arises from substituting a wren for Egil's cuckoo.

John Lucas's versions of Egil's three great poems are all dramatic, but his *Höfuðlausn* is for me the most consistently effective. His *Sonatorrek* is more uneven, rising to verses of a high poetic order:

"My lineage ends, like the storm —  
Felled maples of the forest.  
I have buried the bodies  
Of too many of my kin." (p. 146)

and ending with impressive dignity. But elsewhere the extent of artifice is sometimes too slight, as in the simple opening of the second stanza — "So many tears! Such sadness!" — which tends to fail for lack of an already created emotional frame of reference. His re-creation of lost or corrupt text varies from the magnificent:

"Rain in my sad heart and rain  
Drenching the land. And the lash  
Of wind on water."  
to the almost banal:  
"Offer a man the money  
And he'll lie, steal, slander, kill."

Yet it is only because Lucas has succeeded so well in conveying the greatness of this poem that these lines won't do here.

Christine Fell's cautious Introduction is effective, but sometimes reads as if severely condensed from a more detailed original, which I should have preferred. Good points are made about the interest in rather than admiration of central figures, the role of the poems as emotional pointers, the way in which pressure masquerades as argument, and the authorial assumption of a good memory in the audience. I should have liked to see more on the reasons why Egil's poetry is pre-eminent, and on the legal background.

There is little wrong with the Notes (virtually only the translation of *seið* merely as "song" in ch. 47, note 1), but they might have been fuller. In particular, I should have liked to see notes on the value of gold relative to other kinds of currency (ch. 7), the sprinkling of infants with water in heathen times (ch. 31), and Atli's magic (ch. 65). There are also an excellent if brief Bibliography, a Genealogical Table, maps and Indices of Personal and Place-Names, all fully adequate except the maps, which are clear but omit many places in Norway and in Borgarfjörður which figure in the text. Curiously, there is no map of Iceland as a whole.

The book is pleasantly produced, and I have found only two misprints, in the second-last line of p. xx and in line 21 of p. 103. It is to be hoped that a paperback edition will be produced soon and cheaply, for such excellent work by both translator and poet deserves to reach as wide an audience as possible.

JOHN MCKINNELL

GAMMELDANSK GRAMMATIK I SPROGHISTORISK FREMSTILLING. By JOHS. BRØNDUM-NIELSEN (under Medvirkning af Dr. phil. KARL MARTIN NIELSEN). *Universitetsforlaget i København*. VI. VERBER I, DE STÆRKE VERBER. 1971. [6]+306 pp. VII. DE SVAGE VERBER, DE PRÆTERITOPRÆSENTISKE VERBER. 1971. [6]+485 pp. VIII. VERBER III, KONJUGATIONSFORMERNES UDVIKLING. 1973. xii+418 pp. København.

With the appearance of the last three volumes of *Gammeldansk grammatik* one of the greatest of the historical Germanic grammars has been completed. It is a work of truly astonishing dimensions (8 volumes, 950 paragraphs or sections, approx. 3,500 pp.) and it is no surprise that it has taken 45 years, longer than the average academic career, to complete. Brøndum-Nielsen was in fact already 46 years old when the first volume appeared, but the

brisk and amusing introduction to vol. VIII gives eloquent testimony to his continuing intellectual vigour at the age of 91.

Although a review of vols. IV-V appeared in *Saga-Book* XVIII, 209-11, it seems appropriate to list here the contents of the complete work. Vols. I and II deal with the history and development of the Old and Middle Danish vowels and consonants respectively. Vol. III describes substantival inflexions and their origins within the various stem classes of Germanic and Indo-European, and Vol. IV traces the inflexions of adjectives in a similar way as well as the comparative and superlative forms of adverbs and the development of the numerals. Vol. V, the largest, contains an extremely thorough survey of the pronouns with detailed discussion of their origins and Old and Middle Danish forms. The last three volumes, as their sub-titles indicate, deal with the verbs. VI-VII are concerned mainly with roots and stems. The verbs are arranged according to type (strong, reduplicating, weak, preterite-present) and according to class within the type. The distinctive features of each class (root vowels of strong verbs, stem vowels or suffixes of weak verbs) are normally traced back to Indo-European, and all known Primitive Norse and Runic Danish examples of the class are listed. From this pre-literary starting point the development of the Old and Middle Danish forms proper is closely observed. Vol. VIII completes the study of the verbs by surveying in great detail the history of the inflexional endings. Examples in all three volumes are more than copious, indeed in some cases it appears that the author has aimed at completeness.

In the face of such riches it must seem churlish to sound a note of criticism. I do so to make quite clear to the reader the limitations of the work. From the preceding description it will be clear that Brøndum-Nielsen is heavily dependent on Neo-grammarian theory and practice. This approach to language was in vogue in the latter part of the last century and much has happened in the field of linguistics since then. Few would now be happy about the author's use of the word "grammatik", for although the 3,500 pp. of *Gammeldansk grammatik* describe in painstaking detail the written representation of the sounds and word forms of Old and Middle Danish, the work does not put the reader in a position to decide whether any given sentence in the language of pre-Reformation Denmark is grammatical. It thus fails what most linguists would now consider the elementary test of an adequate grammar. No one can be blamed for failing to achieve a goal they have not set themselves, but it is an indication of the extreme limitations of the type of linguistic description exemplified by *Gammeldansk grammatik* that it ignores entirely the syntactic and semantic

component, without which there is no language, just a jumble of forms.

The general framework of linguistic theory within which he works encumbers Brøndum-Nielsen in other ways. Sounds and word forms are largely treated in isolation and no attempt is made to describe or account for the function of each unit in the phonemic or morphemic system to which it belongs. This can often lead to vague speculation which a more systematic approach would have prevented. In addition, the belief in immutable laws governing sound-changes leads the author to state as fact many things which are only conjecture. One example will suffice to illustrate these weaknesses.

