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## TROUBLESOME CHILDREN IN THE SAGAS OF ICELANDERS

BY ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

Of all social groups which formed the societies of the past, children, seldom seen and rarely heard in the documents, remain . . . the most elusive, the most obscure. (Herlihy 1978, 109)

### 1. *Medieval Children?*

**D**ID CHILDREN EXIST in the Middle Ages?<sup>1</sup> It seems a silly question, but for some time it was a commonplace in historical scholarship that childhood as a notion was alien to the medieval mentality. Philippe Ariès expressed this view thus (Ariès 1962, 128):

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking.

Ariès was not himself a medievalist, but this particular statement, though based on superficial scholarship, proved extremely seductive and has often been repeated. More fruitfully, it spurred medieval scholars to enter into intensive research on childhood. In the last few decades many medievalists and renaissance scholars have done so, and in general have found that, contrary to Ariès's claim, people in the Middle Ages did indeed recognise childhood and distinguish it from adolescence and adulthood in many and varied ways (see e.g. Burrow 1986, Hanawalt 1993 and 2002, Orme 2001, Péter 2001, 3–8, Pollock 1983, Shahar 1990). One of the first was Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, who in his influential research on the village of Montaillou countered Ariès (without actually referring to him) with the statement that 'there was not such an enormous gap, as has sometimes been claimed, between our attitude to children and the attitude of the people in fourteenth-century Montaillou and upper Ariège' (Ladurie 1978, 212).

As Barbara Hanawalt outlines in her recent review of the study of childhood in the last few decades, many medieval scholars have found

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a research project which has been generously supported by Vísindasjóður Íslands.

fault with Ariès's reasoning and gone on to draw on sources he did not consider. Among those medievalists who have done the most extensive research on the concept of childhood, the view seems now to be dominant that while medieval experiences and conceptions differed from those of today, childhood was distinguishable and children were considered different from adults (Hanawalt 2002, 456–57).<sup>2</sup>

It must be stressed that the concept of childhood is certainly not an easy one (see e.g. Boswell 1988, 22–39). One is tempted to ask whether any generalisations about medieval or modern attitudes to childhood might not pose problems. It is not altogether implausible that in the Middle Ages there existed side by side the contrasting views that children were small adults, and that they were different and strange. In fact, the same also applies to the present. Some parents regard their children as more or less an extension of themselves, while others are captivated with their otherness. And while some would focus on the similarities between children and adults, others find their logic and train of thought very strange and not altogether comprehensible.

What remains is to examine how this otherness is expressed. Instances where children play important roles in long, partially realistic narratives, such as the Sagas of Icelanders, would seem ideal for this purpose. In medieval and modern times alike children are most often defined by their status as minors, who are so much smaller and weaker than ourselves that they escape our notice if they are not our own. Children are supposed to be innocents who neither threaten nor intimidate adults. They are thus liable to be overlooked at times. As a rule they are regarded as passive rather than active, victims rather than perpetrators. And in most instances where children are mentioned in medieval Icelandic narratives, they are indeed rather passive and certainly not dangerous.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Or, in the words of the folklorist Ilomäki, childhood was 'a self-regulating system that is largely impervious to outside interference' (2002, 77).

<sup>3</sup> I do not intend to provide a complete picture of the life and treatment of children in medieval Iceland, such as is to be found in the studies of Stein-Wilkeshuijs (1970) and Kreutzer (1987). Stein-Wilkeshuijs's work is encyclopaedic, and rather than analysing narratives she provides examples of various aspects of childhood. She deals first with 'normal' children, then with those who are either above or below the norm. Kreutzer's main focus, on the other hand, is on births, newborn children and abandonment of children. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (1991) has recently made some illuminating remarks on the social position of children in medieval Iceland, though without much reference to the Sagas of Icelanders. He is less critical of Ariès than many other scholars have been.

In fact, one of the more common plot lines involving children in medieval Icelandic literature is the ‘persecuted child’ narrative, where a future hero must take to flight in his childhood.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I will take a closer look at examples of children who are not safe, cuddly little creatures. Each is in his or her own way troublesome, or even sinister and dangerous. These narratives counter the common assumption that children are lovable but weak. Each case discussed is unique in some way. In some instances these children are future protagonists, whereas in others they are anonymous and appear to be largely subservient to the plot or to a theme in the saga. All these examples, however, may prove useful in determining how the otherness of children functions in a medieval narrative.

## 2. *Njáls saga*

Impertinence in children is skilfully portrayed quite early on in *Njáls saga*, in a scene in chapter 8. The accomplished warrior Hrútr Herjólfsson has with little foresight got himself engaged to the daughter of the celebrated Mǫrðr gígja, the greatest lawyer in Iceland. Even more unwisely, Hrútr goes abroad before the marriage and steps right into the clutches of the formidable Queen Gunnhildr, who, at least according to other sources, has been raised by Lappish sorcerers and now rules Norway along with her son Haraldr gráfeldr. Gunnhildr first commands Hrútr to be her new lover and when he later wishes to leave, but denies being engaged to an Icelandic woman, she lays a curse upon him for being dishonest with her.

The curse ruins Hrútr’s marriage, since it makes him unable to have intercourse with his wife. She is distressed by this and finally leaves him after mustering up the courage to tell her father about the precise nature of her husband’s problem. Her grasping father then sues Hrútr for his daughter’s property. Hrútr refuses to return the dowry and, furthermore, challenges Mǫrðr to a duel. The lawyer is unwilling to fight the warrior, and there the matter rests.

On the journey home Hrútr and his brother Hǫskuldr stop at Lundur, the farmstead of their ally Þjóstólfr Bjarnarson. It is a moment of relief after the ruthless struggle over the dowry at the Alþing. But the narrative takes an unexpected turn, as the great men meet with minuscule ‘adversaries’ who unexpectedly prove to have the power to cause them a lot of harm:

<sup>4</sup> I discuss this theme in more detail in a forthcoming article.

Regn hafði verið mikið um daginn, ok höfðu menn orðit vátir, ok váru gørvir langeldar. Þjóstólfr bóndi sat í meðal þeira Høskulds ok Hróts, en sveinar tveir léku á gólfinu, — þat váru veizlusveinar Þjóstólfs, — ok lék mæð ein hjá þeim; þeir váru málgir mjök, því at þeir váru óvitrir. Annarr þeira mælti: 'Ek skal þér Mørðr vera ok stefna þér af konunni ok finna þat til foráttu, at þú hafir ekki sorðit hana.' Annarr svaraði: 'Ek skal þér Hrótr vera; tel ek þik af allri fjárheimtunni, ef þú þorir eigi at berjask við mik.' Þetta mæltu þeir nokkurum sinnum; þá gerðisk hlátr mikill af heimamönnum. (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 28–29)

Rain had fallen heavily during the day and everybody was soaked, and long fires had been lit in the centre of the hall. Thjostolf sat between Hoskuld and Hrut.

Two boys were playing on the floor, poor boys under Thjostolf's care, and a girl was playing with them. They were very chatty, since they didn't know any better. One of the boys said, 'I'll be Mord and summon you to give up your wife for not having sex with her.'

The other boy answered, 'I'll be Hrut, and I say that you must forfeit all property claims if you don't dare to fight with me.'

They repeated this a few times, and much laughter arose among the household. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, III 12)

These boys are a classic example of naive impertinence, and they may perhaps be all the more representative since they remain unnamed and disappear from the saga after this episode. We hear nothing of their adult life. In this instance the child is not father of the man. The boys only appear as children, playing a role similar to those of other kinds of 'marginal' figures: servants, old men, beggar-women. These characters, by their very marginality, are outside the constraints placed on more respectable members of society. Their words are not taken as seriously. Thus they are able to say what other people may well be thinking, but are too cautious or too polite to put into words. This is exactly what these boys do. And even if what they say is categorised as mere 'chat', it may prove extremely dangerous to the reputations of Hrótr and his family once it has been put into words.

Is it pure chance that children serve this purpose as commentators in this scene in *Njáls saga*? It is at least possible that the author is making a point about childhood and in particular comparing the games of children to the serious business of adults. These boys obviously have a function similar to that of the unnamed child in Hans Christian Andersen's fable, 'The Emperor's New Clothes', who is the first to mention the emperor's nudity and consequently to reveal him as a dupe. In a similar manner, these boys transform the serious business of the Alþing into a childish game and so reveal the game-like nature of the adults' lawsuits. They also, without mincing their words, mention Hrótr's



inability to satisfy his wife, and that is the reason why Hǫskuldr responds by hitting the boy who plays the part of Mǫrðr. He is the child who has mentioned the unmentionable, in crude terms which have caused much mirth among those present. This game may seem innocent and childish, but it may be its very innocence which makes it so dangerous. The ‘carnival’ element of such chat, which turns serious lawsuits into a game, is metamorphosed into something much more serious by the fact that the boys are innocents and thus cannot have a specific purpose in deriding Hrótr. Their very innocence makes them truth-tellers, and the childish banality of their game is much more hard-hitting than the more deliberate mockery of adults could possibly be.

The irreverence of children in this case is obviously a vehicle for the irreverence of adults. The boys themselves are hardly old enough to know much about sex, and therefore the language used would seem to have been picked up from adults. Their bantering must echo what has been said about Hrótr’s misfortunes by local people. And childish irreverence not only reflects adult irreverence: in this instance it also leads to the irreverence of adults, exactly as in Andersen’s fable. The poor boys may seem thoughtless innocents, but their talk is very dangerous to the magnates from Dalir, not least because these powerful men have no obvious strategy to deal with such an ‘attack’ from below.

It is not surprising that Hǫskuldr responds angrily, and strikes the more offending of the boys — the first but not the last smack in the face in this particular saga. The wise Hrótr, however, calls the boy to him and gives him a finger-ring. He makes friends with the boy, demonstrates his magnanimity and at the same time reveals that he has some sympathy for boyish irreverence. After all, he has himself challenged the foremost lawyer in Iceland to a duel, and refused to return his daughter’s dowry to him. He may perhaps discern something of his own rebellious self in the two anonymous boys. But the wider perspective is different. The humiliation of Hrótr in his failed marriage is only a game to the boys, a game which, when played by children, reveals the game-like structure of the politics of the commonwealth.

Hrótr manages to defuse the situation and rise above the whole sordid affair, so that the childish banter of the two boys does not start a feud. Their intervention in the narrative leads to nothing, in contrast to that of the anonymous boy in *Droplaugarsona saga* whose fart when he upsets a chess table makes Grímr Droplaugarson laugh, thereby revealing that he has killed Helgi Ásbjarnarson (*Droplaugarsona saga*, 172). The boys in *Njáls saga* do not have such an important plot function, since the

scene is the last in this particular segment of the saga; they provide, however, a significant commentary on the narrative. Furthermore, their childish reinterpreting of the plot adds a new dimension to it: the absurdity of the situation is revealed, along with the game-like structure of the processes at the Alþing. As this happens in the first part of the saga, we enter the narrative of Gunnarr and Njáll (who are yet to make an appearance in the saga) already disillusioned about the nature of that all-important institution, the Alþing, and by extension, the nature of the Law itself. The boys in *Njáls saga* are innocents and yet extremely dangerous. In their innocence they provoke laughter at the expense of the strong and the powerful. Their Alþing game reveals that the real Alþing in all its dignity is perhaps nothing more than a game, albeit of a more refined sort.

Thus the voice of the child disrupts the narrative of *Njáls saga* at an early stage. But these are not the first dangerous children to make an appearance in the saga. In fact the very first scene involves a child, the soon-to-be-infamous Hallgerðr langbrók. As a child she is favoured by her father, the aforementioned Hǫskuldr. After the introduction of the two brothers, the scene is set at Hǫskuldr's farm. He calls his daughter to him, kisses her, and asks for Hrútr's opinion of this beautiful long-haired child. Hrútr's somewhat sullen answer is that the girl is beautiful indeed, *ok munu margir þess gjalda* 'and many will pay for that' (*Brennu-Njáls saga*, 7; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* III, 2). He draws attention to the sinister aspect of Hallgerðr's beauty and, as if that were not enough, he remarks that he does not know how thief's eyes have come into the family.

This is hardly a polite comment, and many modern readers have found it excessively harsh (see Jón Karl Helgason 1998, 53–75). After all, Hallgerðr is only a child, an innocent. But these kind-hearted readers are mistaken, according to the author of *Njáls saga*. There is nothing innocent about children. While Hallgerðr the child is quiet and does not seem mischievous, the scene of the thief's eyes nevertheless serves as an omen to remind us that children are to be feared, at least for their adult potentialities. It may seem puzzling that Hrútr (and the author) should wish to draw special attention to Hallgerðr's later theft at Kirkjubær, since Hallgerðr is also directly and indirectly responsible for much more spectacular events in the saga, including several killings. Perhaps the reason is that the stolen cheese at Kirkjubær sets in motion a chain of events which eventually leads to Gunnarr killing Otkell, and indirectly to his downfall, since it is the subsequent slaying of Otkell's son which

results in the chieftains' last alliance against Gunnarr. Or perhaps Hrútr uses thief's eyes simply as a metaphor for this particular child's underhandedness and treacherousness. Hallgerðr is a thief not only in literal terms, she is also a thief of hearts, a thief of peace and a thief of lives. Whereas there are all sorts of killers, a thief is by definition cunning and sly, and must not reveal his identity if he is to get away with his thieving. He is always in disguise; duplicity is his trademark. This is perhaps the essence of the child Hallgerðr: she is not the beautiful innocent she seems.

In the very first scene in the saga, we are explicitly told that a particular child has thief's eyes, and that she is not to be trusted, and is even to be feared. So when the two boys start playing Hrútr and Mǫrðr on the floor of Þjóstólfr's house, the reader may already be paradoxically aware that their innocence is not all that innocent. The games of children are not to be underestimated, and even though children may look innocent, they may also have thief's eyes and tongues sharper than the swords of adults. The two episodes share this theme, and are further linked by their common function of implicit comparison of the brothers Hrútr and Hǫskuldr, to the latter's disadvantage. Together, they have the function of a prologue. The dangerous innocent, like other apparent paradoxes, makes us question the reliability of our own impressions. These narratives about children near the beginning of *Njáls saga* alert us and encourage us to be sceptical. Perhaps they have a general and symbolic value as case studies about deceptive appearances, which turns out to be a theme in *Njáls saga*.<sup>5</sup>

In a saga with a biographical structure, the beginning of the narrative is the proper place for episodes about children. *Sturlunga saga* begins with a short *þáttur* which is basically about children, *Geirmundar þáttur* (*Sturlunga saga*, I 5–11). Various Norse kings, among them Óláfr Tryggvason, Óláfr helgi, Haraldr harðráði and Hákon Hákonarson, also make their first appearance as children or youngsters in their respective sagas. Some Sagas of Icelanders also include stories of the hero's childhood. As in the case of Hrútr's comment about thief's eyes, stories of children at the beginning of a saga usually contain a prophecy. The child foreshadows the man, and is by his or her nature an 'introduction'

<sup>5</sup> I have already ventured a possible interpretation of the saga somewhat along these lines (Ármann Jakobsson 2000). It is, for example, striking that when Gunnar of Hlíðarendi first makes his mark in the saga he is actually wearing a disguise.

to something bigger, but this does not necessarily mean that the child is not also a child, and different from the adult he may grow into.

In fact the narrative about the two boys, whom we never meet except as children, is a very realistic and credible depiction of how children make games out of the concerns of the adults around them, and in this instance, the irreverence inherent in this kind of game is exactly what makes them dangerous. *Njáls saga* represents children as threatening in two ways: in themselves, and in their potentiality. The latter is the case with Hallgerðr. She is a lovable and beautiful child, and her father thinks he knows her inside out, but he is completely unaware of what her future holds.

### 3. *Egils saga*

If *Njáls saga* emphasises that beauty is not always innocent, other sagas provide us with examples of children who are neither beautiful nor well-behaved. One such is the young Egill Skalla-Grímsson. When he is only three years old, it has become clear that he will turn out to be ugly and black-haired. He is also said to be as big as boys twice his age. He is described as talkative and with a gift for words but difficult to deal with in his games with other children — and this turns out to be no exaggeration. Yet though the young Egill might be described as a prodigy of a sort, he is nevertheless easily recognisable as a chattering child, more interested in games than in preparing for his future role. This forms a contrast, and perhaps a conscious one, with the protagonists of saints' lives, who avoid childish games or use the opportunity to play the role of a bishop (for example, *Þorláks saga helga*, 49, 145; see also Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1994, 44–46).

The first anecdote about the child Egill concerns a feast given by his grandfather. Egill wishes to go but his father forbids it, since the boy is *ekki góðr viðskiptis, at þú sér ódrukkinn* 'enough trouble when you're sober' (*Egils saga*, 81; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 68). This is indeed a remarkable description of a three-year-old, but perhaps less outrageous than many have found it, as those who have had to deal with a hyperactive toddler will confirm. Skalla-Grímr may be referring metaphorically to the 'intoxicated' state induced in children at parties by an excess of food, drink and high spirits.

Egill is, of course, disgruntled at being left out of the party. Even children of one or two show clear (indeed sometimes quite violent) signs of disliking being left out of the fun, and the author of *Egils saga* seems to have had a respect for the personality of a child which is unusual in any age, and would perhaps have been even more uncommon in the

Middle Ages. So Egill rides after the party to Álftanes, no mean feat for such a small child, and is welcomed by his grandfather, who, as is the way of grandparents, sides with the child against the parent. Then Egill recites some verses, complete with kennings, which are acclaimed, and which would certainly be a prodigious accomplishment for a child of any age. The verses earn popularity for Egill and the episode could be taken to indicate that it is with his poetry that Egill will win the favour of others. Thus it foreshadows his later successful attempt to escape death and the wrath of King Eiríkr through poetry.

Egill's behaviour could at this stage be best described as wilful. He is certainly difficult to control, and disobedient towards his somewhat misanthropic father. The upbringing of children usually entails their learning to obey their parents. Children who do not heed parental authority might reasonably be expected to be ungovernable later in life, too. Some might even grow into a menace to society, an assumption which must rest on the premise that authority is to be obeyed. So even though Egill's wilfulness is in itself charming and eccentric, there is a danger inherent in it. And indeed quite soon, Egill becomes a killer.

The next time we meet him, Egill is seven years old and so quick-tempered that boys are taught to give in to him. In a ball-game on the plains by the river Hvítá, Egill turns out to be a very bad loser. He strikes his opponent, the twelve-year-old Grímr Heggsson, who dashes him to the ground, while the other boys jeer at the humiliated Egill. His older friend and mentor, Þórðr Granason, then gives Egill an axe which the boy uses to kill Grímr in revenge. Curiously enough, Egill's parents do not scold him for this. Apparently, killing is not to be discouraged in the child of a noble line. On the contrary, his mother praises him and calls him a true viking, in reply to which Egill speaks his famous verse about the happy viking life. His father, Skalla-Grímr, however, *lét . . . sér fátt um finnask* 'seemed indifferent' (*Egils saga*, 100; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 77). In any psychological discussion of *Egils saga*, this paternal indifference would obviously make for a very promising explanation of Egill's difficult character.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Torfi H. Tulinius (1999, 293) has discussed Egill's relationship with his father (and Grettir's with his). He thinks, though, that a psychological interpretation is inappropriate, since these narratives are older than the advent of psychology. Narratives such as *Ívars þáttur Ingimundarsonar* (*Morkinskinna*, 354–56), however, indicate that some of the methods of modern psychology are not so modern after all, and were known to Icelandic audiences in the thirteenth century.

The third scene involving Egill the child also takes a violent turn when Skalla-Grímr suddenly goes berserk in a ball-game, kills Egill's friend Þórðr and grabs Egill, probably meaning to kill him too. Egill is saved by the intervention of his foster-mother Þorgerðr brák, whom Skalla-Grímr kills instead. Egill is, of course, *allreiðr* 'furious', quietly kills Skalla-Grímr's favourite in revenge, and father and son do not speak for a whole winter (*Egils saga*, 102). This episode shows Egill becoming rather aggressive, and he asserts himself further by thwarting his elder brother Þrólftr's efforts to go abroad without him. Even when castigated for this, he replies promptly that he would not hesitate to cause Þrólftr more trouble and damage if he did not take him away from his father (*Egils saga*, 103).