Germanic *-ð*, we are told, was replaced by *-r*, later *-r*, as the final consonant in the 3rd sing. pres. indic. ending for (among others) the following reasons: "*b(ā)riutiþ* (Stentoften) underwent the regular development *-tð > tt* . . . after syncope, and a similar development (to *t*) took place after *k*, *p* and other unvoiced consonants. This (at a time when the assimilated forms *sell*, *skill*, *renn* etc. had not yet developed . . .) resulted in a number of irregular verbal forms. In other present-tense forms, where syncope had not yet taken place (*sitir*, *Rök*), or did not take place at all (*hallar* etc.), the original final spirant must still have been preserved in the earlier part of the syncope period, although because of its phonetic<sup>1</sup> merger with the 2nd plur. pres. . . the form may possibly have become somewhat unstable, an instability which the phonetic similarity between *ð* and *r* would have increased . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Now we have no evidence at all for a form *\*brýt* and very little for a period in which words with long root syllables had undergone syncope while those with short root syllables had not. We find *sunu* and *sitir*, clearly relics, on the *Rök* stone (A.D. c. 850), but the seventh-century Blekinge inscriptions, Björketorp, Istaby and Stentoften, already contain examples of syncope after both short and long root syllables; what is more, Stentoften's *bariutiþ* is paralleled by Björketorp's *barutr*. If this shows anything, it is perhaps that syncope and associated developments took place at different times in different parts of Scandinavia, and while we may postulate a development *\*briutiþ > \*brýtiþ > \*brýtþ > \*brýt > \*brýtr* in Östergötland if we wish, the evidence does not point to a similar succession of changes in Blekinge. It is difficult to judge the phonetic similarity between *ð* and *r* since *r* is an unknown quantity.<sup>3</sup> There is a runic symbol which comparison with other Indo-European languages shows to represent the reflex of Indo-European /s/. Because of the workings of what is known as Verner's Law it is likely that this

was /z/ in early Germanic. Runic inscriptions from the period A.D. c. 900-1150 and later manuscript sources indicate that /z/ either merged with /r/ or was lost in Viking Age and early medieval Scandinavian. These developments seem to have taken place at different times in differing phonetic environments and to have happened much earlier in Norway and the Norwegian colonies in the west than in Denmark and Sweden. It also appears that in North Germanic /z/ caused palatal mutation (e.g., \**glaza* > *gler*). If this is so, one would assume that it had the distinctive feature [+palatal] at the time of mutation. As far as I know, neither [p] nor [ð]<sup>4</sup> cause palatal mutation. This, together with what we otherwise know of dental spirants in Scandinavian, makes it unlikely that [+palatal] was a distinctive feature they shared with /z/. What distinctive features, if any, /p/ and /z/ did have in common is impossible to say (except that [ð] was presumably [+voiced]). It seems that "the phonetic similarity between *ð* and *ʀ*" is not after all a fact, just the product of conjecture.

I trust these few critical remarks will not deter anyone from buying or using such an important work. As indicated at the outset, it contains a wealth of information about Old and Middle Danish phonology and morphology. Anyone seeking details about the *forms* of a particular word or class of words will automatically consult *Gammeldansk grammatik*. His task is made easier by the excellent indexes which accompany Vols. I-V and VIII. Indeed, as Professor Ross remarked in the review alluded to above: "It has, for two generations now, been the practice of scholars to use the indexes of the volumes of the *Gammeldansk grammatik* (which are, I understand, to be cumulated in a final volume) as an Old Danish dictionary, as far as actual forms are concerned." Unfortunately the indexes have not been cumulated in Vol. VIII, and a great opportunity has thereby been lost. Perhaps some public-spirited person will undertake this task and issue a complete index as a separate publication at a later date.

MICHAEL BARNES

<sup>1</sup> I translate "fonematisk" here and below by "phonetic" rather than "phonemic". According to the best dictionaries "phonemic" is the correct rendering, but it makes no sense here and can hardly be what Brøndum-Nielsen means.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. VIII, 3: "*b(ʌ)riutiþ* (Stentofte) fik ved Synkope lydret *-ið > tt*. . . og tilsvarende Udvikling (til *t*) indtraadte efter *k, p* og andre ustemte Konsonanter . . . hvorved der (paa en Tid, da Assimilationsformerne *sell, skill, renn* &c endnu ikke var opstaaede. . .) fremkom en Række systemfremmede Verbalformer. I andre Præsensformer, hvor Synkope endnu ikke var indtraadt (*sitiR* Rök) eller overhovedet ikke indtraadte (*kallar* &c), maa den oprindelige finale Spirant endnu i den tidligere Synkoptid være bevaret, omend Formen



muligvis ved sit fonematiske Sammenfald med PræszPl. .har kunnet faa en viss Usikkerhed, der kunde forstærkes ved den fonematiske Lighed mellem *ð* og *R* . . . ."

<sup>3</sup> It is not at all clear what is meant here by *ð* either. True to earlier linguistic practice no systematic distinction is made in *Gammeldansk grammatik* between sound and phoneme and sound and symbol. We cannot be sure what the ending of the 3rd sing. pres. indic. was in North Germanic since our only certain example (**bariutip**) falls within the period when final spirants were unvoiced (cf. **gaf** in the same inscription). Before this period [d] and [ð] were allophones of the same phoneme and contrasted with /p/ and /t/. By the end of the syncope period all spirants in medial and final position were voiced and [ð] and [p] were allophones contrasting with /d/ and /t/. It is therefore impossible to say what sound was (a) allegedly similar to "*R*", and (b) took part in the various postulated consonantal assimilations, although the phoneme concerned must have been /p/.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. note 3 above.

SCANDINAVIAN YORK AND DUBLIN. THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF TWO RELATED VIKING KINGDOMS. 1. By ALFRED P. SMYTH. *Templekierian Press*. Dublin, 1975. 116 pp.

This is at once a very useful and a very irritating book: useful, because it attempts with reasonable success to provide a coherent framework for studying the history of Scandinavian York and Dublin from the middle of the ninth century up to c. 920; and irritating, because it often refers, particularly in the first two chapters, to a work as yet unpublished — the author's *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850-880* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and sometimes does so in connection with points which require much fuller discussion than Smyth gives them in the book now under review.