In these last two anecdotes, Egill's behaviour is excessively violent. Although the killing of Grímr Heggsson might in itself be understandable, it provokes a quarrel in the neighbourhood in which seven lives, in addition to Grímr's, are lost. Egill seems to care nothing for this; far less does he acknowledge any responsibility. This is hardly to be expected of a seven-year-old, but it demonstrates that Egill's ability to slay, hurt and wreck far exceeds his self-control and his willingness to take responsibility for his actions. This lack of moderation is important. Witnessing the temper-tantrum of a child alerts us to the fact that lack of self-control is childish, whereas maturity should bring moderation.

Though Egill may have just cause to harm Skalla-Grímr, the killing of Skalla-Grímr's servant, who has done Egill no harm but is from his point of view a proxy for his father, shows his ruthlessness. And though we can well understand that Egill is desperate to escape from his father, his recklessness in getting his own way is nevertheless excessive and suggests an over-the-top mentality. Egill is represented as something of a sociopath, who does not care much about his fellow-man. What matters to him is to come out on top, to get even, to get his way. In this, the child Egill resembles the man who becomes the protagonist of the saga. Although some of Egill's later killings are more honourable, he remains an ambiguous figure, partly grotesque, partly sympathetic, but always dangerous.

As a response to the lack of recognition of his prodigious abilities, his behaviour constitutes a rebellion against parental authority, made more sympathetic by the fact that maturity is hardly to be expected in such a young hero. In addition, his father is cold and indifferent, and on occasion downright mean and cruel towards his son, most notably when he tries to kill him in a berserk rage. It could be argued, too, that Egill shares many qualities of temperament with his father, and may be motivated to

some extent by the attempt to emulate him. Thus understanding Egill is easy, pardoning him more complicated.

In the episodes concerning his childhood Egill asserts himself as a rebel against authority, and throughout the saga he remains hostile towards, and yet fascinated by, any form of authority, in particular that of King Eiríkr of Norway. Egill has been called an individualist, or even an existentialist (by none other than Jean-Paul Sartre),<sup>8</sup> but, less generously, one could simply call him an egoist. In spite of his many talents, Egill's morality must have seemed extremely dubious to a thirteenth-century audience. Egill always fights his battles for his own benefit, and even though he later manages to co-exist peacefully with his father, there seems to be no love lost between them. Thus the theme of the rebellious child is sustained throughout the saga. Although the older Egill is a successful and wealthy chieftain, he is sometimes regarded as a misfit. In this instance, an egotistical child grows into an egotistical adult.

Is the saga's portrayal of the young Egill realistic? While Egill is certainly not a normal child, his actions are nevertheless narrated in a realistic manner, even though saga realism is never totally free of exaggeration. Riding a horse at the age of three and reciting skaldic verse are prodigious feats, but not so far removed from plausibility as to be impossible; and even though children of seven are rarely killers, some recent examples to the contrary must force us to at least acknowledge the possibility. Egill himself is essentially the same character in childhood as he is as an adult, but his childishness is suggested in the world he inhabits: in the toys his grandfather presents him with for his poetry, the children who are warned against crossing him in games, and the protectiveness of his friends Þórðr Granason and Þorgerðr brák. Last but not least, the child Egill is greatly affected by the lack of emotion displayed by his father. Later in life he seems to be indifferent to his father's feelings for him. The childish need for paternal love has been replaced by his dependence on his wife, Ásgerðr, whose initial rejection of him makes him physically ill. The main difference between the childish Egill and the mature Egill is that the semi-psychopathic brutality of the child can be excused by his lack of maturity while the grown Egill really has no excuse. The uncontrolled aggressiveness of this hero is more to be expected of the child than the man, and what makes the child Egill especially sinister is that his behaviour as a child, although it is on a smaller scale, is a fairly exact foretaste of his behaviour as an adult.

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with *Morgunblaðið*, 15th August 1951.

An important difference between the child and the man is that the mature Egill gets away with much more than the child, adapting rather well to a heathen and brutal world; even if he remains immature, he is an accomplished warrior and poet. We are left to ponder whether the boy and the man are all that different, or if Egill in some sense never reaches maturity, and remains at heart a psychopathic, childlike egoist. *Egils saga* is not a *Bildungsroman*, because in a sense Egill remains in a Neverland of his own.

#### 4. *Grettis saga*

Another well-known mischievous child in the genre of Family Saga is the future outlaw Grettir Ásmundarson. Grettir is the second son of Ásmundr and Ásdís, and is described in chapter 14 of *Grettis saga* as *mjök ódæll í uppvexti sínum, fátalaðr ok óþýðr, bellinn bæði í orðum ok tiltekðum* ‘very overbearing as a child, taciturn and rough, and mischievous in both word and deed’ (*Grettis saga*, 36; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 64). He is also said to be a late developer, which suggests that his behaviour in childhood is perhaps not to be considered proleptic of the grown Grettir. As in the case of Egill, his mother is loving but his father shows little affection. When Grettir reaches the age of ten Ásmundr asks him to look after the goslings on the farm, a task which Grettir dismisses as *lítit verk ok lqðrmannlegt* ‘a trifling job for weaklings’. Ásmundr’s words imply that his relationship with his son depends on the latter’s obedience: *Leys þú þetta vel af hendi, ok mun þá batna með okkr* ‘Do the job well . . . and we shall get on better’ (*Grettis saga*, 37; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 64). Grettir finds the goslings tiresome, and becomes infuriated. Like Egill, he has a short temper. A little while later the goslings are found dead, and the geese maimed. Ásmundr becomes furious with Grettir, who just grins and recites a verse in which he virtually admits to killing the goslings.<sup>9</sup>

As in Egill’s case, there are two more anecdotes about Grettir’s childhood. After Grettir’s failure at keeping geese, Ásmundr asks his son to rub his back by the fireside. Grettir comments again that this is a job for weaklings (*er verkit lqðrmannlegt*), which by now should be noted by the reader as an ominous sign. Grettir, of course, becomes tired of rubbing the old man’s back, not least since Ásmundr keeps urging him to rub a bit harder, and calls him lazy and good for nothing—to which

<sup>9</sup> At least the line *vind ek hals á kjúklingum* (p. 37) seems to indicate a confession.



Grettir replies with a proverb: *Illt er at eggja óbilgjarnan* ‘It’s bad to goad the obstinate’ (*Grettis saga*, 38; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 64). Finally he picks up a wool-comb and runs it along Ásmundr’s back. Even his mother is angry with him this time, while relations between Grettir and Ásmundr are not improved by the incident: *Ekki batnaði frændsemi þeira Ásmundar við þetta* (*Grettis saga*, 39), a palpable understatement.

The third job Grettir is given is to look after his father’s horses. This time he tortures Ásmundr’s favourite mare for no better reason than that he wishes to *gera eitthvert þat bellibragð, at Kengálu yrði goldit fyrir útiganginn* ‘play a trick on her to pay her back for staying out all the time’ (*Grettis saga*, 40; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 66). In all three anecdotes, Grettir behaves with gratuitous cruelty, first by killing and maiming innocent animals, and then by wounding his grumpy father, grossly over-reacting to his goading. His torture of the horse seems even more excessive. And, importantly, Grettir’s violence has no purpose: it is meaningless and uncalculated.

Ásdís, however, blames Grettir’s father for constantly assigning to his son tasks which he clearly has neither the wish nor the talent for. So we are left in some doubt as to whether to see Grettir as scoundrel or hero. The final comment of the chapter does not help much:

Mörg bernskubrögð gerði Grettir, þau sem eigi eru í sögu sett. Hann gerðisk nú mikill vexti; eigi vissu menn gørla afl hans, því at hann var óglíminn. Orti hann jafnan vísur ok kviðlinga ok þótti heldr níðskældinn. Eigi lagðisk hann í eldaskála ok var fátalaðr lengstum. (*Grettis saga*, 42)

Grettir played many more pranks in his youth which are not recounted. He grew very big, but no one knew how strong he was, because he was not a wrestler. He often made verses and ditties that tended to be scornful. He did not lounge around in the fire-hall, and he was taciturn most of the time. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 67)

The word *bernskubrögð* ‘childish pranks’ indicates that the reader is not to take the hero’s actions seriously, and this highlights the difference between a child and a grown-up. Nevertheless, Grettir’s behaviour cannot be interpreted as mere wilfulness. His temper is dangerous, and results in the torture of humans and animals.

As Robert Cook (1984–85, 137) has pointed out, these three little episodes leave the reader uncertain ‘whether he has met a tyrannous and unreasonable father, an incorrigible and sadistic ten-year-old, or a budding hero not content with menial tasks’. This uncertainty is, according to Cook, a key factor in the construction of Grettir’s image: it takes time

for the audience to work out whether Grettir is a hero or a prankster. Yet, as Cook demonstrates, in the end Grettir the man turns out much better than we would expect of this hot-tempered and occasionally cruel child, languishing under Ásmundr's cold regime.

A comparison with Egill is inevitable.<sup>10</sup> *Egils saga* is earlier than *Grettis saga*, and as it was both popular and influential, the audience of *Grettis saga* could be expected to be familiar with the ungovernable boy Egill. Unlike Egill, Grettir does not kill a man in his childhood. However, one might suppose that venting his anger against animals is even less in the heroic mode. Egill's 'pranks' are 'cleaner' than Grettir's: he kills with a swift blow while Grettir flays first his father and then the beloved horse. Egill strikes Grímr in the heat of the moment, only after having wrestled with him, and does not instigate the bloody fight with Skalla-Grímr, while Grettir attacks animals who cannot defend themselves, and his old father, whose back is turned to him. Unlike Egill, Grettir has no allies in his mischief. His mother is his closest friend and yet she does not condone his pranks.

Egill and Grettir are both engaged in a fight against parental authority, in each case represented by a cold and hostile father. Both are uncontrollable and so excessive in their anger that they constitute a threat to those around them. Both have difficult relationships with their fathers but loving ones with their mothers. However, their fortunes turn out to be vastly different. In spite of all his faults, Egill becomes a chieftain, a warrior, a court poet and a very rich man. Grettir, on the other hand, ends up as a fugitive and an outlaw. Is this due to the whims of fortune or is society to blame? Egill is a step above Grettir on the social ladder. He competes with kings, whereas Grettir is persecuted by farmers in Iceland. Egill also gains important friends and benefactors, most notably Arinbjörn, while Grettir is friendless, and even well-wishers like the lawspeaker Skapti Þóroddsson cannot protect him. Perhaps the most important difference is that Egill lives in a society where the powerful seem to make their own rules, while Grettir is a misfit in a society ruled by the wise rather than the brave.

And yet who is the better man in the end? While we see Egill turning into a vindictive old man who plans to make the Icelandic élite fight over his silver at the Alþing, Grettir matures into an unlucky and misunderstood benefactor of the community, who alone can defend it against

<sup>10</sup> Stein-Wilckshuijs emphasises the difference rather than the similarities by classifying Grettir as a *kolbíttr* (78–79) but Egill as a prodigy (1970, 88–90).

ghosts and monsters and yet receives nothing but scorn from most people. Grettir is as useful in adulthood as he was useless in childhood. Egill's luck is certainly better, but it is in fact he who remains the brutal egotistical child throughout his life, while we discern none of Grettir's childish cruelty in the mature Grettir.

Since the childhood episodes in *Grettis saga* invite comparison with those of *Egils saga*, one of their functions may be to depict one hero and his fate in the light of another. While Egill is in the end more successful, Grettir may be the moral winner in terms of maturity. He does not manage to rise above all his faults, most importantly the lack of restraint commented on by King Óláfr helgi (*Grettis saga*, 133–34), but as an adult he nevertheless seems more mature than Egill, fighting berserks and ogres for the sake of others, while Egill is forever looking out for himself. The child Grettir is fundamentally different from the man, while the adult Egill retains some of his childlike qualities into his old age.

##### 5. *Finnboga saga*

As Paul Schach (1977) has remarked, the 'generation gap' is a theme in many Sagas of Icelanders; but the gap usually involves conflict between a grown son and his ageing father (see de Vries 1953). There are other instances, however, in addition to those of Egill and Grettir, of the hostility of a father to his young son. Most of these narratives are far less subtle. *Finnboga saga ramma* is the story of an unwanted child prodigy whose situation resembles Grettir's and Egill's in some respects. Like the children discussed above, Finnbogi is underestimated, but although he is precocious, he does not seem to be dangerous to the world of adults.

The story starts when Finnbogi's father Ásbjörn instructs his pregnant wife, Þorgerðr, to expose her baby to the elements. This is his revenge on her for having married their daughter to a Norwegian without his consent. Luckily the child is saved by the ugly and poor Syrpa, who raises him under the name Urðarkottr. Like Egill and Grettir, Finnbogi is soon as big and strong as boys twice his age. Everyone seems to know that he is not Syrpa's son, and his real mother is kind to him, while his father is indifferent (*Finnboga saga*, 257–58).

At a tender age he manages to draw a huge fish onto the shore, and this feat becomes famous. However, he is by and large unpopular for being unruly, for hitting his mother's servants and causing uproar at Eyrr. Finally he is noticed by the lawspeaker Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði, who perceives instantly that this is not just a precocious but also a noble

child—a theme easily recognisable from *Geirmundar þáttr* and many a childhood episode in the Kings' Sagas (see Hansen 2003). Then the truth comes out, Finnbogi is reunited with his real parents and his mother is delighted. For a while his father remains distant. Unlike Skalla-Grímr and Ásmundr, however, he finally begins to soften. Later, the relations between father and son become more amicable (*Finnboga saga*, 259–67).

*Finnboga saga* is in many ways a highly conventional narrative. It has generic affinities with the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, and is less realistic in style than many Sagas of Icelanders. Its main subject is the rise of Finnbogi to unparalleled fame and excellence. Although a foundling, he is never a coalbiter. His worth is obvious from the outset; all that is needed is a wise and generous patron like Þorgeirr to right Finnbogi's wrongs and return him to his proper status. Unlike many foundlings, he has been well treated by his poor and ugly foster-parents, and his father, though the cause of his misfortune, does not fight against his reinstatement and quickly becomes affectionate towards his son.

*Finnboga saga* is not a psychologically subtle narrative, and Finnbogi's character is much less problematic than Egill's or Grettir's. Whether he is depicted as a 'small adult' is hard to say, but the narrative lacks the complexity of the other saga portrayals of children. Nevertheless, what happens to Finnbogi reveals what a contemporary audience might have expected for Egill or Grettir. It is the success story which serves as the obverse of the harsh reality they are faced with. Egill has to flee from his father and they never become friends, although they refrain in the end from fighting. There is no Þorgeirr goði or Earl Hákon to raise him to his proper status. This he has to achieve on his own. Grettir's fate is even worse. Although he rises to be the defender of the defenceless against ghosts and berserks, his considerable abilities are never acknowledged or put to their proper use by society, even though they are gradually revealed to the saga audience.

These three troublesome boys mature into the subjects of three vastly different tales; the tale of Finnbogi is told in the comic or adventurous mode, the story of Grettir is tragic, whilst Egill survives and ends up rich and famous, in spite of being perhaps the least mature of the three in his adulthood.

#### 6. *Dangerous innocents*

The common denominator of these examples is that children are not to be underestimated or ignored. They indicate that the authors of the Sagas of Icelanders were not only aware of the existence of children, but in

some instances saw them as different, dangerous and unpredictable. In all these cases, children are very much a force to be reckoned with.

Why are these children in the Sagas of Icelanders portrayed as rebellious, disruptive and potentially dangerous? Being children, they lack the necessary wisdom or experience to show prudence and self-control, but in some cases their behaviour is also very much a reaction to the way they are treated by adults. While leaving the ultimate explanations to their audience, the authors of the sagas at least show considerable awareness of the fact that children are not always weak and easy to deal with, but sometimes potent, dangerous, strange and different.

In *Brennu-Njáls saga*, two irreverent innocents cause uproar by turning the serious business of adults into a game, only to disappear into obscurity. In contrast, we meet a sweet and delightful girl with thief's eyes who is much better behaved but ultimately more sinister. In this case the child is not dangerous in the present, but brings promise of a dangerous future (see Mundal 1988). In *Egils saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Finnboga saga* the focus is on boys who are the future protagonists of the sagas, and their rebellion against parental authority. The narrative of Finnbogi is a success story, whereas Egill and Grettir rebel in a decidedly childish way. Psychological explanations for their rebelliousness, such as the need to gain the attention of an indifferent father, are hinted at. All three narratives reveal that self-control is believed to be an important sign of maturity. The rebellious child is frequently lacking in self-control, and tends to overreact to a real or imagined injustice. We see how father and son are bound to clash. But we also see how differently the young rebels may fare in later life, depending in part on how they learn to fit into adult society, but in part on luck and social status.

Episodes in which a child plays an important role are unfortunately few and far between in the sagas, but the examples discussed here have a common theme of danger, which in some cases is connected to rebelliousness. Although childish rebelliousness is not prominent in saga literature, a number of sagas concern the reactions of the younger generation to parental authority.<sup>11</sup> Here, influence from European romances might be discernible; it has been argued that they were viewed as the literature of the younger generation in the thirteenth century (see Fidjestøl 1997). Even in a relatively stable society, the younger generation tends

<sup>11</sup> This is a recurrent theme in the poets' sagas, which deal with the loves of young poets and their quest for fame in the service of kings and princes (see for example Sverrir Tómasson 1998), and are beyond the scope of this inquiry.

to be unpredictable and potentially dangerous, on account of its dissatisfaction with its present role. This is illustrated in the cases of Egill and Grettir as children. The rise of a new generation must thus always be a cause for concern.

The rebelliousness of children is nevertheless of a different kind from this theme of youthful rebellion. In the cases of Egill and Grettir we see the immature reaction of a child to a cold and indifferent father. Some of Egill's 'pranks' relate to dissatisfaction with his role in the household, but in other instances he simply cannot control his childish rage. Grettir's misbehaviour also arises from the combination of a childish temperament and an undistinguished place in society. This, tragically, continues to deny Grettir his proper place as he grows up, even though his reactions become more mature and subtle.

The narratives of Egill and Grettir indicate that even though some children are born difficult, they will become even more so if they are treated with hostility or indifference. *Njáls saga* adds another dimension, suggesting that even if children are not deliberate rebels, they may be unwittingly disruptive, like the two poor boys who create havoc through a silly game. *Njáls saga* also draws our attention to the fact that a child may seem beautiful and obedient, and yet be no less dangerous, bearing a hidden promise of future mischief.

Medieval sources about children do not originate among children themselves (see Orme 2001, 338), and neither are children the most probable implied audience of medieval narratives. There is thus of necessity an element of otherness about children in medieval literature. When adults face a child, they feel that they ought to understand him or her. After all, adults have experienced childhood, and are supposedly wiser than children. One might assume that although a child cannot understand the mind of an adult, an adult must know the mind of a child, having once possessed it. But is this really so? The fact is that we cannot be sure, because we have lost the child in us, and it cannot be reclaimed. Consequently, childish logic and thought become strange and unfamiliar. Although we have all been children, most of us gradually lose our contact with a child's way of thinking, and, if we reflect upon it, we feel a little uneasiness when facing a child. We feel that we should understand the child, even though he or she is incapable of understanding us. And yet we cannot be sure, and even children who are very close to us remain an enigma. Children retain the ability to surprise, even if we know them well, and even if most adults have ceased to be surprising.

It is this aura of otherness which makes it reasonable to regard children as strange, unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Although the authors of the Sagas of Icelanders did not enjoy the benefit of knowing the works of modern authorities on the psychology of children, such as Jean Piaget (1926), they have nevertheless left us some sensitive and realistic portrayals of childhood, which seem to indicate that they were well aware of the otherness and the potential danger of their little ones, even though they had no means but narrative to expand upon the subject.