Two examples of this may be given. On p. 18 Smyth points out that "Ívarr is credited in Norse sagas with the brutal slaying of the Northumbrian king, Ælla, whom he sacrificed to Óðinn . . ."; he then refers in a footnote, without further discussion of this point, to chapter XIV of his forthcoming book. The expression "Norse sagas", incidentally, is hardly accurate, since the primary Scandinavian source for this notion is Sigvatr Þórðarson's poem *Knútsdrápa* (c. 1038), which is referred to in connection with Ælla's death in the part of *Hauksbók* known as *Ragnarssona þáttr*, and in one of the two principal redactions of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (see *Gripla* I, 1975, 72-5). As will be evident, it is not clear from Smyth's phrasing whether the view that Ívarr sacrificed Ælla to Óðinn is his own, or is to be attributed solely to medieval authors, but according to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill's lecture on *The Vikings in Francia* (1974; published 1975), 10, n. 44, Smyth has suggested, in his unpublished D.Phil. thesis, that Ælla of Northumbria may historically have been the

victim of ritual sacrifice to Óðinn, in the form of the blood-eagle. Smyth no doubt intends to develop this suggestion in his forthcoming book; but such a suggestion should hardly be made, or even hinted at, without some discussion of the very considerable efforts of earlier scholars to discredit the historicity of the blood-eagle sacrifice both generally and, more specifically, in connection with Ívarr and Ælla. Storm attempted to do this with some persuasiveness in his *Kritiske Bidrag til Vikingetidens Historie* (1878), 89-90, while de Vries suggested, in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* XLIV (1928), 161-2, that the notion of Ívarr's sacrifice of Ælla in this manner might derive from a misunderstanding of a passage in Abbo of Fleury's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*, though he also pointed out, in his *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* I (1956), 411-12, that rejection of the supposed historical instances of this sacrifice need not imply that this *kind* of sacrifice was unhistorical. No doubt Smyth is aware of these and other earlier contributions to the subject, and no doubt he has some interesting suggestions of his own to make in this connection, but the reader cannot be convinced of this until the unpublished work, here so tantalizingly referred to, has appeared; in the meantime Smyth has raised high expectations of the relevant chapter of his forthcoming book which he now has a responsibility to fulfil. The other example is on p. 29, where Smyth, arguing for "The equation of *Imhar* and *Albdann* of Irish records with *Inwaer/Ingwar* and *Healfdene* respectively of English writers", and for the equation of *Imhar/Ingwaer/Ingwar* with Ívarr inn beinlausi, son of Ragnarr loðbrók, says that since there is no mention of Hálfðan as a son of Ragnarr in Norse and Danish traditions about the latter, it might be tempting to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers were in error in claiming that Hálfðan was the brother of Ívarr. "This matter would still be in doubt", writes Smyth, "were it not that *Albdann* turns up in ninth-century Irish records in close association with Ívarr's activities at Dublin, and that this Irish Hálfðan is styled "Son of Ragnall" in an early stratum of the twelfth-century compilation, the *Cogadh Gaedhel*". Then follows a footnote referring to the relevant parts of the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, and to chapter XX of Smyth's forthcoming book. Now, quite apart from the question of whether it is legitimate to speak of "Ragnarr loðbrók" (cf. Smyth, p. 27) as if the latter were a historical person, it is debatable (a) whether the relevant English sources, namely the annals for 878 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Æthelweard's *Chronicle*, do in fact give clear information on whether Inwaer and Healfdene were brothers, and (b) whether, if it is accepted on the basis of these sources that they were brothers, the Healfdene

known to them can be identified with the Albann of the *Annals of Ulster*, who arguably was the same person as the "son of Ragnall" mentioned in the *Cogadh*. These difficulties have been discussed in the *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin, 1973* (1976), 115-23. No doubt Smyth is aware of them, and no doubt he has the means of disposing of them, but his statement, as it stands, is a sweeping one, and will remain so until he has demonstrated his insight into the complications of the subject in the relevant part of his forthcoming book.

At one point Smyth totally fails to give a reference where one is required. On p. 19 he says that "according to Saxo", Hálfðan of Northumbria "was despised by his own people and his lust for battle resulted in the fields of his English kingdom being 'matted in decay with none to till them'." This last phrase, to which no footnote is given, is a quotation from O. Elton's translation of *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus* (1894), 383, and refers there, as well as in the original (cf. J. Olrik and H. Raeder, eds., *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 1931, 264), to the domains of Agnerus, who, like Iuraus, was, according to Saxo, one of the sons of Regnerus Lothbrog by Thora. Smyth's implication that the fields in question are Hálfðan's accords ill with his perfectly sensible denial, on pages 17 and 29, that Hálfðan appears as a brother of Ívarr and son of Ragnarr loðbrók in Scandinavian tradition. It is to be hoped that this contradiction will be resolved in the forthcoming O.U.P. publication.

These are, in a sense, small points, though all of them, including the one involving the blood-eagle sacrifice, which is presented in the Scandinavian prose accounts as an act of vengeance by the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók for the slaying of their father, relate more or less directly to the question of whether or not Imhar of Dublin and Healfdene of Northumbria were brothers, which is crucial for assessing the ultimate validity of Smyth's main argument, that is, that the capture of York by Ragnall in 919 owed its success primarily to his having a claim, through being Imhar's grandson and Healfdene's grand-nephew, to the kingship. As I have hinted here, it remains to be seen whether or not Smyth has *proved* his case, but he himself describes his aim in this book as tentative (p. 14), and he has certainly offered good reasons for tentatively regarding Sigfrid and Sigtryggr I as sons of Imhar (pp. 28-9), and Ragnall, Sigtryggr II and Gothfrith as sons of Sigtryggr I (p. 69); this provides the history of the kingdom of Dublin with a coherent genealogical pattern. The York kingdom has gaps in its history after the departure of Hálfðan in 876-7 and in the first decade of the tenth century, though Smyth claims (p. 46) that a Jarl Sigfrid, who had challenged Sigtryggr I of

Dublin in 893, and is not to be confused with that king's brother Sigfrid, succeeded Guthfrith, son of Hardacnut, to the kingship of York in 895; he also identifies (p. 50) with an *Adalbrigt* of Old Norse sources Æthelwold of Wessex, who was driven out of the kingship of York in 900 by *Knútr/Cnut*, who reigned there until his death in 902, the year of the exile of the Norsemen from Dublin for a period of fourteen years. Smyth also suggests (pp. 104-6), on numismatic evidence, that Ragnall may have ruled in York for some four years after the death of its Danish kings Eowils and Healfdene in 910. After joining the Waterford Vikings in 917, the year of Sigtrygg II's capture of Dublin, Ragnall returned with his brother Gothfrith to Northumbria by way of Scotland the following year. Smyth's emphasis on the route from Dublin to York by way of the Clyde and Forth (p. 22) is by no means inconsistent with his view, expressed at length in chapter V, that the Scandinavian settlers of North-west England in the early tenth century were predominantly Norwegian, rather than predominantly Hiberno-Norse, as F. T. Wainwright, for instance, had held.

In his Introduction, Smyth mentions "the group of manuscripts centred on Durham" (p. 10) and claims that "many of the themes of the heroic sagas such as *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga* were current among the Danes in England centuries before these sagas were committed to Icelandic manuscripts" (pp. 11-12). It will be interesting to see if his promised forthcoming study includes an investigation of the *Narratio de uxore Aernulfi ab Ella rege Deiorum violata*, preserved in a manuscript of the early thirteenth century containing material relating largely to Durham, and edited in the Rolls Series edition of Gaimar's *Lestorie des Engles*, I (1888), 328-38. This, as I hope to show elsewhere, bears a remarkably detailed resemblance to parts of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and may well suggest that these existed in England in a form comparable to that which they have in the saga at least as early as the eleventh century.

This, then, is a useful and at times a stimulating book, though its value cannot be properly assessed until its second volume, and the forthcoming study of the period 850-80, have appeared. It is to be hoped that the second volume, when it appears, will provide, *inter alia*, an index to the first.

R. W. MCTURK

THE VIKINGS IN FRANCIA. By J. M. WALLACE-HADRILL. *The Stenton Lecture* 1974. University of Reading. [Reading], 1975. 19 pp.

In this lecture, Wallace-Hadrill advocates a return to close study of contemporary and near-contemporary accounts of the activities of the Vikings in Francia. He rightly stresses that Vogel's book, *Die Normannen und das fränkische Reich* (1906), based as it is on accounts of this kind, remains fundamental for the period up to 911, and goes on to give a short survey of relatively recent more or less general treatments, admirably pin-pointing what is essential among these, and ignoring what is useless. He questions the view that monastic accounts of the Viking attacks are exaggerated, claiming that, in the ninth and tenth centuries, Viking paganism was consciously and tenaciously anti-Christian, and producing evidence for the extensive damage done by the Vikings to the towns, countryside and populations of Francia. He admits, of course, that exaggerations do occur in the relevant sources, as when the Vikings are said to have attacked Hamburg with 600 ships in the *Annales Bertiniani* for 845, and is on his guard against the use of literary devices by chroniclers to highlight the heroism or horror of certain events. He nevertheless claims that "reported numbers are sometimes convincingly low", (p. 5) and concludes his prefatory remarks as follows: "In sum, I believe that the literary sources exaggerate when I can catch them out, but otherwise I give them the benefit of the doubt" (p. 8).

Wallace-Hadrill is obviously more concerned here with the Vikings in Francia than with Frankish accounts of the Vikings at home, though it would be interesting to know his views on the accounts in the *Annales Bertiniani*, the *Vita Ansharii*, and the *Annales Fuldenses* of the battle fought in Denmark in 854, in which, according to the last-named of these three sources, all members of the royal family perished except one boy. Is the number one here "convincingly low", or is it a literary device? It is hard to "catch out" the *Annales Fuldenses* in this case, since the other two sources, though less specific than these annals on this point, do not contradict them. If it is accepted that only one member of the family in question survived the battle, and that Reginheri, the Viking leader who sacked Paris in 845, was a member of this family (a view which seems necessary if Viking leaders described as kings are to be regarded as his sons), then it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the survivor was Horicus II, and that Reginheri's sons, if he had any, were slain in this battle, and cannot be regarded as identical with the Vikings who came to be regarded as sons of Ragnarr loðbrók in Scandinavian tradition (see *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress, Dublin*, 1973 (1976), 98, ff.). This point is by no means central to Wallace-Hadrill's argument, but is relevant to the extent that he

does at one stage refer to "Ragnar and his sons" (p. 9); this, and his one other reference to Reginheri (p. 11), shows that his close attention to the Frankish sources has quite properly prevented him from referring to this historical figure as "Ragnarr loðbrók"

This is a wise and salutary contribution to Viking studies, which archaeologists, in particular, would do well to read carefully.

R. W. McTurk

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC STUDIES, 1965-1974. Edited by HANS BEKKER-NIELSEN. *Munksgaard (The Royal Library)*. Copenhagen, 1966-75.

"*BONIS* . . . is now established as an indispensable bibliographical annual for scholars in the Norse-Icelandic field and for the librarians who serve them" These words, written by the editor of *BONIS*, in the preface to the latest edition, may seem like special pleading, but they are indeed justified, as those who work in the field can testify, and also those who, like myself, only stand and serve. It is still the only really comprehensive guide, and, since its inception, it has come out with a commendable promptitude — not too soon, with the risk of a lot of material being omitted because it had not yet been received in Denmark; nor too late, by which time much of the material will have already been known to the enquiring scholar. That this is so is undoubtedly due to the energy of the editor, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, to whom we must all owe a deep debt of gratitude for being willing to fit this chore in to a busy working life.

The average number of entries in a volume is around the 500 mark, save for 1973 when it dropped to 343 entries. Though these do include book reviews and large numbers of articles from *KLNM*, it does give some idea of the scope of the publication — a very 'just view' indeed! Thorkil Damsgaard Olsen was joint editor with Hans Bekker-Nielsen until 1967, and from 1968 the latter has carried the burden on his own shoulders, assisted by an editorial board of talented scholars in the field, drawn from all the Scandinavian countries. In 1972 the responsibility for publication was transferred from Munksgaard to the Royal Library.

One of the pleasures of *BONIS* has always been its introductory essay, where much learning and wit can be discovered. In the period under review two useful bibliographies have appeared in

this slot:— a very thorough and workmanlike bibliographical introduction to medieval Scandinavia, by Peter Buchholz (1971) — ranging from bibliographies and directories through reference works and sources to periodicals, which will remain an essential source of reference to the scholar for many years to come; and a handy guide to the oriental sources by Stig Wikander, 'Bibliographia normanno-orientalis' in the latest issue (arranged chronologically from 1814 to 1976 — thus leaping ahead of *BONIS* itself!). The 1967 volume contains a guide to 'Old Norse bibliography' by some hack whose name escapes me. The sagas are covered by several essays. 'Heroic poetry and legendary sagas', by Anne Holtsmark (1965); 'Some ambiguities in *Gísla saga*: a balance sheet', by Theodore M. Andersson (1968); 'Translating the sagas into English', by George Johnston (1972); and 'Death in autumn: tragic elements in early Icelandic fiction', by Hermann Pálsson (1973). Poetry is covered in two essays — 'Rímur and lausavísur', by Sigurður Nordal (1966); and 'Scaldic poetry: history and literature', by Gabriel Turville-Petre (1969). Finally, there is a brief, but interesting, survey on 'The teaching of Old Norse-Icelandic in the United States', by Gene M. Gage (1970). The quality of these contributions can be attested by the roll-call of distinguished scholars who have written them.