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*LOF EN EIGI HÁÐ?*  
THE RIDDLE OF *GRETTIS SAGA* VERSE 14

BY RUSSELL POOLE

*GRETTIS SAGA*, LIKE *GÍSLA SAGA SÚRSSONAR*, features as protagonist a verse-making outlaw.<sup>1</sup> The verses attributed to Grettir are elusive and cryptic in a manner that seems to befit the outlaw condition. Likewise, the mythological allusions and resonances found in them are perhaps appropriate for a hero whose partly self-willed, partly inadvertent opposition to society puts him in need of support from supernatural forces or from human beings whose behaviour somehow re-enacts mythological patterns. The intrinsic interest of such verses would seem to need no defence. Yet they have suffered systematic neglect by contrast with those attributed to Gísli, let alone the more celebrated poet-heroes Kormákr and Egill. A key factor in this is the virtually universal scholarly verdict that the verses in *Grettis saga* were not authentically composed by the characters named in the saga, but are rather of quite late composition (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, xxxii–xlii). This verdict is based on sound metrico-linguistic evidence and is not likely to need reconsideration. At the same time, though, it must be affirmed that ‘late’ does not necessarily mean ‘derivative’, ‘mechanically imitative’, ‘decadent’, or ‘uninteresting’ (see Guðrún Nordal 2001, Meulengracht Sørensen 2001b, 289).

Rather than apologising for their lateness and branding them as ‘anti-quarian’, we can put the verses of *Grettis saga* into a broader Scandinavian context where traditional poetics continued to flourish. In Iceland there was the renewed cultivation of skaldic and eddic poetry, which is thought to have begun in the twelfth century and to have lasted well into the fourteenth, if not longer, covering the period during which this saga

<sup>1</sup> I should like to express my gratitude to Richard Perkins, who arranged a preliminary presentation of the ideas in this article at a seminar at University College London in April 2002, as also to Alison Finlay, Richard North, David Reid and others who contributed comment and critique; to the Massey University Overseas Duties Fund and the Viking Society Research Support Fund; and to Ólafur Halldórsson and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson for access to Ólafur’s transcription of AM 551a, 4<sup>o</sup>. I should like to dedicate this article to the memory of Hermann Pálsson, who has done so much to stimulate debate on *Grettis saga*.

gained its written form (Guðrún Nordal 2001). Meanwhile, runic remains in Bergen confirm that at least as late as the thirteenth century the preservation and composition of verses in skaldic and eddaic forms continued as a living tradition in Norway (Marold 1998).

Side by side with this continuation of traditional poetics, an active practice of telling stories of the heathen gods and other associated figures must have persisted. Margaret Clunies Ross has credibly argued that in Iceland such myths and legends continued to form an element in social practice for several centuries after the Conversion (1994 and 1998). One of the runic finds at Bergen suggests that a familiarity with these stories, specifically an episode from the story of Baldr, informed the cultivation of poetics in Norway as well (see Frank 1978, 169–70 and 179–81). As to Denmark, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has seen reason to postulate that the active cultivation of legends told in eddaic style, as in *Bjarkamál*, continued in some centres down to Saxo's time and perhaps beyond (2001a, 145). Stories like that of Hagbarðr and Signý, attested in Saxo's adaptation and alluded to by Kormákr, might have retained currency right down to the rise of Danish balladry. The continued transmission of such legends presupposes a continuing interest in the properties and acts of the heathen gods, notably Óðinn, a point I shall discuss in more detail presently. Concomitantly, it would seem that an active mythopoeia, based upon traditional heathen story materials, persisted into the later Middle Ages. Grettir himself is a protagonist ideally suited to the continuation of mythopoeia. The stories told of him, as I shall presently illustrate, suggest that he was constructed as an amalgam of heathen gods. More or less with Kirsten Hastrup (1986) we could posit an active practice of mythopoeia that rethinks ancient archetypes in terms of current social dynamics.

These, in essence, are some reasons why we might nowadays take a renewed interest in the verses in *Grettis saga*. Certainly the intrinsic interest of the verses would have been self-evident to the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Grettir enthusiasts who collected and assembled materials towards the saga text we now have. Aside from the copious genealogical lore that forms part of the package in most sagas, *Grettis saga* is notably rich in folklore, aetiological stories, proverbs and references to other sagas (de Looze 1991, Sigurður Nordal 1938, 4). The saga bids fair, moreover, to rival Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* as a collection of proverbial wisdom. The proverbs, most of which are spoken by the protagonist, complement or rival the verses in their witty, ironic, sardonic and cryptic qualities, and, to add to these commonalities, one of the

verses (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 50, v. 12) is itself based on a proverb.<sup>2</sup>

Remarkable for their sheer number, the verses often give the impression of being pieces with some previous history or context that have been ‘anthologised’ into the saga text. The prose narrative states, for instance, that the dialogue verses in which Grettir and one Sveinn dispute possession of a mare, conventionally entitled *Søðulkolluvisur*, were pressed into employment as part of an evening’s entertainment soon after their composition (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 148–52, vv. 31–37). When we know or suspect that other verses in similar format were intended from the outset for recitation turn and turn about as part of an evening’s entertainment (Davidson 1983, Gunnell 1995), it is reasonable to suggest that the *Søðulkolluvisur* have similar origins, which became disguised or fictionalised in the saga narration. Comparable is the *Grettisfærsla*, which in *Grettis saga* is mentioned and assigned to a specific ‘originary’ occasion but (prudently?) not cited (Ólafur Halldórsson 1960). All the verses referred to so far have sexual overtones, if not explicitly sexual themes, and we could add to their number vv. 15–16 and 64–65, which similarly look like general-purpose ribaldry that has been assigned a narrative context *ex post facto*.

Another notable cluster in the saga consists of sundry verses of the *ævikviða* type (though they are not identified as such), composed in either *kviðuháttir* or *dróttkvætt* form. The accompanying prose informs us that one such series was set down in runes (Jón Helgason 1953, 142), an embellishment that suggests antiquarian interests on the part of the author of the prose narrative. That would sit naturally with an author who had marked collecting and anthologising propensities.

The verses that I wish to concentrate on in particular in this article exhibit all the characteristics to which I have been drawing attention: they are aphoristic, they are eminently quotable and collectable, and they contain an intriguing combination of the mythological and the enigmatic. I shall begin by considering two of the *kviðuháttir* stanzas. The very choice of this form indicates some special contact with and predilection for ancient story materials.

Vas Þorfinnr  
Þundar sessi

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article the enumeration in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936 is used. Verses cited are from the editions specified, with modifications in normalisation and punctuation.

aldar alinn  
 oss til hjalpar,  
 þás mik víf  
 í valskorum  
 lukt ok læst  
 lífs of kvaddi.

Vas stórskip  
 stallgoðs bana  
 Rauðahafs  
 ok Regins skáli  
 es Býleists  
 bróðurdóttur  
 manna mest  
 mér varnaði.

(*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 86, vv.  
 22 and 23)

Porfinnr, the benchmate of Óðinn's people, was born to help us, when Hel ('woman locked up and confined to the region of the slain') claimed my life.

It was the big ship (= *drómundr*) of the killer of the cliff-god (Pórr) of the Red Sea and the hall of Reginn (*steinn*, stone) who, most of men, shielded me from the daughter of Loki (Hel).

The first half of verse 23 is virtually a riddle or charade, to be solved as 'Þorsteinn drómundr'. Some elements are straightforward, as the above analysis shows. The 'giant-killer' is easily recognisable as *Pórr* and the 'rock' ('hall of the dwarf') stands for 'stone', so supplying the name Þorsteinn. The 'large ship' stands for *drómundr*, supplying Þorsteinn's nickname. The verse becomes more enigmatic when we try to assign and interpret the word *Rauðahafs*. Does it refer to the Mediterranean, where the type of vessel called the *drómundr* was used? Or is the reference to the mythical 'Red Sea' at the circumference of the world, where the giants dwelt on their cliffs (see Meissner 1936 for discussion of this possibility)? Or both, in an *apo koinou*? In both verses we also hear of Hel, who in heathen mythology presided over the abode of the dead and was the daughter of Loki. She will turn out to have a strong presence in the verses of this saga. All the allusions to the heathen gods and giants are rather more living and rather less compacted into regular predictable kennings than is the norm.

A second set of *kviðuháttir* verses attests to a similar association of the mythological (or legendary) and the enigmatic:

Sögðu mér,  
 þau's Sigarr veitti,  
 mægða laun

margir hæfa,  
unz lofgróinn  
laufi sœmðar  
reynirunn  
rekkar fundu.

Mundak sjalfr  
í snöru egnða  
helzti brátt  
höfði stinga  
ef Þorbjörg  
þessu skaldi—  
hon 's allsnotr—  
eigi byrgi.

Mik bað hjölp  
handa tveggja  
Sifjar vers  
með sér fara.  
Sú gaf þveng  
Þundar beðju  
góðan hest,  
es mik gæddi friði.

(*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 171–72,  
vv. 40–42)

Many said that the reward for an in-law that Sigarr handed out ('hanging') would be fitting for me, until men encountered the rowan tree, laudably sprouting with the leafage of honour.

I would have had to stick my head there and then in the baited noose if Þorbjörg had not rescued this skald—she is a most sagacious woman.

The help of the two hands of Sif's husband told me to go with her; she gave the thong of Óðinn's bedmate ('snake', therefore 'Grettir') a good horse when she procured me safe conduct.

These stanzas, with their background in *Ynglingatal*, that quintessential catalogue of the 'ways of death', are rich in allusions to a peculiarly Odinic form of death and sacrifice, hanging on the gallows. Even the use of the Óðinn-name Þundr in verse 42 is consistent with this preoccupation. In Danish legend (I shall use Icelandic name forms here), Sigarr condemned Hagbarðr, the suitor of his daughter Signý, to be hanged. Hence the gallows can be referred to in kennings as *Sigars hestr*, 'Sigarr's horse'. Grettir's observation that Þorbjörg has provided him with a 'good horse' has a certain cryptic wit in such an ominous context. We might even wonder about the *þveng* in the kenning and how far an echo from *snara* would have been detected by the audience. Grettir's peculiar jeopardy here is of a specific kind that recurs in the saga. Hanging appears

to have rated as an irregular penalty in medieval Icelandic law (Nordal 1998, 200–03), though for Grettir, as an inveterate thief, it would have been traditionally appropriate.

Meanwhile the allusions to the god Þórr stem from the story that he escaped drowning in a swollen river by clinging on to a rowan tree. In tribute to this timely assistance it gained the name *Þórs björg* ('Þórr's salvation'), which is nearly identical to the name of Þorbjörg, Grettir's helper in his current crisis. If there is an element of enigma in the verse-making here it is heightened by the fact that a cryptic reference to the story is placed in verse 40, before the spelling-out that occurs in verses 41 and 42. To this extent, then, Grettir is styled upon Þórr, but the allusion is no simple imposition of the giant-killer's exploits on to a hero of the post-settlement era. Rather, associations with Þórr and Óðinn are conflated, and once again we are dealing not with formulaic kennings but with little periphrases where the original story material still asserts itself.

Another stanza that illustrates similar tendencies is addressed to Grettir's sparring partner Auðunn:

Eigi veitk nema útan  
 Jalfaðr at þér sjölfum  
 kverkr fyr kapp ok orku—  
 kvelling es þat—svelli;  
 svá bannaði sinnir  
 seim-Gauts, þás vask heima,  
 ungum endr fyr lǫngu  
 ákall þinul fjalla.

(*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 97–98, v. 26)

I cannot tell other than if, Auðunn (Jalfaðr = Óðinn = Auðunn), your own throat is swelling from outside for your bravery and efforts. That is a torment. In just that way, long since, when I was at home, the befriender of the rich (Auðunn) suppressed my outcry ('of the net-rope of the fells' = 'snake' = Grettir).

This stanza is embedded in a prose exchange (ch. 28) that presupposes that Grettir is addressing one Barði Guðmundarson. Auðunn is described as a choker or strangler and, as is seen, we learn in the verse that Grettir had nearly fallen victim to the same behaviour on Auðunn's part in an earlier episode. But if we go back to the episode in question (ch. 15), we find no corroboration for that accusation. In one manuscript Grettir is shown as injured when Auðunn forces his knee into Grettir's abdomen, but although such an assault could cause winding it hardly amounts to a case of asphyxiation. The other manuscripts do not commit themselves. Strangely, though, Skeggi, in the altercation with Grettir that immediately follows, interprets Auðunn's action as a kind of suffocation (ch. 16):

Skeggi mælti: 'Of fjarri er nú Auðunn at kyrkja þik, sem við knattleikinn.' 'Vel er þat,' sagði Grettir, 'en eigi muntu mik kyrkja, hvern veg sem hitt hefir verit.' (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 46)

Skeggi remarked: 'Auðunn is too far away now to strangle you as he did at the ball game.' 'That is all very well,' said Grettir, 'but you are certainly not going to strangle me, whatever may have happened then.' (Fox and Pálsson 1974, 30)

To add to the puzzle of this strangling, the syntax of the first *helmingr* of verse 26 is difficult to sort out conclusively. *Jalfaðr* could be nominative or vocative, *kverkr* nominative or accusative, *svelli* intransitive or causative and also singular or plural! Finnur Jónsson wished to separate the two *helmingar* (*Skj B I* 288, v. 3), with the outcome that the first *helmingr* is directed to Auðunn, using the second person, and the second to Barði (or some other interlocutor), referring to Auðunn in the third person. Guðni Jónsson understands the stanza as signifying that Auðunn grips Barði's throat, and Kock appears to have accepted this interpretation (1946–50, I 147), so too Mörður Árnason (*Grettis saga* 1994, 73). But the words *fyr kapp ok orku* are most readily referred back to Auðunn himself, in light of the idiomatic association between swelling and emotions, an excess of which would be plausibly attributable to him in context (cf. Cleasby–Vigfússon, s. *svella*). To sum up, in one view of the transitivity relationships Auðunn is swelling the throats of others, in the other view it is his own throat that he is swelling.

The verse contains *ofljóst* on the two proper names Auðunn (= Óðinn) and Grettir (= 'snake'). The sole plausible explanation of the *heiti Jalfaðr* is as 'shouter, crier, roarer' (de Vries 1977, s. *jölfuðr*). As to *ákall*, Cleasby–Vigfússon define the word as 'clamour, shouting' or 'a claim, demand', in good agreement with Fritzner, but also add 'invocation (to God)'. Whatever the authority of the latter gloss, the etymological meaning of *Jalfaðr* appears to have been within the poet's awareness, another sign that attunement to mythology as well as to traditional poetic diction is involved here.

The combination of an interest in Óðinn and the motif of throttling or being throttled suggests the presence of an allusion to *Bjarkamál*. Versions of that poem appear to have contained a curse upon Óðinn, whose treachery is a key feature of the story. In one of the few stanzas to be preserved, the speaker says:

Svá skalk hann kyrkja  
sem enn kámleita  
véli viðbjarnar  
veggja aldinna.  
(*Skj B I* 171, v. 7)

I shall throttle him just as the black [cat] ensnares the mouse ('the wood-bear of ancient walls').

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, a work whose extant redaction cannot be earlier than the fourteenth century, we see a further reflex of this motif when Þoðvarr wishes he could throttle the treacherous deity like a disgusting little mouse (ch. 33).

I would see verse 14 of the saga, the main focus of this article, as another in which the enigmatic and the mythological are combined, and as a further plausible example of a verse curiosity or collectable that may have attracted the attention of antiquarian minds. We can start by briefly considering the context of the stanza in the saga narrative. Purportedly Grettir composes it to meet a request to mock and praise his skipper, Hafliði, in one and the same set of words. The purpose of this verbal chicanery is in some devious and twisted way to placate the traders on board Hafliði's ship, who have been enraged by Grettir's facility at dodging tasks and flinging barbed *kviðlingar*. The prose narrative runs as follows:

'Slíkt er ógeranda,' sagði Hafliði. 'Mun oss aldri vel gefa ef þér berizk þetta fyrir. Mun ek leggja ráð til með þér.'

'Hvert er þat?' sagði Grettir.

'Þeir finna at við þik, at þú níðir þá. Nú vil ek,' sagði Hafliði, 'at þú kveðir til mín nokkura níðvísu, ok má vera at þeir umberi betr við þik.'

'Aldri kveð ek til þín,' sagði Grettir, 'útan gott. Geri ek þik ekki líkan kyrpingum.'

Hafliði mælti: 'Kveða má svá at fegri sé vísan, ef grafin er, þótt fyrst sé eigi allfögr.'

'Þetta hefi ek ok nægst til,' sagði Grettir.

Hafliði fór til þeira skipverja, þar sem þeir váru at ausa, ok mælti: 'Mikit er erfiði yðvart ok ván at yðr líki illa við Gretti.'

'Verri þykkja oss kviðlingar hans en hvatvetna annat,' segja þeir.

Hafliði mælti þá hátt: 'Hann mun ok illa af því fara um síðir.'

En er Grettir heyrir Hafliða ámæla sér, kvað hann vísu.

(*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 52)

'That must never happen,' said Hafliði. 'Matters will never turn out well if this is your attitude, but I can give you some advice.'

'What is that?' said Grettir.

'They blame you for lampooning them,' said Hafliði, 'and so I would like you to compose an insulting verse about myself, for it may be that this will make them tolerate you the better.'

'I will never make verses about you,' said Grettir, 'unless they be honest ones. I'm not going to put you on a level with these numbskulls.'

Hafliði said, 'You can make the verse in such a way that it seems abusive at first sight although it is in fact complimentary when it has been studied more closely.'



‘That’s easy to manage,’ said Grettir.

Hafliði went up to the men who were bailing, and said, ‘Hard is your toil, and one might guess that you have no love for Grettir.’

‘We find his lampooning even worse than everything else,’ they said.

Hafliði said in a loud voice, ‘It will turn out badly for him in the end.’

When Grettir heard Hafliði blaming him, he said [and then the verse is cited]. (Fox and Pálsson 1974, 33)

The text of the verse itself is as follows, with AM 551 a (in Ólafur Halldórs-son’s transcription) as copy-text:

Annat var þá er inni  
át Hafliði drafla  
—hann þóttisk þá heima—  
hvellr at Reyðarfelli,  
ok dagverðar darra  
dómskreytandi neytir  
tysvar tveggja nesja  
tak/reins degi einum.

Variants are as follows (information, except as noted above, is taken from *Skj* A II 433–34): 1. annat AM 551 a, AM 152, Delag 10; annar AM 556. er inni 551, 10; inni at 556, at inni 152. 5. ok 551, 152, 10; enn 556. dagvidar 551; dagverðar 152, 556, 10. darra 551, 556, 10; dryckia 152. 6. dom 551 (followed by a space before the next word); doms 556, 10; dæmm 152. skreyt- 551, 556, 152; skreyf- 10. tveggja 551, 556, 10; tueura 152. 8. reins 551; hreins 556; hreims 10; hreinn 152.

Before proceeding to detailed discussion of the stanza we need to assess how much credibility the talk of ambiguity in the saga prose might have, since our interpretations will inevitably be coloured by our views on this issue. Simply to ignore the saga prose would be rash, in my opinion. For one thing, if we assent to the prevailing view that this stanza, like its counterparts elsewhere in the saga, is not especially old, there would have been correspondingly less opportunity for understandings of it to have become confused (though of course that does not exclude the possibility of a playful or mischievous misconstruction). Elsewhere in the saga, the author does not merely evince what we would nowadays regard as a sound analytic understanding of the constituent verses but tends to lay emphasis on his own understanding. Additionally, as we have seen, several other verses in the saga have their own share of the enigmatic or equivocal. An instance is verse 11, where the author builds on what is indisputably the correct interpretation, namely that it contains witty prevarications on Grettir’s instrumentality in the killing of Skeggi. While Þorkell

krafla draws the correct conclusions, the less informed members of Grettir's audience are shown putting an idiotically mistaken construction on the hero's veiled language—namely, that a troll has perpetrated the killing. A similar interest in skaldic interpretation, in a similar context and with similar subject-matter, is evinced by *Gísla saga* (see Harris 1993).

It may have been, as John Lindow (1975) has maintained, that skaldic verses were understood and interpreted from time immemorial as a kind of enigmatic utterance that serves to discriminate between an in-group, who comprehend, like Hafliði and Grettir himself, and an out-group, who do not (like the traders in this episode). But it is more likely that in this and kindred sagas the motivation for citing tricky interpretations lay in the resurgence in Iceland of a vernacular type of learning founded on skaldic poetry. A well-known expression of this interest occurs in the *Málskrúðsfræði* (or *Third Grammatical Treatise*) of Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson (1884, 84 and 197–98; see Guðrún Nordal 2001, 182). The author of *Grettis saga* appears to have something in common with the method of Óláfr when he cites 'specimen' verses for their intrinsic interest as examples of equivocation and ambiguity. The difference from the grammatical treatise is naturally that in the saga the verse-making has the added ingredient of drama in the presentation, whereas the element of explication is correspondingly played down.

Not merely Grettir's verses but also his prose utterances tend to deal in equivocation. Laurence de Looze (1991, 95) has pointed out how, for instance, rather than lie outright to the berserks in chapter 19,

he chooses to speak to [them] in an enigmatic fashion that is open to two different interpretations . . . Again we are confronted with the ambiguity of the riddling voice which Grettir used to taunt his father.

As de Looze also points out, an interest in the workings of language is made explicit when Grettir tells Þórir that *orða sinna á hverr ráð*, 'everyone chooses his own words'.

None of these considerations positively proves that the author of the prose narration is correct in detecting ambiguity in verse 14, and we shall have to think further about this problem presently, but they should lead us to attach some weight to his views. So perhaps might the author's habits as a collector of notable verses, discussed above.

With these preliminary points in mind, we can attempt an analysis of verse 14. The first *helmingr* is comparatively straightforward:

It was a different thing when Hafliði loudly ate his curds—he felt at home at Reyðarfell—

As to the second *helmingr*, the most obvious interpretation would run as follows:

And the warrior ('embellisher of the assembly of spears') enjoys a morning meal on board ship ('reindeer allotted two headlands') twice a day.

Neither *helmingr*, as translated here, appears to contain any ambiguity, which puts these interpretations in conflict with the saga prose. Before proceeding further, I shall review scholarly attempts to resolve this and other problems associated with the stanza. We can start with Jón Þorkelsson (1871, 8–9), who explains the contrast between Haflíði's past and present as lying in the fact that whereas formerly he ate very poor food at home (all the time thinking himself well looked after) now he does much better, from a dietary standpoint, on board ship. In the second *helmingr* Jón takes *darra dómskreytandi*, 'ornamenter of the judgement of arrows', as a kenning for 'warrior'. The longer series of genitive-case nouns, *tveggja nesja takhreins*, 'reindeer whose stamping ground is two headlands', is explained as a kenning for 'ship', governing *dagverðar*, hence 'a ship's mess or meal'. That yields an affirmative meaning, satisfying the requirement that the verse should contain praise: Haflíði is a substantial fellow who gets the benefit of two morning meals a day. To obtain a negative meaning, so as to satisfy the requirement for an insult, Jón detaches *darra* from the former kenning and takes *dómskreytandi* on its own to mean someone whose presence enhances a *þing*, as that of a lawspeaker or *goði* would do. Such a kenning would, however, be difficult or impossible to parallel, at least in the present state of our knowledge. Then, combining *darra* with *dagverðar*, Jón explains this phrase as a kenning for 'battle', perhaps on the basis of kennings such as Egill's *náttverð ara* 'supper of the eagle' (*Höfuðlausn* v. 10; *Skj B I* 32), or *odda messa* 'mass of the spears' in *Krákumál* (v. 11; *Skj B I* 651). These, we can note parenthetically, would not be convincing parallels, since in the Egill type logically the determinant needs to be a predator of some kind (*ara*), not a weapon (*darra*), and the referent is the slain, not battle. While it true that skalds (and others) can refer to a weapon as 'biting' (i.e. piercing) its unlucky victim, there does not appear to be any series of kennings formed from the conceit 'slain as food of the sword'. Similarly, in the *Krákumál* type the semantic facet of *messa* on which the kenning is built is that of 'singing', not 'eating' (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1931, s. *messa*, and Meissner 1921, 197–98). Jón's analysis leaves *tveggja nesja takhreins* to be accounted for as an adverbial genitive ('on a ship/on board ship'). The overall interpretation is as follows: 'This splendid man now fights (or prepares to fight) twice on the same day on his ship'—with the

suggestion that the fighting might consist of casual skirmishes with Vikings and pirates who infest the seas (see the verses referring to this problem cited in Jesch 2001, 56 and 66; note also p. 229). Jón offers this negative signification tentatively, and rightly so, since, quite aside from the weaknesses in it detailed above, it is difficult to see what could be insulting about it. If Hafliði really attacks Vikings twice a day, such fortitude would surely be to his credit. Finally, Jón suggests creating a firmer logical bridge between the two *helmingar* by emending the manuscript reading *ok* (variant *enn*) to *þá* or *nú*.

Richard Boer (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1900, 58), while recognising the associated difficulties, essentially goes along with Jón's ideas on the second *helmingr*. He adopts Jón's conjectured *nú* into his text and also makes a marginal improvement by applying the notion of the adverbial genitive to both the affirmative and the negative interpretation, so that the meal is just a meal, not a ship's mess. Where Boer differs most from Jón is on the first *helmingr*, which means to him that although Hafliði was noisy at home all the reward he gained for these vocal exertions was pap or other degrading food. That could certainly be an insult, but then where would the praise lie?

Finnur Jónsson (*Skj B II 465*, v. 12) returned to manuscript *ok*, rejecting *nú*, but himself emended *neytir* to *neytti*, thus obtaining a preterite; his reasons for doing so are unclear but we could surmise that he was uneasy about the shift in tenses between the first and second *helmingr*. Also emended is *tveggja* to *Tveggi*, giving the nominative form of an Óðinn-name, which is then construed as the base-word of a kenning for 'warrior'. This kenning is taken as in apposition to *skreytandi darra dóm*, '[person] embellishing the judgement of spears'. None of this convinces: aside from the needlessness of the emendations, proven cases of appositions in the classic Old English style are hard to trace in skaldic poetry, and the kenning formation, where *dóm* lacks genitive inflection, is equally suspect. In the first *helmingr* Finnur again goes a different road from his predecessors, taking *hvellr* within the parenthesis, which yields a meaning 'then was he, a man strong of voice, proud to be at home'.

E. A. Kock opposed most of this, not least because Finnur had failed to find the ambiguity spoken of in the prose (1923–44, §1570; 1946–50, II 255, v. 12). In the first *helmingr* Kock essentially follows Jón Porkelsson and Boer, if we ignore an incidental emendation made purely for the sake of the *skothending* in line 3. In the second *helmingr* he concurs with Finnur when he combines the words *Tveggja nesja takhreins* into a kenning for 'sailor' ('Óðinn of the ship'). This kenning would be

governed by *dagverðar*, ‘a sailor’s meal’. As to the ambiguity, Kock proposes that we can regard the allusion to a double meal as either pejorative (implying gluttony) or laudatory (implying a large but fair ration, on the basis that Hafliði, as a dedicated skipper, has been keeping long watches, while others, Grettir conspicuous among them, slept). How we assess this suggestion depends heavily on our knowledge of the cultural values attaching to *dagverðr* and unfortunately these are thinly documented (Ejder 1956–78). Consumed early in the day, the *dagverðr* appears to have customarily been a hearty, substantial meal (see also Cleasby–Vigfússon, s.v.; Fritzner, s.v.; *Lexicon Poeticum*, s.v.; de Vries 1977, s.v.). Although there is some slight evidence that where the *dagverðr* was delayed in favour of special duties or exertions a substitute lighter meal could be consumed at the start of the day, it is far from clear that this was a widespread practice. Nor is it clear how this departure from routine would relate to the verse in *Grettis saga*.

Whether accusations of gluttony could attach to any such extra consumption would be a matter for the ‘eye of the beholder’. Certainly in the Old English Blickling Homily VIII, scandal and condemnation are the lot of those who *heora underngereordu ond æfengereordu . . . mengdon togædere* ‘merged their morning and evening meals together’ (Morris 1967, Homily VIII, line 62). But the attitudes of the homily are likely to have been radically distinct from those incorporated into *Grettis saga* and we cannot assume that any particular moral judgement would be placed upon Hafliði.

Guðni Jónsson (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 52–53) largely follows Kock, except that he sees Hafliði as more explicitly the master of the house in the first *helmingr*. He does not appear to press for the presence of an insult in the verse, perhaps out of scepticism about the prose narrative. Stephen Tranter (1990, 189) in turn follows Kock and Guðni Jónsson in respect of the ‘sailor’s meal’, invoking various phonic and semantic associations of a tenuous nature to account for the element of praise and insult.

Meanwhile Mörður Árnason takes a different route (*Grettis saga* 1994, 38), apparently reviving the views of Jón Porkelsson and Boer when he suggests combining *darra* with *dagverðar* and interpreting this phrase as ‘battle’. He further connects this phrase to *tveggja nesja takhreins*, producing a kenning-like phrase meaning ‘battle at sea’, but such a concatenation is less plausible than the adverbial genitive proposed by the two earlier scholars. Emending *dagvidar*, the newly recognised reading of AM 551, to the expected *dagverðar*, Mörður follows Kock in

assuming the insult to lie in an implication of gluttony, both at sea and on shore.

In the midst of this largely inconclusive discussion a notable new suggestion has been ventured by Jonna Louis-Jensen, as briefly reported by Rolf Stavnem (2000, 33). If somebody is accused of ingesting his morning meal twice a day, it might be, to speak with all due delicacy, that he is envisaged as consuming the one meal twice, once before digestion and once afterwards. That would clearly be a deadly insult. Parallels in saga texts are not readily found, but in an earlier article Louis-Jensen had plausibly conjectured a counterpart in a fragmentary *níðvísa* (1979).

Another approach to the second *helmingr* is indicated by parallel idioms outside *Grettis saga* and the skaldic corpus. It happens that in *Fóstbræðra saga* (1943, 138) we find a closely comparable collocation of key words: *þú neytir fyrr dagverðar á spjóti mínum en á fénu*—literally, ‘you will take a morning meal on my spear before you do on the money’.<sup>3</sup> Commonalities between the relevant passages in *Grettis saga* and *Fóstbræðra saga* include the collocation of *dagverðar* and *darralá spjóti* as well as the verbal phrase *dagverðar + neytir*. The passage in *Fóstbræðra saga* occurs within a dialogue exchange that is a tissue of proverbs and hostile witticisms, very much in the style of dialogue seen in *Grettis saga*. It might also be noted that these two sagas have a great deal else in common, including the account of the dealings between Þorbjörg dígra and Grettir. In sum, *Fóstbræðra saga* has much to offer us if we wish to explain obscurities in *Grettis saga*.

In another passage in *Fóstbræðra saga* (1943, 158–59) there is a corresponding irony on the word *náttverðr*, referring to the evening meal:

Þorgeir ok hans féлага velkði úti í hafi nokkura hríð, sjá at lykðum land fyrir stafni ok kenna Austmenn landið ok er þat Írland. Sýnisk þeim ósýnn friðrinn ef þá rekr þar.

Þorgeirr mælti: ‘Þat er sýnna, ef vér verjumsk vel, at vér fáim nokkurum mǫnnum ærinn náttverð áðr vér erum drepnir ok er þá hæft nøkkut í várri vǫrn.’

Nú kasta þeir akkerum eigi allnær landi ok brjóta upp vápn sín ok búask þeir til bardaga ef þess þyrfti við.

Þorgeirr and his comrades were tossed around out at sea for some time. Finally they see land before their prow and the Norwegians recognise the land and it is Ireland. Prospects of a truce seem poor to them if they are driven in there. Þorgeirr said, ‘There is a better chance, if we defend ourselves well, that we shall supply some men with a sufficient evening meal before we are killed

<sup>3</sup> For the variant reading *spjótsoddi* see *Fóstbræðra saga* 1925–27, 25.

and then there will be something fitting in our defence.’ Now they throw out their anchors not too close to the shore and unpack their weapons and prepare themselves for battle if it proved necessary.

In the event the Irish do not press hostilities, leaving the exact nature of the ‘supper’ prepared for them unspecified. Fritzner (s.v.) classes this usage of *náttverðr* as figurative. The same would no doubt apply to another instance of the word that he does not cite (*Fóstbræðra saga* 1943, 128):

Porgeirr átti øxi breiða, stundar mikla sköfnungsøxi. Hon var snarpegg ok hvöss ok fékk mǫrgum manni øxin náttverð.

Porgeirr had a broad axe, a very large axe with a thin patterned blade. It was sharp-edged and keen and the axe supplied many a man with his evening meal.

Although it is abundantly evident that the axe is not literally being used to procure people an evening meal, the basis of the idiom has been contested. In one analysis it has been seen as arising from a conflation of two originally separate idioms, to give people evening quarters (or *náttból*) and to give the raven its evening meal, both signifying to slay one’s enemies (*Fóstbræðra saga* 1943, 128, n. 3). That seems contrived by contrast with Fritzner’s explanation. What is involved here is not a kenning but an irony on words signifying ‘hospitality’.

These observations lead us to two possible ways of construing the second *helmingr* of verse 14, shown here in graphic form. Underlining indicates words that are pivotal, potentially belonging in one or other of two different groups.

Version 1: compliment.

Ok dagverðar DARRA  
DÓMS SKREYTANDI neytir  
tvisvar tveggja nesja  
*takhreins* degi einum.

And the warrior (‘embellisher of the judgement of spears’) enjoys a morning meal on board ship (‘reindeer with allotment of two headlands’) twice a day.

Version 2: insult.

Ok DAGVERÐAR DARRA  
*dóms skreytandi* neytir  
tvisvar Tveggja nesja  
**takhreins** degi einum.

And the warrior (‘embellisher of the judgement of Tveggi’) enjoys a morning meal of spears on board ship (‘reindeer with allotment of a headland’) twice a day.

The two pivotal words are *darra* and *t/Tveggja*. Let us first consider *darra*.

The complimentary interpretation places *darra* in a straightforward kenning for ‘warrior’, *darra dóms skreytandi*, used with reference to Hafliði. The insulting interpretation places it within a nonce-phrase, *dagverðar darra* (‘meal of spears’). To enjoy a meal of spears, as in Grettir’s verse, would be equivalent to enjoying a meal on a spear, as in *Fóstbræðra saga*.

Elsewhere in *Grettis saga* we see still more gruesome ironies that base themselves on the difference between an expectation of food and the reality of extremely grievous bodily harm. Such is the fate of Grettir’s antagonist Snækollr (ch. 40), who finds a shield kicked into his *snæðings porti* (a kenning for ‘mouth’ that suggests that snacks or morsels are regularly being dispatched into it, like goods into a market town). Skeggi for his part receives axe-blows around the head rather than the desired bag of provisions (ch. 16); to compound the irony, the axe blade is described as a gaping, toothed Grendel-like troll consuming its adversary.

This general type of irony is familiar from other Old Icelandic texts. *Prymskviða*, for example, closes on a taunting note:

Drap hann ina öldnu  
jötna systur,  
hin er brúðfjár  
um beðit hafði;  
hon skell um hlaut  
fyr skillinga,  
en högg hamars  
fyr hringa fjöð.

(*Edda* 1962, 115, v. 32)

He struck the aged sister of the giants, who had requested the dowry; she received a crushing blow instead of precious stones and a stroke of the hammer instead of a mass of rings. (For this interpretation of *skillinga* see McKinnell 2001, 334.)

In a stanza attributed to Torf-Einarr, a representative of the Norwegian king comes to Orkney to collect taxes and is accorded instead—to paraphrase—a ‘tribute of stones’:

Verpið . . .  
skatt velk hánum harðan,  
at Háfætu grjóti.

(*Orkneyinga saga* 1965, 15, v. 5)

Throw stones at Háleggr; I choose hard tribute for him.



Comparable in Old English is the speech in *The Battle of Maldon* where Byrhtnoð tells the Vikings that his men

willað eow to gafole garas syllan,  
ættrynne ord and ealde swurd,  
þa heregeatu þe eow æt hilde ne deah.

(*The Battle of Maldon* 2001, 16, lines 46–48)

mean to give you spears as tribute, lethal points and old swords—that war legacy which does not avail you in battle.

The literally ‘poisonous’ or ‘venomous’ attribute attached to the spear- or arrow-points might well suggest an irony on food consumption similar to that we see in *Grettis saga*, unless we believe that Anglo-Saxons or Vikings used literally poisoned weapons.

The second pivotal word is *t/Tveggja*. Whereas *darra* is capable of just one meaning, *t/Tveggja* is inherently ambiguous. As we have seen, it could mean ‘of two’, as commonly, or alternatively ‘of Tveggi’ (that is, of Óðinn). Previous interpreters have opted for one or other meaning, treating them as alternatives, but in my opinion both are operative.

In the latter application *Tveggja* enters into a straightforward kenning for ‘warrior’, replacing *darra* in that slot and eliminating the problem of *dóms skreytandi*, which is clearly no sort of kenning at all. For ‘battle’ as the *dómr* of Óðinn, a ready comparison lies to hand in *dóm Svǫlnis* (*Skj* B I 525, *Rekstefja* v. 3). Meanwhile, *nesja takhreinn* is a good, if unusual, kenning for ‘ship’, with a close parallel in a probably late verse attributed to Gunnlaugr in *Gunnlaugs saga*, where the defining word is *andnes* (v. 10; see Poole 1981, 474).

In the former application *tveggja* enters into a somewhat unconventional kenning for ‘ship’—‘the reindeer whose allotted stamping-ground is of two headlands’. Conceivably the idea behind the kenning is that the ship is concealed in a cove or even a *leynifjörðr* or *leynivágr* between two headlands. An example of such a configuration of the coastline is found on Dímun, an island south of Dǫgurdarnes, where ships could be concealed between the two prominent *Dímunarklakkar* (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 57).

The phrase (*tveggja*) *nesja takhreins* is in my interpretation an adverbial genitive of location (‘place where’), as proposed by Jón Þorkelsson and reinforced by Boer. Such free uses of the genitive seem to have been handy when skalds were attempting elaborate effects, such as the ambiguity seen here.

If the stanza contains ambiguity the poet displays particular ingenuity in devising it so that it relies at least in part on the interpretation of

the word *tveggja*. The presence of ‘two’ meanings or ‘doubleness’ of interpretive possibilities would then be the key to the total import of the stanza. When one reads *Tveggja*, the Óðinn-name, the lexical selection becomes if anything still more piquant, since Óðinn himself is an ambiguous, two-faced, duplicitous, self-disguising figure. Juxtaposition with *tysvar* reinforces this effect. Elsewhere too there is something teasing and ambiguous about the use of this Óðinn *heiti*, as one sees by comparison with *Völuspá* v. 63, where editors are uncertain how to construe the word *tveggja* (see *Völuspá* 1923, 147). A loose parallel to this highly self-conscious mode of paronomasia occurs in the teasingly obscure verse attributed to Tjörvi háðsami in *Landnámabók* (1968, 301). There, if Einar Ól. Sveinsson is correct (1972; see Sayers 1993), the word *vél* ‘guile, artifice, deception’ is masked by *ofljóst*, most appropriately in light of its meaning.

The net effect of verse 14 is that Hafliði can be perceived as either praised or insulted. If praised, the Hafliði who as a child or man about the house loudly consumed his curds eats two meals a day on board his ship. What sort of meals is not spelt out, but presumably when praise is the tenor we are to think that they are square, nutritious, and thoroughly manly. But the crucial part of the logic is probably that Hafliði feels quite as at home on his ship consuming these meals as he did at Reyðarfell, even though his marine location is far more risky. For this there is a parallel in *Njáls saga* chapter 136, where Flosi rides *í Tungu til Ásgríms til dagverðar* to take up his grievances and, despite the dangers of this location and the threatening redness of Ásgrímr’s face, coolly eats his morning meal and *fór at engu óðara en hann væri heima* in washing once he has done (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 360–61). The problematic bridging word *ok* in verse 14 can then be explained as linking two different scenarios where Hafliði feels at home, one past and the other present. The contrastive *nú* (or even *enn*) is not appropriate to this logic, though it may represent what the audience would have expected to hear.

When it comes to the reading as insult, it is conceivable that the offensive ingredient in the verse is not simple but twofold. Read one way, the verse may be saying that Hafliði has to submit to intimidation from his antagonists, who give him a taste of their spears on a regular basis. The contingency imagined here might be the stock situation invoked by Jón Þorkelsson, with early-morning ‘wake-up calls’ from pirates and other riff-raff infesting the seas, who brandish their spears in Hafliði’s face. Whatever the case, this sounds like the same sort of

exaggeratedly bloodthirsty talk and grotesquerie that one finds throughout *Fóstbræðra saga* (Andersson 2000, 6; Meulengracht Sørensen 1999 [rpt. 2001, 266]). Read another way, in pursuance of Louis-Jensen's suggestion, the verse, as we have already seen, may be branding Hafliði as a coprophagist.