Each volume is supplemented by a convenient index that pin-points the works under headings that are broad enough to be useful, but which avoid the trap of being too specific, which can often cause the user to fear that he may have missed something as he may not have searched all the relevant headings. Useful too is the geographical breakdown of some of the major headings, like 'Personal names' and 'Place names', and specific headings for 'Editions' and 'Translations', with the works arranged alphabetically beneath them. Perhaps some other headings could usefully be subdivided, like 'Archaeology', 'Architecture', 'Legal History' and 'Linguistics'. The reader is also handily guided from the general to the particular where necessary (e.g. under 'Linguistics' and 'Literary History and Criticism'). I am not too happy about the heading 'Ecclesiastical Literature' which has recently begun to appear; it seems to me to be not very helpful or meaningful, especially as there are so few entries under it so it cannot be said to act as a catchment point for a lot of miscellaneous material. What is the difference, for example, between that and, say, 'Homilies' or 'Saints' Lives', both of which have separate headings? One might suggest, perhaps, as amendments — 'Marian Literature' for 1973: 291 and 1974: 405; 'Bible' for 1973: 185. The other entry under this heading (1973: 53) is also indexed under '*Dialogi Gregorii*', and that

could have been sufficient, with, perhaps, a cross-reference under 'Gregory's Dialogues'. In the latest volume, a cross-reference from 'Printing History' to 'Bibliography and History of Printing' would have been useful.

The rather irritating habit of citing authors' names under different forms still persists — the Director of the British Museum, for example, appears as both 'Wilson, D. M.' and 'Wilson, David M.' I am not too happy either about the arrangement of entries under authors. Single works appear first, followed by cross-references, followed by joint works. It might be better if the cross-references followed all the works. It is, in any case, I would have thought, a fairly well established bibliographical principle by now that single and joint works need not be separated and can run together in one alphabetical title sequence. There is inconsistency, too, in the capitalization of titles of both articles and books (particularly, in the latter case, in the sub-titles). Some have major words capitalized; some use lower case throughout, except where grammatical rules dictate otherwise. The editor may well be following the practice of the original works in this, but it might not be a bad idea to aim at consistency in the finished product. Editions and translations are sometimes entered under the original, sometimes under the editor or translator (Cp. 1974: 20, 191 with 1974: 124, for example). Filing-titles are used inconsistently. Sometimes they are used when it is not necessary, e.g. 1971: 98, where the use of the filing-title does not alter the position of the entry in any way. It is true that there are no examples of this in the latest volumes, so it could be a fault that has been cured, but there are still examples of cases where filing-titles are not used where they should be used (e.g. 1973: 184, 280; 1974: 389, 450), which results, in the latest issue, in two translations of *Völsunga saga* being separated by some 65 entries in the index (389, under '*Sagaen om Brynhild og Gudrun*'; 454, where the filing-title '*Völsunga saga*' is used. It is particularly ironic in this case that had the filing-title not been used at 454 the two entries would have fallen together under their own titles!) In cases where filing-titles are not used, the reader is sometimes referred to the original title in the body of the bibliography, but he sometimes has to find this out from the index at the end.

Certain economies could be practised. I am thinking, in the first instance, of the notes appended to the entries. Those leading to 1974: 340 could reasonably be shortened from '[Contribution to 'Jelling problems. A discussion' [340]]' to the more simple '[Contribution to 340.]' Which leads me on to the point that the use of square brackets within square brackets seems unnecessarily



clumsy. The number can surely be quoted as I have done it; not even the Old British Museum General Catalogue used square brackets within square brackets. Another suggested economy is the omission of the publisher statement from the imprint where the name of the publisher has already appeared in a series statement (cf. 1974: 187, 292, 342, 389). This already seems to be the case with university series. Some further abbreviations may judiciously be used with periodicals — *HT*, for instance, is well established as an abbreviation for *Historisk Tids(s)krift*, and *JBAA* is much snappier than the lengthy citation, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. Though some abbreviations may seem unfamiliar it would be no hardship to track them down in the list of periodicals included before the bibliography. (What, for instance, does *AION-SG* say to the average reader?)

The general standard of accuracy in the printing of the volumes seems to be commendably high. I do not intend to rehearse all the errors over ten years, but one or two may be noted in the latest volume. On p. 14 a round bracket is missing at the end of the series statement in the entry under 1960. On p. 16 the comma after 'Franciszek' in the second entry under 1973 should be a fullstop. On p. 31 a round bracket is missing between the volume number and the date in entry no. 137. On p. 32 the full-stop is better removed after 'Icelanders' in entry no. 152. On p. 34, the comma after 'Press' in entry no. 171 should be a full-stop. On p. 36, the square bracket at the end of entry no. 200 seems to be italics rather than Roman. On p. 43 a quotation mark is missing after 'rit' in entry no. 284. On p. 47, there is one full-stop too many after 'Tidegård' in entry no. 329. One final criticism. It might have been useful to point out to the reader that entry no. 242 consists of German translations of papers already published — simply to say 'An anthology' could be misleading.

However, most of what I have said are mere details, and of a kind that only loons like librarians would worry about. The average scholar is content to be able to find the information he wants and inconsistencies in the finer details would not worry him (or her) provided such inconsistencies did not prevent him (or her) from finding something of importance. Hans Bekker-Nielsen and the Royal Library are to be congratulated on sustaining *BONIS* now into its twelfth year and particularly at maintaining its price at 30 Danish kroner since 1967 (that the actual price to British readers has almost doubled in that period is scarcely their fault). Undoubtedly, generous aid from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities has helped also to stabilise the price. Unluckily, as *BONIS* grows older, the task of working through it year by year for a comprehensive bibliography on a

particular topic is going to become more and more tedious, so it would be good if cumulations could now be planned — say at ten-yearly intervals — but considerations of money and time doubtless militate against this at the present moment.

One final word of apology is due to the hardworking editor. It is the practice in *BONIS* for book reviews to have annotations directing the reader to the particular reference for the work reviewed. As this review covers ten numbers of *BONIS*, not only will the note be a lengthy one but it will be a troublesome task for the editor to chase up the references in back numbers. I, therefore, make him a present of them now — [*BONIS* 1966, no. 48; 1967, no. 58; 1968, no. 47; 1969, no. 71; 1970, no. 73; 1971, no. 67; 1972, no. 101; 1973, no. 37; 1974, no. 65; 1975, no. ? P.S. Wouldn't it be easier to put 1966: 48, *etc.*?].