If we analyse the workings of the former type of insult, we see a neat fit with the stipulation in the prose that the verse must initially be understood as insult and only upon subsequent reflection as praise. This would be eminently possible if a tendency existed to interpret skaldic poetry line by line, as if each line were a unit of sense. That such a tendency frequently gained the upper hand can be seen from textual variants and scribal emendations in manuscripts containing skaldic verses. This is most notoriously the case in *Hulda/Hrokkinskinna* (Louis-Jensen 1977, 152–53), where skaldic stanzas are construed as consisting of a series of one-line end-stopped phrases, clauses, or sentences. If these emendations represent a contemporary mode of analysis, we could postulate that the audience for verse 14 would automatically interpret the first line of the second *helmingr*, *ok dagverðar darra*, as a unit of sense. That is, as we have seen, precisely the combination needed to generate the insulting reading. Subsequent reflection would reveal the possibility of a combination that straddles the first and second lines—*darral dóms skreytandi*—and this is the reading that yields the required praise.

But that leaves us with Louis-Jensen's line of insult unaccounted for. It may therefore be that, rather than straightforwardly generating the neat ambiguity presupposed by the prose narrative, the verse ultimately dissolves into polysemy. The prose might conceivably have latched on to one *double entendre* while ignoring the other, just as it apparently suppressed the all-too-gross *Grettisfærsla*. In the process of reaching his learned construction, the author of the prose might have taken his cue from prohibitions in *Grágás* against certain sorts of verse-making. It was definitely an offence for somebody to compose *lof þat er hann yrkir til háðungar*, 'praise that he composes in order to ridicule' (*Grágás* 1852–83, Ib 183). Snorri, or in any event the writer of the Prologue to *Heimskringla*, famously clarifies the meaning here when he observes that extravagant praises directed at a patron who has not performed the deeds in question would be *háð en eigi lof*, 'mockery, not praise' (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 4). The verse in *Grettis saga* could be construed as reversing this process: *\*háð þat er hann yrkir til lofs*, 'mockery that he composes in order to praise'. Such ingenious play with words and legal concepts

would be very much at home in this saga, though scarcely possible to prove in this particular case.

Although I hope that this article has shed some additional light on the riddle of verse 14, its inherent polysemy means that ultimately the solution—whether Hafliði is a good skipper or a double-dipper or a hapless victim or something much nastier—remains elusive. In concluding I should like to suggest that the saga commentary may be reductive in another respect as well. It tends to limit our response to the verse, turning it into a mere puzzle. Aesthetically speaking, this stanza would be better treated as resembling the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book: although primarily a *jeu d'esprit*, it also contains overtones and resonances that hint at more serious concerns and ominous situations. We hear of spears, of headlands, and of Óðinn, a nexus that conjures up atavistic images of this god as he sometimes appears to mortals. A kindred nexus of ideas occurs in *Sonatorrek* verse 25 (*Skj B I 37*; *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* 1933, 256):

Nú erum torvelt,  
Tveggja bága  
njörva nipt  
á nesi stendr;  
skalk þó glaðr  
góðum vilja  
ok óhryggr  
heljar bíða.

I am placed in difficulties; Hel ('the ?intimate? sister of the enemy of Óðinn') stands on the headland. Yet I shall gladly and with firm resolution and unafraid wait for Hel.

In both texts we see the use of the rare Óðinn-heiti *Tveggi* in association with a *nes* 'headland'. At the same time, *Grettis saga* verse 14 is no parasitic or academic imitation of Egill, but has its own distinct logic, including some kind of allusion to the place-name *Dögurðarnes*. It is my contention that with sustained attention many other verses in this saga would also turn out to be more than mere pendants of older verse-making.

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO YORK VIKING POETRY?  
MEMORY, TRADITION AND THE TRANSMISSION  
OF SKALDIC VERSE

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**I**N THE FIRST HALF OF THE TENTH CENTURY the York–Dublin dynasty of Scandinavian kings represented the primary opponents of the West Saxon dynasty of Alfred as he attempted to forge a unified ‘Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ and then a ‘Kingdom of the English’.<sup>1</sup> Although it was York itself which formed the focus for this competition, Scandinavian York as a political venture cannot be considered in isolation from Scandinavian Dublin. The key figures and events are by now familiar, and a chronology for York history in the first half of the tenth century has been more or less agreed (Smyth 1978; Lapidge et al. 1999, 504–05). The period of Scandinavian control came to an abrupt end in 954, when Eiríkr blóðøx, the last Scandinavian king of York, was driven out and killed, though Peter Sawyer (1995) has recently argued for a revised chronology for these last years in York (with Eiríkr reigning only once, not twice, from 950 to 952).<sup>2</sup>

Taken all together, then, the story of Scandinavian York and Dublin and of the York–Dublin dynasty comprises, from a military or political perspective, one of the great colonial achievements of the Viking Age. Perhaps surprisingly, however, very little indeed was remembered about this dynasty and these events in Old Norse literary tradition, and the purpose of this article is to explore why this should be so. In particular, the issue will be approached via two related questions: why does so little skaldic verse survive which is associated with Viking-Age York and Dublin? And how did traditions about York and Dublin, poetic or

<sup>1</sup> The fundamental modern study is Smyth 1987. For studies of the process and ideology of West Saxon unification see for example Stafford 1989, Wormald 1994, John 1996, 83–98 and Foot 1996. On the proposed distinction between the ‘Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ and the ‘Kingdom of the English’ see Keynes 1998 and 2001.

<sup>2</sup> The traditional chronology for these years was established by Alistair Campbell (1942, 92–97). See also Woolf 1998, who accepts Sawyer’s revised chronology for Eadred’s reign, but would place Eiríkr’s first York tenure back in the reign of Athelstan.



otherwise, make their way from tenth-century England to twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland?

The basic situation can be stated simply at this stage. There appears to be an absence of extant praise poetry for the early tenth-century York–Dublin dynasty, descendants of the great (and possibly legendary) Ragnarr loðbrók. Similarly, the York–Dublin dynasty in this period hardly features at all in Old Norse prose sources. Before the York–Dublin hiatus one finds traditions about York concerning Ragnarr and his sons,<sup>3</sup> and after the hiatus those concerning Eiríkr blóðøx, while traditions of the Norse in Ireland are common from around the reign of Sigtryggr silkisegg at the turn of the millennium; but in between, the early tenth century remains a silent period, and traditions about the York–Dublin kings, like poems in their honour, appear not to have been transmitted.

In some respects an inquiry into transmission and survival (or non-transmission and non-survival) may seem a strange undertaking—after all, can't we just be grateful for what we have, rather than worrying about why we have it? But research by anthropologists into oral cultures, and by historians into memory and the uses of the past, has indicated that there is almost no such thing as a chance survival. What is remembered is deliberately preserved; what is forgotten is no less deliberately jettisoned. To use Walter Ong's term in a seminal work, oral cultures are 'homeostatic' (1982, 46–49); that is to say, only that which is relevant to the present situation is preserved, and that which is not relevant is discarded. But to some degree this is true not only of oral cultures, and the landmark publication which explores these issues for the early medieval period is Patrick Geary's 1994 study of commemoration and forgetfulness at the turn of the first millennium, in which he examines the various ways in which 'annalists, chroniclers and historians alike consciously select from a spectrum of possible *memorabilia* those which are *memoranda*—that is, those worth remembering' (1994, 9). 'Worth remembering' is the crucial phrase here, as it indicates that what is remembered is, in some sense, useful or relevant to those doing the remembering. To quote Geary again (1994, 12): 'All memory, whether "individual," "collective," or "historical," is memory *for* something, and this political (in a broad sense) purpose cannot be ignored.' Of course, the notion of relevance or usefulness covers a wide range of possible applications, as can be seen for example from a recent collection of

<sup>3</sup>Traditions about Ragnarr and his sons have received a good deal of attention and will not be discussed here; see in particular Smyth 1977, McTurk 1991.

studies on the early medieval period (Hen and Innes 2000; for some wider comparisons see Layton 1989), many of which explicitly invoke both Geary's work and the standard textbook on 'social memory' (that is, collective memory) by James Fentress and Chris Wickham (1992). One of Fentress and Wickham's key emphases is that it is not possible to consider the form and content of what is remembered without also considering its social role or function (1992, 88; see also Connerton 1989):

Memories have their own specific grammars, and can (must) be analysed as narratives; but they also have functions, and can (must) also be analysed in a functionalist manner, as guides, whether uniform or contradictory, to social identity.

One can therefore summarise much of this recent study of memory and remembering by quoting Elizabeth Tonkin (1992, 137 n.11):

It is assumed in such discussions that the 'events' at issue are significant for the tellers, or writers, and that absences of reference indicate absence of significance for them—or that there are interesting reasons for the absence.

However, Sarah Foot has recently queried the rather catch-all use of the term 'memory' to cover any cultivation of traditions of the past. As she writes (1999, 187),

memory as an individual mental process should be distinguished from the constructed accounts of shared pasts, however much these may claim to draw on multiple memories.

Foot therefore makes a distinction between, on the one hand, reminiscent memory, based on recollected personal experience, and, on the other, consciously learned commemoration, based sometimes on invented or constructed accounts. Foot notes that the first of these, reminiscent memory, is frequently family-based, whereas the second, learned commemoration, is more often political in origin and orientation (1999, 199–200). Although it is not watertight, this is a helpful distinction, and it is important to stress that learned commemoration is likely to be much more political or ideological than reminiscent memory (though this is not to say that reminiscent memory is therefore necessarily 'true' or disinterested).

There have been relatively few attempts to apply these perspectives on memory and the cultivation of the past to the study of Old Norse literary history, though one might feel that the Iceland of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with its enormous hinterland of remembered traditions stretching back to the Viking Age itself, would be an extremely fertile area in which to explore such ideas. One recent publication which

has attempted to do something of this kind, however, is Diana Whaley's overview of Icelandic historical writing, significantly entitled 'A useful past'. As Whaley writes (2000, 192):

Concerning the purpose of the historical writings, one may wonder whether there is such a thing as disinterested history, written in the pursuit of truth and with the promise of entertainment, or whether it is always partisan, promoting prejudices and vested interests. The either/or formulation of the question, however, is clearly unhelpful. The Icelanders seem to have had a genuine curiosity about the past, and not just their own, and history was an important source of entertainment and of moral and political example. However, if it had not also served present needs it would not have taken the form it did, and in some cases it might not have been written at all.

In this article I will attempt a case-study of one particular body of tradition which either succeeded, or did not succeed, in being remembered through the oral centuries until it was recorded in Icelandic written culture, and I will explore the mechanisms and motivations by which this remembering (or forgetting) occurred. This is a radically different undertaking from old-style investigations into the nature and reliability of 'oral tradition', where the overriding goal was to separate the kernels of dependable information from the chaff of unhistorical accretions—an exercise which has always loomed large in both the debate about saga origins, and attempts to write a narrative history of the Viking Age. If one shifts the emphasis away from what is remembered to a consideration of how and why it is remembered, however, many new and interesting questions come to the fore, and we may gain new insights into the recall and cultivation of the past which occurred in both skaldic tradition and medieval Icelandic culture. It is hoped, therefore, that the investigation which follows into the poetic and memorial traditions of Scandinavian York and Dublin may be in certain ways representative or suggestive of wider questions about the Icelandic preservation of the past.

Let us turn, then, to the poems themselves. Extant Norse poems in honour of York–Dublin kings of the relevant period (that is, pre-954) form a meagre collection; in fact, there are only two certain examples (Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Hofuðlausn* and the anonymous *Eiríksmál*), and two other probable ones (Glúmr Geirason's poem for Eiríkr and the anonymous *Darraðarljóð*). The details of these four poems and their circumstances of preservation will be briefly reviewed here, before the more difficult questions of their possible means of transmission and reasons for survival are addressed.

Egill's *Hofuðlausn*, the enforced praise poem by which the Icelandic supposedly saved his head at the court of Eiríkr blóðøx in York, is

preserved in full only in certain manuscripts of *Egils saga*.<sup>4</sup> Its genuineness has been debated back and forth in the course of the twentieth century, but the most recent discussions appear to have left the poem currently enjoying the status of ‘genuine’ (which, in any case, has probably always been the majority view). In 1969 Jón Helgason argued that the rhyme-scheme *hjǫr-gjǫr-fjǫr-spjǫr* (stanza 10 in Finnur Jónsson’s ordering) would have been impossible in the tenth century, as he claimed that the correct form and meaning for *gjǫr* (in the phrase *hrafna gjǫr* ‘the *gjǫr* of ravens’) was in fact *gǫr* ‘flock’, and therefore the poem must date from after the time when *ǫ* and *ø* fell together in Icelandic as *ö* (1969, 168–76; see also Turville-Petre 1976, xxxviii n.1). Jón Helgason’s claims, however, were answered in 1973 by Dietrich Hofmann, who proposed, among other arguments for an early date, that Egill’s *gjǫr* derived instead from an adjective *gerr* ‘greedy’, in which case the noun *gjǫr* ‘desire’ (produced by breaking and umlaut) would form a perfectly acceptable tenth-century rhyme with *hjǫr*, *fjǫr* and *spjǫr* (‘sword’, ‘life’ and ‘spear’). Hofmann’s publication is the last major contribution to the debate, and his conclusions have more recently been followed by John Hines in his careful review of the poem’s date and provenance (1995, 87–89; for another positive assessment of Hofmann’s arguments see Frank 1985, 174). It will certainly be assumed in the present discussion that *Höfuðlausn* is a genuine Egill composition. At the very least the testimony of Egill’s own *Arinbjarnarkviða*, a poem which has been subjected to less scepticism, is that Egill did indeed compose a ‘head-ransom’ poem for Eiríkr when the latter was king in York (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 43–48, B I 38–41); that the extant *Höfuðlausn* is the poem Egill composed is a separate assumption, but the grounds for such a belief seem reasonably strong.

The anonymous *Eiríksmál*, a memorial lay for Eiríkr blóðøx, has received at least as much attention as Egill’s *Höfuðlausn*, in particular with regard to its value as a tenth-century mythological source, and often in association with the related *Hákonarmál* of Eyvindr skálda-spillir.<sup>5</sup> Although its first ten lines are quoted in Snorri Sturluson’s *Skáldskaparmál* (Snorri Sturluson 1998, I 10, stanza 20), the poem as a

<sup>4</sup> For text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 35–39, B I 30–33; for a sophisticated text-critical discussion see Poole 1993a; on the saga’s account of Egill in England see for example Jones 1952, Vésteinn Ólason 1990 and Swanson 1994; on the ‘head-ransom’ genre more broadly see Nordland 1956.

<sup>5</sup> For text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 174–75, B I 164–66; there is also a helpful parallel text in Kershaw 1922, 96–99; for bibliography see

whole (if indeed it is a whole; see Hollander 1932–33) is preserved only in the anonymous kings' saga *Fagrskinna*, where it is introduced with the information that *Eptir fall Eiríks lét Gunnhildr yrkja kvæði um hann, svá sem Óðinn fagnaði honum í Valhøll* (Bjarni Einarsson 1985, 77) ('After Eiríkr's death Gunnhildr had a poem composed about him, as if Óðinn welcomed him into Valhøll'). As to where it was composed, there are conflicting suggestions in the prose sources: *Fagrskinna* says that Gunnhildr proceeded to Denmark after Eiríkr's death (Bjarni Einarsson 1985, 79–80), whereas Snorri, in his *Hákonar saga góða* in *Heimskringla*, says she remained in York for a short time before repairing to Orkney (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 154–55). Even if such information about provenance could be accepted at face value, it would only confirm what historical sources (and common sense) indicate—namely, that as the poem is an *erfidrápa*, it must date from after Eiríkr's expulsion from York. Probably, therefore, it cannot be regarded as a 'York poem' in quite the same way as Egill's *Höfuðlausn* (that is to say, it was neither composed nor recited in the city), though it is at least worth noting that Snorri does not suggest that Gunnhildr vacated York until after Eiríkr's death. If, however, the poem was composed soon after Eiríkr's death, as is generally thought,<sup>6</sup> and by a poet at that time in Gunnhildr's service, then it seems reasonable to assume that the (now anonymous) poet was a figure who had known the king and had been part of his court in York. In support of this assumption is Dietrich Hofmann's demonstration of influence from Old English on the language of the poem (1955, 42–52, §§26–39), which implies that the poet had spent some time in England (and presumably, therefore, at Eiríkr's court in York). These two facts about the poet—that he was in Gunnhildr's retinue, and used linguistic Anglicisms—make it reasonable to suppose that, wherever the poem was actually composed after Eiríkr's death (Orkney, Denmark, or even York itself), it was composed by an author who had earlier been a praise poet in Eiríkr's York. If this (unprovable) supposition is correct, then in *Eiríksmál* we have the most important literary product of the culture of Viking-Age York, of potentially greater representative

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Marold 1993. For the poem's relationship with *Hákonarmál* see for example Marold 1972, Lindow 1987, 310–12, North 1997, 106–07, 129–30.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus von See (1981, 318–28, 522–25) argued that *Eiríksmál* draws on *Hákonarmál* rather than vice versa, and that *Eiríksmál* is in fact an eleventh-century confection. As Bjarne Fidjestøl (1997a, 141) notes, 'this chronological reversal has not been generally accepted'.

significance than the fuller (and better provenanced) *Höfuðlausn* of the itinerant Egill.

The third poem to bring into the picture is so fragmentary that, unfortunately, very little can be (and has been) said about it. This is Glúmr Geirason's praise poem in honour of Eiríkr blóðøx (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 75, B I 65). *Landnámabók* and other prose sources preserve considerable information about Glúmr and his family; he became, for example, the second father-in-law of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, the heroine of *Laxdæla saga* (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 86–87, Björn Sigfússon 1940, 204–11, Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 284). Along with Egill and Kormakr Ögmundarson, he was one of 'the first Icelandic skalds to eulogize foreign dignitaries' (Gade 2000, 76), and in *Skáldatal* he is listed as having composed for both Eiríkr and his son Haraldr gráfeldr (see Sveinbjörn Egilsson et al. 1848–87, III 273–74). Indeed it is *Gráfeldardrápa*, his *erfidrápa* for Haraldr, which constitutes his main extant work (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 75–78, B I 66–68). His poem for Eiríkr is in much worse shape, and in fact only two lines can be attributed to it with any confidence. These are preserved only in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* by Óláfr Þórðarson, and read as follows (in Finnur Jónsson's normalised text (1912–15, B I 65)):

Brandr fær logs ok landa  
lands Eiríki banda.

The sword gains for Eiríkr the fire of the band of the land [= gold] and lands.

In his edition, Finnur Jónsson suggests that these two lines might be a *stef* or refrain, but this can only be speculation. A further stanza (not in the same variant of *dróttkvætt* as these two lines) is sometimes added to this poem for Eiríkr (for example by Finnur Jónsson), but Bjarne Fidjestøl has argued persuasively that there has been confusion among the prose sources, and that this stanza belongs properly in Glúmr's *Gráfeldardrápa* (1982, 90–91; see also Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 155–56). Glúmr's poem for Eiríkr thus amounts to a mere two lines in its extant form, and there are no internal signs as to where the poem was composed; nor does its preservation in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* supply any external indications, as preservation in a king's saga might. The use of the present tense (*fær*) seems to suggest that the poem is not an *erfidrápa*, but whether Glúmr came into Eiríkr's service in Norway or England must remain entirely unclear, and in its possible status as a York poem the work must rank some way below *Eiríksmál* and Egill's *Höfuðlausn*; for this reason Judith Jesch, in her catalogue of 'skaldic verse composed for performance

in England', places the poem in her second category of 'not proven' (2001a, 317–18).