J. A. B. TOWNSEND

TALES AND TRADITIONS OF THE ESKIMOS. By HENRIK RINK. With a new introduction by HELGE LARSEN. *C. Hurst & Company*. London, 1974 xii+472 pp.

DANISH GREENLAND: ITS PEOPLE AND PRODUCTS. By HENRIK RINK. With a new introduction by HELGE LARSEN. *C. Hurst & Company*. London, 1974. xvii+468 pp.

Hinrich Johannes (Henrik) Rink was born in 1819. He received a scientific education, grounded in physics and chemistry, taking his doctorate at Kiel in 1844, following which he attended medical lectures at Berlin. He accompanied the "Galathea" expedition as a mineralogist, and from this stemmed his first work, *Die Nikobarischen Inseln* (1847), which established him as a geographical writer and laid the foundations of the reputation he was to enjoy for the rest of his life. In the following year (1848) he began a scientific tour of North Greenland, undertaking geological and mineralogical research, which resulted in the observations made by him on the "inland ice" described by Helge Larsen in his introduction to *Danish Greenland* (pp. [i-ii]). On his return to Denmark in 1851 he was made a member of the committee set up to investigate Greenland affairs, on whose behalf he made an extensive tour of South Greenland, writing, on his return to Denmark, the monograph *Om Monopolhandelen paa Grønland*, in which he defended the monopoly. In this, as Larsen remarks (p. [ii]), "one already notices Rink's desire to protect the Greenlanders" This interest received a further impetus and encouragement in 1853 when he married Signe

Møller, a girl who had been brought up in Greenland and who was herself fluent in the Eskimo language and perfectly at home with their culture. Not unnaturally, Rink's attentions now turned towards the people themselves, their customs and culture, and to the role of Scientist he now added those of Ethnographer and Folklorist. In the year of his marriage he had been made a colonial administrator at Julienhaab and Deputy Inspector for South Greenland. He moved from Julienhaab to Godthaab in 1855, and in 1858 was made Inspector for the whole of Greenland, retiring finally back to Denmark, on the grounds of ill-health, in 1868. Three years later, in 1871, he was made Director of Den kgl. grønlandske Handel og Administration, a position he hoped to employ to further the interests of the Eskimo and to establish Eskimo culture alongside all the other major cultures of the world. He died in 1893, having lived to see opportunities provided for young Eskimoes to come over to Denmark to further their education.

During his years in Greenland, Rink had set up a small press, which he used to publish monographs on the Eskimo, and from which he issued the monthly *Atuagagdliutit* (1861-). It was also during these years that he produced the two works under review here; works which helped to establish his reputation as second only to Hans Egede as a "Grønlandsforsker". The first, *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo* was originally issued (in Danish) in two parts; the first in 1866, and the second in 1871. It was translated into English, by the author, and published by William Blackwood (Edinburgh & London) in 1875. The book contains an introductory section on the Eskimo (pp. 1-81), containing matter on their way of life, customs, religion, probable origin and history, etc., and the main body of the work (pp. 83-472) contains 150 tales from all quarters of Greenland and from Labrador, with a brief introduction to this section on the tales themselves. Tales 1-86 are narrated in reasonable detail, but 87-150 are fragmentary. They are charmingly illustrated with drawings made by the Eskimo themselves. *Danish Greenland* was originally published earlier, but not translated until later. The Danish version came out in two parts in 1852-57, and the English version in 1877. This latter was again undertaken by Rink himself and the whole work revised by him at the same time. (In both works he had been assisted by Dr Robert Brown, who revised the manuscripts, putting the works into "intelligible English" and making the style "tolerably correct" It is possible, I suppose, for English at times to be "intolerably" correct.) *Danish Greenland* opens with some introductory remarks on the history of the colony and then passes on to scientific observations on the country — its

physical features, climate, geographical features, products and resources, capture of seals and whales, and fishes and fisheries (pp. 1-38, 39-135). Rink then moves on to the inhabitants themselves, describing the major aspects of their culture — their means of life and dress, their language, traditions, superstitions, institutions, etc. (pp. 163-229), before introducing a section dealing with descriptions of their life by the Eskimo themselves (with reprints from *Atuagagdliutit*, mentioned above) and a chapter, "The Greenlanders sketched by themselves", explaining the drawings contained in the book made by the Eskimo delineating their way of life (pp. 230-279). The final section (pp. 280-355) deals with the impact of Europeans on the Eskimo, particularly with regard to the Danish trading stations that had been established there. There are eight appendices (pp. 357-463) on glaciology, meteorology, geology and mineralogy, vocabulary, flora and fauna, etc.

The reprints contain brief, but informative, introductions by Helge Larsen, Keeper of the Department of Ethnography at the National Museum, Copenhagen (both of which are largely reprinted in the blurb on the dust-jackets), which summarise Rink's work and explain its importance for present-day readers. Though written over a hundred years ago, both books are seminal works for the study of the history and culture of the Greenland Eskimo, and, though much of what he said has now been updated or replaced by more recent study, yet a good deal remains true today. It is perhaps a pity, in some ways, that such updating cannot be done in the reprints themselves — not in the text, but in the introductions, yet such reprints are valid as source works, subject to the *caveat* that they must not be treated by the student as gospel truth still. C. Hurst and Company have done a valuable service in enabling both the private scholar and the learned library to have these volumes on their shelves once again. The books themselves are attractively produced, with wide margins and clear print. There are, inevitably, one or two quibbles. In *Tales and Traditions*, I am not too happy about the use of "forwarded" as a synonym for "put forward" on p. [ii] of Helge Larsen's introduction. In *Danish Greenland*, "mention" is misprinted as "metion" on p. [iii] of his introduction. More seriously, plate 6 has been repeated instead of plate 7 (this is being corrected); plates 2 and 12 have been misplaced to face pp. 127 and 154 instead of pp. 115 and 150 respectively.

J. A. B. TOWNSEND

NORRØN ORDBOK. By LEIV HEGGSTAD, FINN HØDNEBØ and ERIK SIMENSEN. *Det Norske Samlaget*. Oslo, 1975. 518 pp.

This is a new (third) edition of Marius Hægstad, Alf Torp and Leiv Heggstad's *Gamalnorsk ordbok* which has been much used at Norwegian and other Scandinavian universities since it first appeared in 1909. The second edition (1930), although considerably enlarged, was in some ways less useful because of the omission of two valuable introductory articles on the history of the Norwegian language before 1350 and derivation in Old Norse. Unfortunately neither of these articles has been included in the third edition either (the latter has now been reissued as a separate publication).

*Norrøn ordbok* differs from its immediate predecessor mainly in the title, which is now more appropriate, and in the Norwegian renderings of the Old Norse entry words. Gone is much of Hægstad's fine *landsmål*, and in its place we are offered the impoverished *nynorsk* which authorities and publishers require today. If words and phrases like *fælsleg*, *røkja etter*, *verta*, etc. are no longer understood in Norway, but must be replaced or accompanied by *forferdeleg*, *undersøkje*, *bli*, what is the point in preserving this as an Old Norse-*nynorsk* dictionary at all? Better to use *riksmål*, and surely the easiest for the editors? Some *riksmål* words have in fact been introduced in square brackets; those, for example, who are puzzled by the word *gravleggje* will be relieved to find "[begrave]" Perhaps this is for the benefit of Danish and Swedish users for whom occasional Danish and Swedish translations are also provided. As a romantic Englishman, I shall continue to use the first and second editions.

MICHAEL BARNES

DICTIONARIUM FÆROENSE. FÆRØSK-DANSK-LATINSK ORDBOK. Af J. C. SVABO. Udgivet efter håndskrifterne af CHR. MATRAS. *Færoensia. Textus & investigationes* VII-VIII. I. ORDBOGEN. 1966, 994 pp. II. INDLEDNING OG REGISTRE. 1970. xxxix+123 pp. *Munksgaard*. København.

As is well known, it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the Faroese language was given the written form which, with a few modifications, is used today. In the 1840's, V. U. Hammershaimb, faced with several considerably divergent dialects, created an etymologizing orthographical standard for Faroese on the basis of a normalized form of its parent language, Old West Scandinavian. In doing so, he sacrificed phonetic

accuracy to impartiality between dialects and, in a broader context, to Pan-Scandinavianism. Of Hammershaimb, a contemporary wrote: 'he has created a garb as becoming as it is convenient, in which Faroese tradition should now appear, rather than in the multitude of vacillating, bizarre and barbaric forms it has assumed in the hands of his predecessors'. Certainly the most influential of these forerunners of Hammershaimb was Jens Christian Svabo (1746-1824). While the form of written Faroese Svabo devised may well offend the eye of the traditionalist (Svabo: *ajggjiliur*; Hammershaimb: *eigiligur*), it has special interest for the philologist. In the preface to one of his dictionary manuscripts, Svabo expresses no doubts as to the free hand his position as a spelling innovator gives him, and makes clear his intention to follow Quintilian's precept to write as one speaks. His written language is, therefore, a surprisingly consistent attempt to reproduce his native dialect of Vágur (West Faroese) phonetically and it is only occasionally that he introduces etymological spellings. Svabo began his work as a lexicographer at the beginning of his thirty years as a student in Copenhagen. It was here in the early 1770's that he produced a draft of the first Faroese dictionary, relying for informants on the handful of his compatriots to be found in the capital. Of this draft version five copies survive, four in the Royal Library in Copenhagen and one in the University Library in Jena. In all they contain more than 5,300 different entries. The glosses are in Danish and, with the exception of the Jena manuscript, in Latin. In the 1780's, Svabo's boyhood friend Nicolai Mohr (1742-90) produced an expanded version based on the common source (now lost) for the five manuscripts already mentioned and on material collected by Svabo on a visit to the islands in 1781-2. This version, containing about 7,500 entries, is preserved as Ny kgl. Saml. 1287 fol. in the Royal Library. It differs from earlier ones by giving Icelandic words and phrases corresponding to the Faroese. In 1800, Svabo returned to the Faroes for good. As far as can be determined, he was now without any copy of the previous redactions and had to begin the process of collection anew. Local tradition tells how in the course of conversation, the old scholar might jot a word or phrase he heard on a slip of paper and thrust it into a bag he had with him. That he was able to combine his lexicography with another of his passions is shown by one of his preserved dictionary slips, a four of diamonds. The fruits of these labours was a collection of about 7,500 entries now in the Arnarnagðan Collection (AM 971 4to). This contains no references to Icelandic, although Norwegian parallels are often given.

As with much of his work, Svabo never saw his dictionary in print and the present edition is the first. It consists of two volumes, of which the first gives a text based on all the extant manuscripts including Mohr's. The second volume contains a detailed description of the manuscripts, facsimiles and a key to the dictionary with headwords in standard Faroese (pp. 3-93), Icelandic (pp. 93-119), Norwegian, Danish, etc. (pp. 119-20). Because of its phonetic approach and comparative earliness, Svabo's dictionary is indispensable to students of the history of the Faroese language, and, indeed, to scholars working in the Norse field in general. The editor, Christian Matras is, of course, well known for his outstanding contribution to Faroese studies. He is to be thanked for undertaking the arduous task of editing this work and congratulated on discharging it so admirably.

RICHARD PERKINS

THE VIKING ROAD TO BYZANTIUM. By H. R. ELLIS DAVIDSON. *George Allen & Unwin Ltd.* London, 1976. 341 pp.

Energy, learning and love of the subject have undoubtedly gone into the writing of this book. Dr Ellis Davidson is an experienced scholar. Her main theme is a fascinating one: the Scandinavian movement eastwards in the Middle Ages, to Russia (Novgorod, Kiev), to Byzantium and its empire and further east into the Caspian and the lands to the south of it. (There are chapters on such topics as 'Finnmark and Biarmaland', 'The Great Svyatoslav', 'Life in Miklagard', the Varangian guard and Haraldr harðráði's sojourn in the imperial city.) It is unfortunate, then, that she has not set her sights higher but has been prepared to pass a botched piece of work on to her apparently willing publishers. It is understandable, of course, that she does not set out to make any original contribution. Her expressed intention is "to indicate the rich and varied contacts open to Scandinavians who used the eastern road, and the importance of the links made with the peoples of eastern Europe, the Muslim Caliphate and the Byzantine Empire" (p. 13). Nor with this modest but reasonable aim would we necessarily expect a mature synthesis based on first hand knowledge of the primary and secondary sources in all their numerous languages. If such a work is ever to appear, we shall probably have to wait many years for it. What one might have hoped for from Dr Davidson is a reliable digest of the main literature on the subject in the Western and Scandinavian languages. But it is precisely in matters of