Turning finally to the fourth poem possibly to enjoy the status of a York–Dublin composition, there can be few more famous (or, in post-medieval literary history, more influential) Norse poems than the anonymous *Darraðarljóð*.<sup>7</sup> The poem is preserved in the context of *Njáls saga* (chapter 157), where it is tied to the Battle of Clontarf (fought in 1014), and the king whom the poem honours is identified as Sigtryggr silkiskegg (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 448–60). That the author of *Njáls saga*, or a predecessor, is not necessarily in command of this particular poetic source, however, is readily indicated by the apparent folk-etymological invention of a saga character *Dǫrruðr*, from knowledge of the poem's title or from the poem's enigmatic phrase *vefr darraðar* (which probably means 'weaving of the pennant(s)') or from both.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the poem indicates a Scandinavian victory over the Irish, whereas the prose account in *Njáls saga* presents (rightly for Clontarf) an Irish victory (see Goedheer 1938, 75–76). On these and other grounds, therefore, Nora Kershaw (1922, 115–17) argued that the poem is not about Clontarf at all, but rather concerns a much earlier Norse–Irish battle fought at Dublin in 919 between Niall Glundubh and Sigtryggr Sigtryggsson (better known as Sigtryggr or Sihtric caoch or caech; on the meaning of Sigtryggr's Irish nickname see most recently Breeze 1998, who suggests 'one-eyed'). This position has more recently received the full and considered support of Russell Poole (1991, 116–56, especially 120–25). In many respects the key stanzas are 7 and 8 (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B I 390):

Þeir munu lýðir  
lǫndum ráða,  
es útskaga  
áðr of byggðu,  
kveðk ríkjum gram  
ráðinn dauða;  
nú's fyr oddum  
jarlmaðr hniginn.

<sup>7</sup> For text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 419–21, B I 389–91; there are also helpful parallel texts in Kershaw 1922, 122–25, and Poole 1991, 116–18. For bibliography see Poole 1993b; on the poem's post-medieval reception see Wawn 2000, 27–30.

<sup>8</sup> On the problematic term *darraðr* see for example Holtsmark 1939, 85–93, Dronke 1969, 49–50 and Poole 1991, 125–31.

Ok munu Írar  
 angr of bíða,  
 þats aldri mun  
 ýtum fyrnask.  
 Nú's vefr ofinn,  
 en vøllr roðinn;  
 mun of lōnd fara  
 læspjoll gota.

Those people will rule the lands who previously occupied the outer headlands. I declare that death is intended for the powerful king. Now the nobleman has sunk down before the spear-points.

And the Irish will experience a sorrow which will never be forgotten by men. Now the weave is woven, and the field reddened; the tale of men's harm will travel through lands.

The circumstances indicated here accord very badly with the situation in 1014, but extremely well with that in 919. The Scandinavians of Dublin had been expelled in 902, but a renewed offensive in 914 led to Sigtryggr's 919 battle in which the Irish high king was killed, and Scandinavian ascendancy in Ireland guaranteed for at least half a century (see Smyth 1987, I 60–74). Alfred Smyth sums up the political situation by declaring that Sigtryggr's victory 'made him the most powerful single military force in Ireland, and his success at Dublin in 919 marked the zenith of Norse power in the island' (1987, I 70). As Poole comments, therefore, 'the great victory won in that year could well have been commemorated in a praise poem', and he concludes (1991, 122, 124):

The reassigning of 'Darraðarljóð' to the tenth century gives us the correct outcome to the battle and a suitably successful warrior king, while preserving the important motif that an Irish 'ríkr gramr' meets his death.<sup>9</sup>

Kershaw had earlier argued that the available evidence 'would seem . . . to point to Dublin as the original home of the poem' (1922, 116).

This reassignment will be accepted here, and many interesting points follow from it. For one thing, as Kershaw and Poole both observe, it casts new light on the occurrence of the identical phrase *vefr darraðar* in the fifth stanza of Egill's *Høfuðlausn*, and suggests that we can see here a connection between the literary cultures of Scandinavian York

<sup>9</sup> Poole notes, however, that a reallocation from Clontarf to the 919 battle is not entirely free of problems, as it leaves unidentified the *jarlmaðr* mentioned in stanza 7 (1991, 124, 150–51); Kershaw, on the other hand, circumvented the problem by suggesting that this is one and same person as the *ríkr gramr* (1922, 116).



and Dublin (see Kershaw 1922, 117, Poole 1991, 127), or at the very least that *Darraðarljóð* was known to Egill—an apparently minor point, the significance of which will be returned to later. Other signs of a shared culture among the extant York–Dublin poems might be the prominent role of valkyries in both *Darraðarljóð* and *Eiríksmál*, and the curious fact that not one of the four extant poems with York–Dublin connections is in classical *dróttkvætt*. *Darraðarljóð* is in *fornyrðislag*, while *Eiríksmál* fluctuates between *fornyrðislag*, *málahátt* and *ljóðahátt*. The two lines of Glúmr’s poem for Eiríkr do not permit a definitive identification of its verse-form (especially if they are a *stef*), but the use of full rhyme in both lines indicates a variation from classical *dróttkvætt*, though one that is not rare in early skaldic verse (see Snorri Sturluson 1991, 77–79). Finally, Egill’s *Höfuðlausn* (basically in *fornyrðislag*) has of course received a great deal of attention on account of its innovatory use of end-rhyme. Representing as it does the first recorded use of end-rhyme (*runhenda*) in Old Norse poetry,<sup>10</sup> its novelty has most often been attributed to the influence of rhymed Latin verse, such as hymns, which Egill may have encountered during his time in England (see Jones 1952, 143, Turville-Petre 1976, xxxvi–viii, Gade 1995, 10). The next extant example of this metre (with similar use of a refrain) derives, interestingly, from Dublin, and is found in Gunnlaugr ormstunga’s praise poem for Sigtryggr silkiskegg, dating from shortly after the year 1000 (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 194, B I 185). Russell Poole (1991, 127) suggests that one might take this as further evidence for a ‘common poetic tradition’ in York and Dublin; this is certainly possible, but one would want to distinguish between Gunnlaugr’s knowledge of the metre, which may have arisen in Iceland through the preservation there of Egill’s verse, and his decision to use it in his poem for Sigtryggr, which may indeed have been motivated by an awareness of York–Dublin poetic conventions or precedents.

What is perhaps odd about this absence of regular *dróttkvætt* from the extant works (with the exception of Glúmr’s poem) is that a number of scholars have proposed the theory that Irish poetry exerted metrical influence on skaldic verse.<sup>11</sup> If this were the case, one might surmise that

<sup>10</sup> A possible forerunner is an end-rhymed stanza attributed to Egill’s father Skalla-Grímr, but its genuineness has rarely been accepted (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 30, B I 26).

<sup>11</sup> For discussion see Turville-Petre 1972 and 1976, xxvi–xxviii, Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1976, Mackenzie 1981, Kristján Árnason 1981, Gade 1995, 7–12, Holland and Lindow 1996, Tranter 1997, and Gísli Sigurðsson 2000a, 103–17.

such influence would occur most easily through a meeting of traditions in Ireland, not Norway (see for example Sayers 1992), and the court of the Dublin dynasty would then be a prime candidate for the environment in which skaldic metre took shape, or at least, if one dates its origins earlier in the century, enjoyed its best opportunity to flourish. Yet it is ninth-century Norway, not Ireland, that was remembered as the site of creation; and the extant York–Dublin poems do not indicate any particular fondness for the metrical ornateness of *dróttkvætt* or the Irish metres. On the other hand, ecclesiastical influence from rhymed Latin hymns can be more plausibly traced in Egill’s *Hofuðlausn* (see for example Stefán Einarsson 1955), perhaps indicating different forms of cultural contact, and different manifestations of identity, in the different environments of Scandinavian York and Dublin.

There are no doubt other stylistic resemblances to be drawn between these four poems, and other, non-poetic forms of evidence (such as stone sculpture) might also be brought into the picture; but taken all together—if it is not reading too much into the extant evidence—these verbal, metrical and mythological parallels amount to just enough signs that once there was indeed a shared York–Dublin skaldic culture. But as will be seen, only certain features, and certain participants, in this culture were later on to be remembered and preserved in the Icelandic *ritöld* or ‘Age of Writing’.

This completes the preliminary survey of the extant poems with apparent York–Dublin affiliations or provenance. Before considering their possible means of transmission and grounds for survival, however, it is important to notice any explicit indications that there once existed York–Dublin poems that have not been preserved. In investigations into medieval ‘lost literature’ this is, of course, the basic principle or procedure (the classic model is Wilson 1970; for an Old Norse example see Jesch 1982–83); but as far as I am aware there is only one hint of a lost York–Dublin poem among the extant Norse sources. This is to be found in Chapter 31 of the *Sturlubók* version of *Landnámabók*, in the history of one of the settlers on the southern edge of Borgarfjörður (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 71):

Þorbjörn svartí hét maðr; hann keypti land at Hafnar-Ormi inn frá Selaeyri ok upp til Forsár; hann bjó á Skeljabrekku. Hans son var Þorvarðr, er átti Þórunni dóttur Þorbjarnar ór Arnarholti; þeira synir váru þeir Þórarinn blindi ok Þorgils orraskáld, er var með Óláfi kváran í Dyflinni.

There was a man called Þorbjörn the Black; he bought land from Hafnar-Ormr in from Selaeyrr and up to Forsá; he lived at Skeljabrekka. His son was

Þorvarðr, who was married to Þórunn, the daughter of Þorbjörn from Arnarholt. Their sons were Þórarinn the Blind and Þorgils orraskáld, who was with Óláfr kváran in Dublin.

Þorgils orraskáld, and his connection with Óláfr cuaran, are otherwise entirely unknown. Admittedly this brief anecdote does not state that Þorgils composed poetry for Óláfr, but it is reasonable to assume that this is what is implied by the second element of Þorgils's nickname.<sup>12</sup> A supplementary point to note here is that in this account Óláfr cuaran is firmly and exclusively associated with Dublin, not York. I will return to this point later.

As noted above, investigations into lost literature have traditionally been based upon scraps and hints such as this as to what once existed, but exists no longer. As R. M. Wilson (1970, xii) notes in the preface to his English study:

At the best such a study could deal only with the literature which has left some trace, and it is obvious enough that much must have disappeared leaving no indication whatever of its former existence.

It is, of course, not possible to prove that works once existed which have left no trace in the extant record, but there seems no reason to doubt that praise poetry was composed for the York–Dublin dynasty, as it was for most other early medieval aristocracies.<sup>13</sup> For one thing, it should be noted that there is relatively little skaldic verse extant from before 950 of any provenance—it is not the case that it is only the York–Dublin cupboard which is (relatively) bare.<sup>14</sup> The probable reasons for this are complex and partly unclear, but it is likely that a major factor is the subsequent shift towards an increasing Icelandic dominance in the field of skaldic composition, which occurred in the decades following Egill's pre-eminent career and was more or less complete by

<sup>12</sup> Þorgils's nickname as a whole seems to mean 'poet of (someone called) Orri', and *orri* 'heathcock, grouse' is itself found as a nickname elsewhere in Old Norse (see Lind 1920–21, 273).

<sup>13</sup> For general discussions of the genre of praise poetry see for example Chadwick and Chadwick 1932, where it is classified as Type D 'celebration poetry', and Bloomfield and Dunn 1989.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the survival of at least some pre-950 skaldic verse from other contexts, however, it is notable that there is also an enormous quantity of non-poetic pre-950 tradition preserved in prose texts (most obviously, the entire history of the migration and *landnám*). This is an important point, as will become clear when we consider the non-preservation of comparable non-poetic traditions about the York–Dublin dynasty.

the end of the millennium, from which time onwards a great deal of skaldic verse is preserved (see Gade 2000, 75–76). In other words, it was not just that the role of skaldic poet was probably increasingly becoming an Icelandic prerogative, but also that the extant manuscript sources, which are Icelandic, preserve above all the works of Icelandic poets. Since Egill is, as noted above, the earliest recorded example of an Icelandic skald composing for a foreign patron, it is perhaps not surprising that so little verse by poets earlier than Egill is preserved in later sources.

The absence of surviving poems for the York–Dublin dynasty constitutes no reason to doubt that such poems once existed. The few hints of a shared skaldic culture between York and Dublin, noted above, may support the view that far more once existed than that which now survives, as may other indications for the circulation of skaldic praise poetry in Viking-Age England (see Townend 2000). Suggestive hints may also be gained from the extant scraps of Old Irish poetry in honour of Scandinavian kings in Dublin. As Máire Ní Mhaonaigh has recently pointed out, there is at least one Old Irish poem, and possibly a second, in honour of Óláfr cuaran, testifying to his activity as a patron of praise poetry (1998, 399–400; this is also noted by Abrams 1998, 23). For all these reasons, therefore, and not forgetting the centrality of praise poetry in early medieval aristocratic culture, it seems reasonable to conclude that there was also at one time a considerable body of poetry for the York–Dublin dynasty which has neither survived nor left any trace of its former existence. It is this vanished poetry which is at the heart of the present investigation, just as much as the few works which have survived from Scandinavian York and Dublin.

Let us return, then, to the four extant poems. The most obvious feature is that all the indisputable York poetry (and/or all that which has remained correctly contextualised) is associated with Eiríkr blóðøx. The only poem not associated with Eiríkr, *Darraðarljóð*, has been wrongly contextualised (in *Njáls saga*). But of course Eiríkr is exceptional in terms of the Scandinavian rulers of York: he was not of the York–Dublin dynasty of Ívarr, but rather of the Norwegian dynasty of Haraldr hárfagri. It is therefore much less surprising that poems and traditions about Eiríkr should be remembered and preserved, and this occurs for basically two reasons: first, his encounter with the most famous of Icelandic skalds, and second, his position in the Norwegian royal house. It seems fair to assume that *Höfuðlausn* is remembered, and ultimately recorded in manuscripts of *Egils saga*, primarily on account of Icelandic

interest in Egill rather than in Eiríkr, and in the context of an investigation into the preservation and loss of York–Dublin poetry this is an important point. But there was also, of course, Icelandic interest in Eiríkr himself on account of his position in the Norwegian royal house (on the possible reasons for Icelandic interest in Norwegian royal history see Whaley 2000, 179–82). Not surprisingly, Eiríkr features in all the Norwegian and Icelandic histories of the Norwegian royal house, from the earliest (Theodoricus, *Historia Norwegiae*, *Agrip*) right through to the latest and greatest (*Heimskringla*, *Flateyjarbók*), and, as has been said, it is in one of them (*Fagrskinna*) that the full version of *Eiríksmál* is preserved. Eiríkr also features in the twelfth-century historical poems *Háttalykill* (stanzas 31 a and b) and *Nóregs konungatal* (stanzas 11–13) (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 524, 580–81, B I 502–03, 576–77). There is no need here to enter into a review of the complex traditions about Eiríkr’s life and career and the relations between the Norse prose texts which record them (for a recent review see Cormack 2001); the essential point is simply Eiríkr’s place in the Norwegian dynasty, and therefore his assured position in the historiography of that house. In other words, traditions about Eiríkr are preserved because of his Norwegian royal status and, to a lesser degree, because of his interaction with Egill; they are not preserved because of his connection with York. Or, to put it the other way round, traditions about York are preserved only in so far as they feature in the story of Eiríkr (and Egill).

Eiríkr’s position in Icelandic tradition is therefore assured and easily understood; it is the preceding kings of York and Dublin who have vanished from the poetic record. These York–Dublin rulers of the Ívarr dynasty include some major names, of whom three will be selected for consideration in the present study, namely Sigtryggr caoch, Óláfr Guðfriðsson and Óláfr cuaran. The activities and achievements of these kings will be set out in more detail below, and it will be seen that, in the world of early tenth-century politics, they were major players indeed; here it is sufficient to note that, with the exception of *Darraðarljóð* (misattributed to Sigtryggr silkiskegg rather than Sigtryggr caoch), no poems in honour of these three kings were remembered or preserved in Old West Norse culture. Yet these were the great kings of Scandinavian York and Dublin, whose military successes made the York–Dublin venture what it was, and who would seem to demand commemoration in the militant and competitive genre of skaldic praise poetry, not the troubled and ineffectual exile Eiríkr. But it is Eiríkr who is recorded in the Icelandic

*Skáldatal* as a patron of poets; no other ruler from York or Dublin features.<sup>15</sup>

The loss of poetic (and other) traditions about these three kings will be explored in more detail shortly. Before going any further, however, it is useful to step back from these specific concerns in order to consider more generally the available evidence for the transmission of skaldic verse. There has been relatively little general discussion of this subject, let alone studies of the possible transmission of individual works or groups of works; what follows must therefore be somewhat provisional and speculative, and no doubt over-crude (for reviews see Frank 1985, 175–77, and Quinn 2000, 45). The ultimate course of the transmission is, of course, from the oral culture of the Viking Age into the period of literacy and historical writing in Iceland and, to a lesser degree, Norway, and it is clear that, during the Viking Age and beyond, we must envisage the steady accumulation of a corpus of verse in memorial circulation (see for example Fidjestøl 1997b, 246, and Gade 2000, 66–70). There is certainly no problem in assuming the circulation of such a body of verse, not least for the simple reason that such a corpus survived into the Icelandic *ritöld*. While most modern scholarship on oral poetry has been directed towards poetry which is extemporised rather than memorised (that is, oral poetry which is of a fluid-text nature, rather than fixed-text, as skaldic verse was), there is still more than enough comparative evidence to support a belief in the more or less verbatim transmission of such a body of work—that is, the transmission of highly-wrought verbal artefacts which achieve the status in an oral culture of being ‘abiding knowledge’ rather than just ‘a passing thought’.<sup>16</sup> Presumably—bearing in mind the ‘homeostatic’ nature of oral tradition—this corpus would shift continually, not only through the addition of new poems, but also through the loss of old ones whose retention, for whatever reason, no longer seemed worthwhile. One might therefore suggest that whatever poems in honour of York–Dublin kings there may once have been, they either didn’t find their way into this canon of orally circulating verse, or else failed to hold their position within the canon—it just did not seem important enough to enough people to keep on remembering them,

<sup>15</sup> See Sveinbjörn Egilsson et al. 1848–87, III 273. Eiríkr is included in the list of the kings of Norway (between Haraldr hárfagri and, out of sequence, Hálfðan svartí), and the poets who are listed as having composed for him are Egill Skalla-Grímsson and Glúmr Geirason.

<sup>16</sup> Ong 1982, 35; for discussion see for example Finnegan 1977, 52–87, 134–69, Ong 1982, 57–68, Goody 1987, 78–122, and Green 1994, 5–7.

perhaps because the dynasty in whose honour they had been composed was no more.

On the memorisation of skaldic poems there is also anecdotal evidence from later Norse prose to be considered, and Kari Ellen Gade (1995, 22) has gathered together examples from the Icelandic sagas of characters being careful to memorise a verse or poem (*nema vísuna* or *kviðuna*) so that they can recite or interpret it on a later occasion. Three examples will suffice here. First, a famous episode in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* tells how a cryptic verse composed and spoken by Gísli, in which he confesses to the killing of his brother-in-law Þorgrímr, is memorised and subsequently decoded by his sister Þórdís—with grievous consequences (see Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943, 58–61; for discussion see Harris 1996). Second, an episode in *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* gives a good example of the subsequent recitation of a poem by a person other than its composer (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, II 243):

Pat var einn hvern dag, er Steinn Skaptason var fyrir konungi ok spurði hann máls, ef hann vildi hlýða drápu þeiri, er Skapti, faðir hans, hafði ort um konung.

It happened one day that Steinn Skaptason came before the king and asked if he wished to hear the *drápa* which Skapti, his father, had composed about the king.

And third, a comic anecdote in *Stúfs þáttr* suggests what a sizeable repertoire of memorised verse one person might command. The Icelandic poet Stúfr entertains Haraldr Sigurðarson one evening by reciting over thirty *flokkar* (sixty in one version of the story), and then nonchalantly assures the king that not only has he not yet recited half the *flokkar* he knows, but the number of *drápur* he knows is twice as many (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 285–86; it is clear from the subsequent narrative that the poems which Stúfr recites are not his own compositions).

So who were the people who did the memorising, thereby acting as stages in the transmission of the verse? The anecdotal evidence collected by Gade shows persons of all stations engaged in the rote learning of stanzas, including some instances where, within the prose work, the memorisers have something of a choric function, as in the well-known example of Óláfr's poets composing at the Battle of Stiklastaðir (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, II, 358, 360):

Þá mæltu þeir sín á milli, sögðu, at þat væri vel fallit at yrkja áminningarvísur nokkurar um þau tíðendi, er þá mundu brátt at höndum berask . . . Vísur þessar námu menn þá þegar.

Then they [Pormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, Gizurr gullbrárskáld and Þorfinnr munnr] spoke among themselves, and said that it would be a good idea to compose some memorial verses about those events which would happen soon . . . And people [Óláfr's soldiers] memorised these verses at once.

Nonetheless, it seems likely that, in the absence of any clerical class such as existed among the Irish, the primary, though not exclusive, transmitters or 'tradition-bearers' for skaldic verse were the poets themselves (on the term 'tradition-bearer' see Niles 1999, 173–93). In her recent study of tenth- and eleventh-century skaldic vocabulary, Judith Jesch has suggested that 'as a small, professional class, most poets probably knew each other's work well, and either borrowed from it or made use of formulaic expressions' (2001b, 35–36). And although we have next to no evidence about the means and nature of the education or apprenticeship undergone by trainee skalds in the Viking Age, it is obvious that, for such a formulaic and metrically constrained poetry, various types of memorisation must have been involved in acquiring the necessary skills and techniques.<sup>17</sup> So for as long as the skills required for the composition of oral verse continued to be learned and passed on, one can assume that skalds also memorised the works of their mentors, colleagues and competitors—especially for the genre of courtly praise poetry, in which commemoration and celebration of the patron or protagonist are of the essence in terms of both content and function. Hints, echoes and intertextual allusions amongst extant skaldic poems merely confirm the validity of this fairly self-evident proposition.

This is certainly not to deny that a patron's followers, as the original oral audience, may also have learned and memorised the poems composed and recited in honour of their leader; but if one is attempting to account for the memorial transmission of poems over decades and even centuries, then the community of poets is more likely to have been the primary channel. This passing on of poems from poet to poet can only have been helped by the fact that many poets were, in fact, related to one another. Skaldhood ran in the family for several Icelandic kin-groups; it will be recalled that, according to *Heimskringla*, Skapti's poem for Óláfr Haraldsson was memorised and subsequently recited in the king's

<sup>17</sup> Some hints about skaldic apprenticeship may be gained from Hofgarða-Refr's *erfiðrápa* for his foster-father Gizurr gullbrárskáld (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 319, B I 295). On skaldic education in the later period see Quinn 1995 and Nordal 2001. For some wider comparisons on the education of the oral poet see Finnegan 1977, 188–200, and Rubin 1995, 136–43.



presence by Steinn, Skapti's own son and a poet himself, while in *Stúfs þáttur* the Icelandic protagonist proudly informs Haraldr of his poetic ancestry, citing this as a qualification for composing a poem about the king (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934, 287):

Konungr spyrr: 'Ertu skáld?' Stúfr svarar: 'Ek em gott skáld.' Konungr spyrr: 'Er nokkut skálda kyn at þér?' Stúfr svarar: 'Glúmr Geirason var föðurfaðir föður míns, ok mörg önnur góð skáld hafa verit í minni ætt.' Konungr mælti: 'Ef þú ert slíkt skáld, sem Glúmr Geirason var, þá mun ek lofa þér at kveða um mik.' Stúfr svarar: 'Miklu kveð ek betr en Glúmr.'

The king asks: 'Are you a poet?' Stúfr answers: 'I am a good poet.' The king asks: 'Are there any poets in your family?' Stúfr answers: 'Glúmr Geirason was my father's father's father, and there have been many other good poets amongst my ancestors.' The king said: 'If you are as good a poet as Glúmr Geirason was, then I will give you permission to compose about me.' Stúfr answers: 'I compose much better than Glúmr.'

Stúfr's descent from Glúmr supplies one possible line of transmission for Glúmr's poem on Eiríkr blóðøx, and further indications of skaldic transmission from poet to poet, including the transmission of some of the other poems under consideration here, can be glimpsed in anecdotal accounts in the prose literature. *Egils saga*, for instance, preserves an account of the friendship between the elderly Egill and the up-and-coming Einarr skálaglamm, in which the two are said to have discussed both poetic technique (*skáldskapr*) and the latest news from Norway (*austan tíðendi*); the young Einarr, the saga-author tells us, was eager to learn (*námgjarn*) (Nordal 1933, 268). As John Hines comments, this tradition 'specifies a chain of transmission [for Egill's verse] through Einarr skálaglamm, the young poet with whom, according to the saga, Egill had a virtually bardic tutelary relationship' (1995, 89). *Hofuðlausn*, and other poems, could well have been transmitted along such a line (as well, of course, as in many other ways). *Hofuðlausn*, as we have seen, may well testify to Egill's knowledge of *Darraðarljóð*; and, if we can trust the account of *Egils saga*, there is no reason to assume that Egill and Einarr only ever discussed, or passed on, their own compositions.

Another poet about whom one might engage in some representative speculation is Eyvindr skáldaspillir. Eyvindr was a Norwegian of eminent ancestry (see Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 199), and he became an important court poet for both Hákon Haraldsson (that is, Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri or inn góði, Eiríkr's half-brother and main rival) and, later, Hákon Sigurðarson, earl of Hlaðir (for texts of Eyvindr's extant works

see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 64–74, B I 57–65). Eyvindr's *Hákonarmál* demonstrates that he knew the anonymous *Eiríksmál*, and knew it well (indeed, perhaps to him it wasn't anonymous at all). This is important evidence for the early transmission of *Eiríksmál* from wherever it was composed (Orkney?) to the royal court in Norway. But Eyvindr also had connections with Iceland, and so may have functioned as one of the links in the chain of transmission that took the poem there. A story in *Heimskringla* (in fact, the anecdote that concludes *Haralds saga gráfeldar*) tells how Eyvindr composed a *drápa um alla Íslendinga* ('about all the Icelanders'), and as a reward received a silver brooch or shoulder-pin (*feldardálkr*) of an incredible fifty marks' weight, put together out of individual contributions collected at the Althing (see Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 221–22; for a discussion of the episode's coherence see Graham-Campbell 1982, 32–33, revisited in 2000, 12–14). The story does not actually state that Eyvindr visited Iceland in order so that all this could happen, though it may seem to imply it; but at the least it gives an indication as to how one might, in theory, trace the transmission of *Eiríksmál* from Gunnhildr to Iceland via only one recorded poet.<sup>18</sup> According to Snorri, Eyvindr was also familiar with the poetry composed by Glúmr Geirason, court poet to his own patron's rival (see Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 181–82, 198–99).<sup>19</sup>

Einarr, like Eyvindr, pursued his poetic career in Norway, and the examples of these two poets also indicate that, as one would expect, the Norwegian courts were the key staging-posts in the geographical route of transmission from York and Dublin to Iceland. There were extensive and continuing contacts between the community of Icelandic poets and the Norwegian royal courts right through the Viking Age and into the thirteenth century (see for example Gade 2000, 76–84), and such a means for the conveyance of poems back to Iceland would only be strengthened by the natural tendency for Icelandic poets to return home both between periods of royal service and for eventual retirement (as can be seen, for example, in the history of Einarr and Egill). Indeed, Gísli

<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, since *Eiríksmál* is preserved in full only in *Fagrskinna*, and since a Norwegian origin is now assumed for the composition, though not the extant manuscripts, of *Fagrskinna* (see Bjarni Einarsson 1985, cxxvii–cxxx), it is at least conceivable that the poem only reached Iceland much later, and in written form.

<sup>19</sup> If it is an Icelandic poem, *Völuspá* also appears to testify to the fairly early knowledge of Eyvindr's *Hákonarmál* in Iceland (see for example McKinnell 1994, 107–08, and Dronke 1997, 138–39).

Sigurðsson has suggested, as a result of his study of the works known to Óláfr Þórðarson in the thirteenth century, that it is likely that ‘the common poetic tradition in the country [Iceland] had its centre at royal courts in other countries rather than at the Althing’, and therefore that ‘skaldic tradition was kept alive by Icelanders at the Scandinavian courts rather than in Iceland’ (2000b, 109–11 and 112). This may well have been so, but in most cases the poems still had to make their way to Iceland in order to be recorded. ‘Scandinavian courts’, as has been said, primarily means Norway, but other routes besides that via Norway were possible. One might be via Orkney, given the recorded connections between Orkney and England on the one hand (see Jesch 1993), and Orkney and Iceland on the other (see for example Nordal 2001, 47–48),<sup>20</sup> and in the present case one might note again the association between Eiríkr, and his widow and children, and Orkney. In theory a direct route of transmission from Ireland to Iceland is also possible, especially granted the record of migration from the one to the other which is catalogued in *Landnámabók*. Poul Holm has suggested that ‘Dublin must have had . . . a thriving skaldic tradition that was conveyed to Iceland and thus preserved’, but, as has been seen, evidence of such a tradition is hard to find in the extant record,<sup>21</sup> and Holm rightly qualifies his claim by noting that ‘Dublin’s role in skaldic and saga traditions is, however, still largely unresearched’ (1993, 324).<sup>22</sup>

But of course it is a question not simply of the means of transmission, but also of the reasons for such transmission and eventual preservation.

<sup>20</sup> An oral version of something similar to *Darraðarljóð* appears to have lived on in Orkney well into the post-medieval period; see for example Poole 1991, 155–56.

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting that *Gunnlaugs saga* depicts Sigtryggr silkiskegg as never having received a skaldic poem in his honour before the arrival of the Icelandic Gunnlaugr (see Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 74–76). There is no need to regard this as historically accurate, but it does indicate that Sigtryggr was not remembered in Old West Norse tradition as a patron of skaldic verse. This might in turn imply that whatever skaldic culture there may have been in Sigtryggr’s Dublin (whether in terms of new compositions or the preservation of older poems), it failed to connect with the main Norwegian–Icelandic axis, and so was lost when the Norse speech community in Ireland died out.

<sup>22</sup> Many scholars have assumed the existence of a now-lost *\*Brjáns saga* behind the Clontarf section of *Njáls saga* (for discussion see for example Goedheer 1938, 87–102, Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, xlv–xlix, Lönnroth 1976, 226–36). But even if such a text once existed, there is no evidence to support Donnchadh Ó Corráin’s claim (1998, 447–52) that *\*Brjáns saga* was originally written (in Old Norse) in Dublin c.1100 and subsequently conveyed to Iceland in written form.

The identification of the poets themselves as primary channels also forms a reminder that they were often a primary focus of interest as well. In other words, as has been said, poems by Egill (for example) were remembered and recorded precisely because they were poems by Egill—the most eminent and foundational of all Icelandic skalds. This is clear enough, and understandable enough, especially for the so-called *hofuð-skáld* ('chief skalds') of Icelandic poetic tradition, bearing in mind the apparent role played by the cultivation of poetry in the formation and articulation of Icelandic national identity. But in thinking about individual cases, another factor to be considered is genealogy. There were many individuals in the Icelandic *ritöld* who could trace their descent from Egill, and who therefore would have a strong family interest in preserving poems by him, as well as traditions about him; and such a genealogical motivation and channel for transmission can only have been aided by traditions of skaldhood within the same family (for example, Einar Skúlason, the most eminent Icelandic poet of the twelfth century, was a descendant of Egill). No doubt something similar would be true of those who were related to Glúmr (and Stúfr); Glúmr's father Geiri was, after all, remembered as a *landnámsmaðr* (see Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 284).

The more general importance of genealogical impulses in the transmission of tradition will be considered below in greater detail; but these are some of the possible channels and motivations for the memorial transmission of skaldic verse in general, and York–Dublin poems in particular. At this point, however, it is also worth considering some of the characteristic consequences of social memory. Fentress and Wickham note that what is customarily lost in transmission is what they term the 'external contexts' of a memory or tradition—that is, knowledge of the social and historical circumstances which shaped and framed a particular event or utterance (1992, 72). This occurs even where verbatim memorisation occurs. In other words (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 79–70):

This means that mnemonic reinforcement decontextualises the information as it preserves it. The information is retained without the accompanying contexts that would put this information into perspective, and allow us to evaluate it as a historical source.

Or, to put this even more bluntly (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 201): 'We preserve the past at the cost of decontextualizing it, and partially blotting it out'. If one applies such generalisations to the transmission of skaldic verse, it is clear that the most obvious aspects of 'external

context' which are often, but not always, retained are the identity of the poet and the name of the poem, neither of which is normally contained within the text of the poem itself. Next to these one might add, if it is not preserved within the 'internal context' of the poem itself, the identity of the patron for whom the poem is composed; and after that, factors such as the occasion of composition, the specific events being alluded to, and so on. When they employ such verses as sources, therefore, the authors of kings' sagas can be seen to be attempting to re-contextualise the traditions that have been passed down to them, either by explicating the information content of the verse itself, or by accounting for the circumstances in which the poet came to compose the verse. So it is hardly surprising that such attempts at recontextualisation are by no means always successful.<sup>23</sup>

Considering our four York–Dublin poems, one can see that the survival rate for even these basic facts of 'external context' is not high; indeed, it is a good deal lower than for skaldic poems from other sources, such as the courts of Knútr and Óláfr Haraldsson. Egill's *Hofuðlausn* is unique among the four in that the names of both the poet and the poem are preserved, while Eiríkr's identity as the patron is vouchsafed internally. For Glúmr's poem we have the name of the poet but not the poem, while the patron is again internally identified. For *Eiríksmál*, on the other hand, we have the name of the poem but not of the poet; once again, the patron is identified within the poem. Finally, *Darraðarljóð* presents the best example of the possible consequences of decontextualisation in the course of transmission: the name of the poet has been lost, though not that of the poem, but the patron is not internally identified by name, only by certain circumstances, such as conflict with the Irish. The most plausible scenario is therefore that in the poem's transmission a further item of external context that was attached was the fact that the poem was in honour of a king called Sigtryggr. Originally this was Sigtryggr caoch, but as the fame of this king declined the Sigtryggr concerned was wrongly re-identified as the more famous Sigtryggr silkiskegg (also, of course, king in Ireland, and in fact the grandson of Sigtryggr caoch). This in turn led the author of *Njáls saga*, or a predecessor, to contextualise the poem in terms of the events of 1014 rather than 919.

<sup>23</sup>To give an illustration from the most obvious of external contexts for skaldic verse, it is well known that the same stanza is sometimes found attributed to different poets in different prose works; see for example Frank 1978, 172–74.

Discussion of the external contexts for skaldic poems leads inevitably into discussion of oral tradition as more broadly conceived. I commented earlier that it is not possible to disentangle a consideration of poetic transmission from the question of the transmission of non-poetic material, not least on account of the ‘external contexts’ that were attached to various verses; nor is it really meaningful to distinguish ‘oral tradition’ from either ‘oral history’ or ‘oral literature’ (see Tonkin 1992, 15–17). In the remainder of this article, then, the focus will be widened to consider the preservation and loss of non-poetic traditions about Scandinavian York and Dublin, though it should be emphasised that this is done only in order to complete the picture of poetic (non-)transmission. The question of ‘oral tradition’ constitutes, of course, an enormous subject, and in Old Norse studies it is still frequently (and, perhaps, anachronistically and unhelpfully) discussed with reference to the bookprose/freeprose debate of the early twentieth century (for reviews of this debate see for example Andersson 1964, 65–81, Byock 1984, and Clover 1985). Notwithstanding a certain sense of exhaustion in some quarters, oral tradition has continued to receive attention (see for example Hermann Pálsson 1999). So, for instance, Heather O’Donoghue has endeavoured to distinguish the various configurations of oral, poetic and written traditions involved in the genesis of *Kormaks saga* (1991, esp. 170–81); and Diana Whaley has reviewed the role of oral tradition in the composition of *Heimskringla* (1991, 77–80). An influential discussion by Richard Perkins (1989) outlines some of the forms oral tradition might take, and explores in particular the role of physical objects as focuses for narrative and anecdote. The obvious analogy from recent ‘memory studies’ would be the role of relics in the commemoration of saints (see for example Cubitt 2000, 271–72), while a possible example from Viking-Age England would be the English coins (*enskir penningar*) which *Egils saga* records as being found regularly in the stream to the east of Mosfell, so forming a focus for narrative traditions about Egill’s service to Athelstan (see Nordal 1933, 297).<sup>24</sup>

But alongside such specific work on Old Norse, there has also been a vast amount of continuing anthropological research into the nature of oral tradition in a range of other cultures (see for example Henige 1974, Vansina 1985, Goody 1987, Tonkin 1992, and Rubin 1995), and one of the key components in the picture is the role of genealogy. It was

<sup>24</sup> Another Anglo-Saxon example, if it survived into the thirteenth century, and if it is not simply a literary motif, would be the cloak Æthelred is said to have given to Gunnlaugr (see Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 71, 107).

suggested above that a poet's descendants might constitute one group of people who would be eager to remember and transmit their ancestor's compositions, but the importance of genealogy as a channel for tradition is very much greater than this one rather limited concern. As Diana Whaley writes (2000, 193):

If one were to choose a single proof of the usefulness of Icelandic historical writing, it would probably be the dominance of genealogical lore—surely the classic case of information for a purpose, since to remember chains of names without good reason would be difficult, pointless and dull. But good reasons are plentiful, from the legitimizing of claims of birth and landholding to the reassuring sense of a place in the flow of generations.

As is clear from Whaley's comments, the genealogical impulse was at work in the preservation of tradition much more widely than simply in the case of the descendants of poets. Those who traced their ancestry to other sorts of famous figures from the Viking Age—to kings, law-speakers, outlaws—will have been no less concerned with the usefulness of such traditions, whether these traditions were (in Sarah Foot's terms) reminiscent memories or learned memorials, and again it is important to stress the diversity of the reasons for preserving family-based memories. The genealogical motivations operative in the composition of a good deal of early Icelandic literature, especially *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingasögur*, have recently been explored by Margaret Clunies Ross, amongst others (see Clunies Ross 1993, 1997, especially 25–30, and 1998, 76–157; see also Whaley 2000, 190–91), and Clunies Ross argues that one can readily observe the textual utilisation of the past in order to serve the political and dynastic needs of the present (though, as noted above, family-based traditions need not always be so political). As Clunies Ross comments (1993, 379):

Although it would be facile to assert that Icelandic scholars and their patrons were driven *only* by self-interest, I think it can be shown that the desire to demonstrate respectability if not superiority of family connections played a very large part in the development of many kinds of writing in medieval Iceland.

The genealogies (*ættartölur*) recorded in *Sturlunga saga* provide an excellent demonstration of such concerns, and in their citing of earliest ancestors they also give a good indication of which pasts and professed origins retained, or acquired, special importance and value (see Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 51–56). Put simply, in the context of Icelandic textual production there was a continuing interest in preserving traditions about those historical or legendary figures from whom important

families claimed descent, but there was little cause to preserve traditions about figures who did not fall into this category. So, for example, a number of eminent Icelandic families in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries traced their descent back to the Danish king Ragnarr loðbrók, and of course narrative and poetic sources about Ragnarr continued to circulate in medieval Iceland (see McTurk 1991); accordingly, several scholars have suggested that it is such ancestries that at least partly account for this Icelandic interest during the *ritöld* (see Mitchell 1991, 123–36, Clunies Ross 1993, 380–82, Nordal 2001, 309–19). But as far as I am aware there was no one in medieval Iceland who claimed descent from the York–Dublin dynasty of Sigtryggr caoch, Óláfr Guðfriðsson and Óláfr cuaran, even though, historically speaking, these kings had had family connections with the supposed sons of Ragnarr. In their genealogical concerns Icelandic families were not without interest in Viking-Age England—as has been said, Ragnarr and his sons were popular ancestors to possess, and one family, the Hítðælir, even claimed descent from St Edmund of East Anglia—but this interest does not seem to have extended to the kings of York and Dublin in the first half of the tenth century.<sup>25</sup> Sigtryggr caoch and Óláfr Guðfriðsson do not feature among the ancestors catalogued in *Landnámabók*, while Óláfr cuaran

<sup>25</sup> One strand of the Hítðælir genealogy concludes: *Móðir Eyjólfss Einarssonar var Valgerðr. Hennar móðir var Vilborg Ósvaldsdóttir, hennar móðir Úlfrún, Játmundar dóttir Englakonungs* (Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 56) ('The mother of Eyjólfir Einarsson was Valgerðr. Her mother was Vilborg Ósvaldsdóttir, and her mother was Úlfrún, the daughter of Edmund, king of the English'). See also the similar, but not identical, version in Chapter 113 of *Njáls saga: Móðir Eyjólfss, fædur Guðmundar, var Valgerðr Runólfsdóttir; móðir Valgerðar hét Valborg; hennar móðir var Jórunn in óborna, dóttir Ósvalds konungs ins helga. Móðir Jórunnar var Bera, dóttir Játmundar konungs ins helga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 284) ('The mother of Eyjólfir, the father of Guðmundr, was Valgerðr, the daughter of Runólfr; the mother of Valgerðr was called Valborg; her mother was Jórunn the illegitimate, the daughter of King Oswald the saint. The mother of Jórunn was Bera, the daughter of King Edmund the saint'). This may be one reason for the interest in St Edmund found in a number of Icelandic texts. As a contrast, it is interesting to note that English tradition preserved no hint that Edmund had any children, and Susan Ridyard has suggested that this may be due to a West Saxon desire to recast the saint as a virgin martyr, thereby disabling any potential rival claimants to the East Anglian kingdom (see Ridyard 1988, 226). Furthermore, the *Njáls saga* version makes it clear that the Oswald alluded to in the Hítðælir genealogy is (impossibly, but, in genealogical terms, significantly) St Oswald of Northumbria; and bizarrely, the saint is here given an illegitimate daughter (if that is what Jórunn's nickname indicates).



appears only in his connection with the Icelander Þorgils orraskáld (see above, p. 59). In other words, there appear to have been few genealogical reasons for medieval Icelanders to remember the York–Dublin dynasty and keep alive traditions about them, let alone to remember any poems in their honour that may once have existed.