accuracy and balance that this book fails. There are many mistakes and misrepresentations and it would be unprofitable to give more than a few examples; (they should have been corrected before the book was printed and one wonders if the author took the obvious precaution of submitting her work to expert scrutiny before publication): On page 65, we read of Ibn Fadlān's *Risāla* that "in 1933 a manuscript of the complete work was discovered in a library in Baghdad by Zeki Validi Togan"; but this latter tells us in the first pages of his edition of 1939 (referred to by the author) that it was in 1923 that he found an unfortunately defective text of the work in Meshed (eastern Persia). The Khazar stronghold Sarkel (an edifice of more than ten million bricks) is spirited away from what was surely its rightful (if now submerged) situation well up the Don near Tsimliansk (map on p. 49) down to "the mouth of the Don where the river enters the Black Sea" (p. 126; cf. p. 138) and back up the river again on p. 240. In enumerating the sources of *The Russian primary chronicle* (p. 62), the omission of Georgius Hamartolos's *Chronicle* is bad. The importance of this, with its continuations, is obvious after even the most cursory perusal of the introduction to Cross's translation of *The primary chronicle* (known to Dr Davidson) and mention of it here would have made sense of the passing (although unindexed) reference to "George Harmartolos" (sic) on page 132. The so-called *Advice to an emperor* does not, of course, say that as a result of friendly relations between Haraldr harðráði and Byzantium "Greek priests were sent from Constantinople into Norway" (p. 228); this Dr Davidson could have ascertained from a brief reading of the relevant short passage about Haraldr which she herself has taken the trouble to have translated and which she quotes on pages 208-9. An undisciplined excursion from the field of history into the possibility of influences from the east in literary, mythological and religious spheres which forms Part Four of the book ('Ideas from the East', pp. 269-317) is, in the context, out of place and often hopelessly vague. (What importance can we, for example, attach to a statement like: "The sense of doom which hung over Constantinople even in the time of its prosperity, and which was associated with the statues in its streets and squares . . . may also have left its influence on northern myths concerning the destruction of Asgard, the city of the gods" (p. 273)?) The author's interest in Byzantine automata and Greek fire is given disproportionate indulgence. Bernhard Dorn's *Caspia* (1875), Joseph Marquart's *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge* (1903; reprint 1961) and Holger Arbman's *Sevar i österviking* (1955) are titles one would have expected to find in the bibliography. Scandinavian (including Old Icelandic) names



are often mangled or misspelt in a manner not tolerable. And one notes mistakes like "*Les Atomes précieux*" (p. 63 footnote) for Wiet's translation of Ibn Rusta's geography, *Les atours précieux*. One could go on and on. It is unfortunate to find oneself in the position of having to criticize a colleague's work in these rather harsh terms. On the other hand, no book is, in my opinion, often better than a bad book and there is no reason whatsoever why writing on the Vikings should not be entertaining, even colourful, and yet, at the same time reliable and scholarly.

I should like to end on a more constructive note by stressing or elaborating three minor points touched on by the author where what we hear of the Vikings in the east gives a picture which largely corresponds to what we can learn of them elsewhere. Page 127: Dr Davidson compares the consternation caused by the Rus incursion into the Caspian in about 913 with similar effects of Viking attacks on the British Isles. Indeed, it is interesting to juxtapose Alcuin's "and never before has such a terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race, nor was it thought that such an inroad from the sea could be made" (trans. from *English historical documents*) with al-Mas'ūdī: "The nations round the sea were greatly alarmed because they were not accustomed in the past to any enemy making his way to them there for only merchant ships and fishing vessels used to pass therein" (Dunlop's trans.). In the west and in the Muslim lands, highly mobile fleets were able to capitalize on the element of surprise. Otherwise the picture given by al-Mas'ūdī of the Rus ravages is exactly what one might expect: "The Rus shed blood, destroyed women and children, took booty, and raided and burned in all directions" (Dunlop's trans.). Page 131: Liutprand of Cremona's account of Igor's defeat by a Byzantine fleet in 941 is cited with its statement that "not a man [belonging to the Rus fleet] that day escaped save those who managed to reach the shore. For the Rus ships by reason of their small size can move in very shallow water where the Greek galleys because of their greater draught cannot pass." We know from other sources that shallow draught was a factor conducive to the manoeuvrability of Viking ships and Bertil Almgren could reasonably have mentioned Liutprand's account in his papers on the subject in *Tor*, 1962 (186-200) and 1963 (215-50). Page 133: As Dr Davidson rightly says, Ibn Miskawaih's account of the Rus leader commanding his forces from the back of a donkey during the occupation of Bardha'a in the 940's has puzzled commentators. But Ibn Miskawaih is a well-informed source and his statement is all the more credible in the light of the high reputation Bardha'a enjoyed

for its mules attested by various sources (see *The encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. *Bardha'a*): where there is excellence in mules, there is probably excellence in asses. Most of the transport had been taken by those who had fled the town and we have here evidence for the Viking genius for improvisation and adaptability we know of from elsewhere.

RICHARD PERKINS

CORPUS CODICUM NORVEGICORUM MEDII AEVI. QUARTO SERIE VOL. V. MED EN INNLEDNING AV ANNE HOLTSMARK. *Selskapet til utgivelse av gamle norske håndskrifter*. Oslo, 1974. 124 pp.

AM 310 4to contains one of the three extant texts (all defective) of the Norse translation of the Latin history of King Óláfr Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason. It is the oldest (c. 1250) of the two most complete texts of the translation and is generally considered to stand closest to the Latin original. It is also of interest because it is one of the few Kings' Saga manuscripts which was preserved in Norway and there is a strong possibility that it was written by a Norwegian. The photographs in this edition are by Arne Mann-Nielsen of the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen and are of good quality. Also included are facsimiles of Árni Magnússon's notes on the manuscript and of his copy of the text on the remaining fragments of leaves 1 and 2. The final side of the codex contains various excerpts from Scripture added by a later hand, and a facsimile of a copy of this with corrections by Árni Magnússon is also provided. The late Anne Holtsmark's introduction (which is in Norwegian, but with a clear English summary) covers the history of the manuscript, the relationship of the three texts to one another and to the Latin original, and the literary background to Oddr's saga. Palaeography and language are given the briefest of treatment.

It only remains to say that the book is handsomely produced as we have come to expect of this series.

MICHAEL BARNES