In the final part of this article it is therefore worth attempting a rapid survey of what traditions about the York–Dublin dynasty—if any—were preserved. It was stated at the beginning of this discussion that there is a hiatus in the accounts of Viking-Age York between the time of the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók and the time of Eiríkr blóðøx in Old Norse literary tradition.<sup>26</sup> The best-known account of Northumbrian history in Old Norse prose is probably that in Chapter 3 of *Hákonar saga góða* in *Heimskringla* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 152–53):

Norðimbraland er kallað fimmtungr Englands. Hann [i.e. Eiríkr] hafði atsetu í Jórvík, þar sem menn segja, at fyrr hafi setit Loðbrókarsynir. Norðimbraland var mest byggt Norðmönnum, síðan er Loðbrókarsynir unnu landit. Herjuðu Danir ok Norðmenn optlaga þangat, síðan er vald landsins hafði undan þeim gengit. Mörg heiti landsins eru þar gefin á norrœna tungu, Grímsbær ok Hauksfljót ok mörg önnur.

Northumbria is reckoned a fifth part of England. Eiríkr had taken residence in York, where, men say, the sons of Loðbrók had previously resided. After the sons of Loðbrók conquered the land, Northumbria was mostly settled by Norwegians. And after control of the land had been taken away from them, Danes and Norwegians often harried there. Many place-names there are in the Norse language, such as *Grímsbær* [Grimsby] and *Hauksfljót* [?] and many others.

This is clearly related to an earlier passage in Chapter 7 of *Fagrskinna* (Bjarni Einarsson 1985, 76):

<sup>26</sup> The one exception to this that has been proposed is the strange story (preserved in related sections of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and the *Þátr af Ragnars sonum*) of how Knútr, a great-great-grandson of Ragnarr, was killed near York by an English king called Aðalbrikt (Aðalsteinn in *Jómsvíkinga saga*); for the episode see Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000, I 129–30, Blake 1962, 6–7, and Guðni Jónsson 1954, I 300 (*Þátr af Ragnars sonum*). Alfred Smyth has suggested that this story preserves memories of the obscure CNUT REX who is recorded on certain York pennies from c.900, and moreover, that Aðalbrikt is to be identified with Æthelwold, the rebellious nephew of Alfred (see Smyth 1987, I 47–52). This, however, seems unlikely, and the story as preserved in Old Norse texts is carefully integrated into traditions about the Danish royal house in the late tenth century (for example, Knútr's father is Gormr, and his brother is Haraldr, father of Sveinn tjúguskegg). See further Ólafur Halldórsson 2000, 52–62, 86–91.

Norðimbraland er kallað af heiti Norðmanna fyrir þær sakar, at Norðmenn hafa löngum haft ríki yfir því landi. Þar eru mörg örnöfn gefin með norrœnni tungu, svá sem er Grímsbær ok Haugsfljót.

Northumbria is named after the Norwegians, because for a long time Norwegians held control over the land. Many place-names there are given in the Norse language such as *Grímsbær* [Grimsby] and *Haugsfljót* [?].

As can be seen, these passages preserve a clear memory of Scandinavian activity in York and Northumbria (see also a similar passage in *Egils saga*, partly quoted p. 75 below, Nordal 1933, 129),<sup>27</sup> and the harryings mentioned by Snorri may well be, historically, those of the York–Dublin dynasty in their repeated campaigns to regain York (though they might also be those of the ‘Second Viking Age’); but these sources are unable to supply details of any particular persons between the sons of Ragnarr and Eiríkr blóðøx. One consequence of this may be the way in which saga tradition expands Eiríkr’s reign in York, and pulls back its beginning; perhaps partly because it was known that Egill had dealings with both Athelstan and Eiríkr, the period of Eiríkr’s reign is reinterpreted to fill the vacuum left by the loss of the memory of other rulers. The picture is similar for Dublin, and until one comes to Óláfr cuaran and, especially, Sigtryggr silkiskegg there is little or nothing to follow the fleeting and chronologically confused reference to the city’s first Scandinavian rulers in Chapter 33 of *Haralds saga hárfagra* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 138):

Þeim Þorgísl ok Fróða gaf Haraldr konungr herskip, ok fóru þeir í vestrvíking ok herjuðu um Skotland ok Bretland ok Írland. Þeir eignuðusk fyrst Norðmanna Dyflinni. Svá er sagt, at Fróða væri gefinn banadrykkur, en Þorgísl var lengi konungr yfir Dyflinni ok var svikinn af Írum ok fell þar.

King Haraldr [hárfagri] gave warships to [his sons] Þorgísl and Fróði, and they went raiding in the west, and harried around Scotland and Wales and Ireland. They were the first Norwegians to gain control of Dublin. It is said that Fróði was given a deadly drink, but Þorgísl was king of Dublin for a long time, and was betrayed by the Irish and fell there.

Let us now review the profile in Old Norse literary tradition of the three kings of Scandinavian York and Dublin who have been selected for emphasis in this article. The first of these, Sigtryggr caoch, was in historical terms a major figure indeed. The son of Sigtryggr Ívarsson, he regained control of Dublin in 919 in his battle with Niall Glundubh, and

<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that there are, apparently, four places in Iceland bearing the transferred name *Jórvík*, but it is unclear when these names were given (see Fellows-Jensen 1987, 147).

soon afterwards, in 921, succeeded to the kingship of York after the death of his brother Ragnall the previous year (see Smyth 1987, I 67–71, II 1–10). In recognition of his status and importance, Athelstan endeavoured to forge a connection with him by marrying his sister Eadgyth to him in a ceremony at Tamworth, as is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub anno 925* (see Cubbin 1996, 41). Sigtryggr appears, however, to have died in 927, to be remembered in later English chronicles as a pagan who soon threw off the Christianity which his marriage seems to have involved (see Coxe 1841–44, I 385–86; on Eadgyth’s later history see Thacker 2001, 257–58). For a Viking king, then, this was a career of very great success and achievement, but as far as I am aware, Sigtryggr is not mentioned once in Old Norse prose. As was seen in the earlier discussion of *Darraðarljóð*, so completely did his memory disappear that the poem became attached to a later and better-remembered Sigtryggr—namely Sigtryggr silkiskegg, Sigtryggr caoch’s grandson.

Óláfr Guðfriðsson was the nephew of Sigtryggr caoch, and in many ways no less successful in his career (see Smyth 1987, II 31–106). King of Dublin in succession to his father, Sigtryggr’s brother, in 937 he led the alliance against Athelstan which was defeated at the battle of Brunanburh. But this was only a temporary setback, and following Athelstan’s death in 939 he became king in York and subsequently campaigned southwards into the midlands, and northwards beyond the Tees, before dying in 941. His 940 campaign into the Midlands led to his rule over all of England north of Watling Street, and as Smyth consequently notes, Óláfr ‘pushed the Scandinavian conquest to its greatest extent since the reign of Alfred’ (1987, II 94–95); his success thus ‘has much more of the character of the time of Sveinn Forkbeard and Knútr the Great than of earlier viking wars’ (1987, II 99).

It is therefore surprising to find that in Old Norse sources Óláfr features only in the following capacity (*Egils saga* chapter 51; Nordal 1933, 129):

Óláfr rauði hét konungr á Skotlandi; hann var skozkr at fõðurkyni, en danskr at móðurkyni ok kominn af ætt Ragnars loðbrókar; hann var ríkr maðr. Skotland var kallat þriðjungr ríkis við England; Norðimbraland er kallat fimmtungr Englands, ok er þat norðast, næst Skotlandi fyrir austan; þat hõfðu haft at fornu Danakonungar; Jórvík er þar hõfuðstaðr.

There was a king in Scotland called Óláfr the Red; he was Scottish on his father’s side, but Danish on his mother’s and descended from the family of Ragnarr loðbrók; and he was a powerful man. Scotland was reckoned a third of [or ‘a third of the size of’] the kingdom of England. Northumbria is

reckoned a fifth of England, and it is the furthest north, bordering Scotland and on the eastern side. The kings of the Danes had held it in the past; its capital is York.

Thereafter he is known in the saga as Óláfr Skotakonungr, and he features in no other saga. In other words, Óláfr's varied and successful career has been reduced in Old Norse tradition to a single straightforward role as the primary enemy of Athelstan, in a battle which is clearly to be identified with Brunanburh but the site of which is called Vínheiðr in *Egils saga*. In the process of this, all connections with Dublin and York have been forgotten, and he has been reinterpreted as a king of the Scots and given a nickname, *inn rauði*, of unknown origin but presumably meaning 'red-haired'. Alistair Campbell explained Óláfr's appearance as king of the Scots by suggesting that the author of *Egils saga* 'had no information about his background' but was aware that at his own time of writing 'the likeliest nation to invade England were the Scots' (1971, 6). There is no cause to doubt Campbell's first comment, though the second is more speculative. Alfred Smyth, on the other hand, suggests that 'it was a short step from calling Óláfr "Irish" to describing him as Scottish', not least because there were indeed Scots under Constantine at the battle of Brunanburh (1987, II 78). This too is possible; what both explanations implicitly recognise is that Icelandic saga authors were entirely ignorant of the long-lasting political association that had existed between York and Dublin, whereby kings of Dublin often subsequently succeeded to the kingship of York, and indeed kings of the one were often kings of the other as well. In other words, Icelandic tradition preserved little knowledge, and no understanding, of the history of the York–Dublin dynasty.

The account of Vínheiðr in *Egils saga* also contains two *lausavísur* attributed to Egill, both preserved only in the saga, which also require attention here. Egill is said to speak the first of these following Óláfr's initial incursion into England, in which he put to flight Athelstan's defenders (for text and saga context see Nordal 1933, 131; see also Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 50, B I 44):

Áleifr of kom jöfri,  
ótt vas víg, á bak flóttu,  
þingharðan frá k þengil  
þann, en felldi annan;  
glapstígu lét gnóga  
Goðrekr á mó troðna;  
jörð spenr Engla skerðir  
Alfgeirs und sik halfa.

Óláfr caused one leader to flee—the battle was furious—and killed the other; I have learned that this king is battle-fierce. Goðrekr has trodden enough foolish paths on the heath; the destroyer of the English brings half of Alfgeirr's land under him.

The second verse is said to have been spoken by Egill after the battle of Vínheiðr itself (for text and saga context see Nordal 1933, 142; see also Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 51, B I 44–45):

Valkostum hlóðk vestan  
 vang fyr merkistangir,  
 ótt vas él þats sóttak  
 Aðgils blǫum Naðri;  
 háði ungr við Engla  
 Áleifr þrimu stála;  
 helt, né hrafnar sultu,  
 Hringr á vápna þingi.

In the west I piled up the plain with heaps of corpses before the standards; the storm was terrible when I attacked Aðils with dark Naðr [Egill's sword]. Young Óláfr engaged in a clash of weapons against the English. Hringr persisted with a meeting of weapons, and the ravens did not go hungry.

It is difficult to know what to do with these in the present context, as the genuineness of many *lausavísur* attributed to Egill has been doubted, and it may well be that the safest course would be to leave *lausavísur*—and especially *lausavísur* quoted only in *Íslendingasögur*—out of the picture altogether (as is usual practice in historical studies).<sup>28</sup> But as this discussion has now moved on to consider the York–Dublin kings in Old Norse literary tradition, not simply in genuine tenth-century poems, it is important to pay some attention to them in this case.

The first *lausavísa* contains no datable anachronisms, and Alistair Campbell saw no grounds for not accepting it as a genuine Egill verse (1971, 7). The figures of Alfgeirr and Goðrekr (according to *Egils saga*, Athelstan's governors in Northumbria) are not known from any other source, but their names are certainly plausible Scandinavianisations of Old English names (*Ælfgār* and *Godric*); this may argue for at least some genuineness in the tradition on which the verse is based, whether or not it is by Egill himself. If the verse is by Egill, then it testifies to the

<sup>28</sup> For some discussion of these two verses see Campbell 1938, 71, 74–75 n. 2, and 1971, 5–7, and Page 1982, 346–48. The second *lausavísa* is immediately preceded in the saga by another, in which Egill laments the death of his brother Þórólfr beside the river *Vína*. For discussion of the possibility that this preceding verse, whether by Egill himself or not, may contain genuine tradition in some form or other see Townend 1998, 88–93.

tradition that there was an enemy of Athelstan's called Óláfr (and the verse was remembered, presumably, simply because it was a verse by Egill). But even if the verse is not by Egill, it still testifies to this same tradition in Icelandic literary culture, and Icelanders continued to take an interest in Athelstan for the two reasons of his patronage of Egill and his fostering of Hákon.

The second *lausavísa* is viewed more widely as a later fabrication, and it is the names Hringr and Aðils which are responsible for this. These are suspicious names; not only are no such figures known from Viking-Age England (although Smyth (1987, II 74) does make a half-hearted attempt to identify Aðils with the Welsh king Idwal), but the names themselves are stock ones for kings with 'Heroic Age' affinities (see Campbell 1938, 71). Moreover, it is likely that the figures of Hringr and Aðils have been invented in order to identify the second and third of the three *jǫfrar* ('princes') that Egill's *Aðalsteinsdrápa* records the English king as having defeated (for text see Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, A I 34–35, B I 30), whereas in reality these two allies of Óláfr's were Constantine and Owain, the rulers respectively of the Scots and the Strathclyde Welsh. It thus seems highly unlikely that this *lausavísa* is genuinely Egill's, but even if, for the sake of argument, one were to accept that it is, the most it would reveal in the present context is that Óláfr was remembered as an enemy of Athelstan's, and that his name was preserved in poetry only because it occurred in a verse by Egill (that is, not because of any interest in Óláfr himself). It is much more likely, however, that this *lausavísa* is indeed a later composition. That the names of Constantine and Owain were forgotten, to be replaced by the formulaic Hringr and Aðils, indicates again the sort of loss of information that occurred in the transmission (or non-transmission) of Norse traditions about York and Dublin.

This somewhat uncertain situation can be summed up as follows. Óláfr Guðfriðsson was remembered in Old Norse literary tradition as the enemy of Athelstan, against whom Egill fought in Athelstan's army. Remembrance of this may have been aided, or even effected, by the fact that Óláfr's name and role were recorded in a *lausavísa* by Egill (but probably only one, and possibly none at all). Traditions about Óláfr thus formed part of the broader Icelandic memories of the battle of Brunanburh and of Egill's time in England—memories which were to be shaped into lasting written form in *Egils saga*. But although Óláfr was remembered as the enemy of Athelstan, his affiliations were entirely forgotten, in terms of both pedigree and location. Notwithstanding the

memory of some Scandinavian ancestry for him, Óláfr's patronymic was forgotten, he came to be presented as a king of the Scots, and all connection with York or Dublin was lost.

Finally, we may turn to Óláfr cuaran in Old Norse literature. Óláfr cuaran was the son of Sigtryggr caoch and the cousin of Óláfr Guðfriðsson (for recent discussion of the meaning of Óláfr's nickname, usually translated 'sandal', see Breeze 1997 and Doherty 1998, 296–97). He was, however, in Stenton's words, 'younger and milder than Olaf Guthfrithson and never equalled him as a viking leader' (1971, 358; on Óláfr cuaran's English career see Smyth 1987, II, 107–25; on his Irish career see Doherty 1998, 296–305). Leaving aside a possible brief tenure in 927, Óláfr cuaran became king in York on the death of his cousin, but enjoyed only three years of rule there before being driven out by Edmund, who had stood sponsor to him at baptism only a year earlier, in 943. He thereupon retreated to Dublin, but in either 947 or 950 he was back in York for another two- or three-year reign, before being again driven out, this time to make way for Eiríkr blóðøx—as events were to prove, the last Scandinavian king of York. Once back in Dublin, Óláfr managed to maintain his reign there for another three decades until the battle of Tara in 980, and he eventually died in 981 and was buried, as a distinguished convert, on the island of Iona; after a break in Scandinavian rule, his son Sigtryggr silkiskegg succeeded him in Dublin. As Smyth writes, 'Óláfr's long life which spanned the greater part of the tenth century renders him the most remarkable, but not the most successful of Scandinavian kings in his own right' (1987, II 107). His early career also marked the end of an era: he was the last Scandinavian king to rule in both York and Dublin, the last king of Dublin to covet the kingship of York. By the time his son Sigtryggr succeeded him York had been in West Saxon hands for over thirty years, and Sigtryggr, who was to enjoy an equally long reign in Dublin, could have no real pretensions to the kingship of York.

Sigtryggr silkiskegg of Dublin is a familiar figure in saga prose, but his father is somewhat less so. As we have already seen, he makes a solitary appearance in *Landnámabók* as the patron of Þorgils orraskáld. In *Njáls saga* he is mentioned once, on account of being Sigtryggr's father: *Hann var sonr Óláfs kvárans; móðir hans hét Kormlóð* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 440) ('He was the son of Óláfr cuaran; his mother was called Kormlóð'). This is also the case in *Gunnlaugs saga: Þá réð fyrir Írlandi Sigtryggr konungr silkiskegg, sonr Óláfs kvárans ok Kormlaðar dróttningar* (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 74) ('King Sigtryggr silkiskegg was then ruling over Ireland, the son of Óláfr cuaran and

Queen Kormloð'), and in Gunnlaugr's praise poem for Sigtryggr, quoted in the saga, the king is described as *Kvárans son* (Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 75; Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B I 185). In *Heimskringla* Óláfr appears twice in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*; both appearances (and no others) occur also in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (see Ólafur Halldórsson 1958–2000, I 165, 208). The first appearance in Snorri's saga is in Chapter 32, when the newly converted Óláfr Tryggvason sails to England from the Scilly Isles, and on arrival attends a local þing: *En er þing var sett, þá kom þar dróttning ein, er Gyða er nefnd, systir Óláfs kvárans, er konungr var á Írlandi í Dyflinni* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 267) ('But when the meeting had been established, then a queen came there who was called Gyða, the sister of Óláfr cuaran, who was king in Ireland in Dublin'). The widowed Gyða has previously been married to a jarl in England, and she tells Óláfr that she is a *konungsdóttir af Írlandi* ('king's daughter from Ireland')—strictly speaking, a reference to Sigtryggr caoch, and probably the only one in Old Norse prose (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 268). The outcome, inevitably, is that Óláfr and Gyða marry, and thus the two Óláfrs become brothers-in-law. This is also recorded in that part of *Orkneyinga saga* which now only survives in a copy of a late sixteenth-century Danish translation: *Oluff Tryggesøn . . . drog hand til Engeland oc fick der Gyde Kaurans Irlands Kongis Søstter* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 25) ('Óláfr Tryggvason . . . went to England and there married Gyða, the sister of King Kváran of Ireland'). Accordingly, the second reference in the saga, in Chapter 47, tells us that when a Norwegian called Þórir klakkr comes to Dublin looking for Óláfr Tryggvason (at that time using the pseudonym Áli), *Var hann þar með Óláfi konungi kváran, mági sínum* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 291) ('He was there with King Óláfr cuaran, his kinsman-in-law'). There are therefore two points to note about Óláfr cuaran's profile in Old Norse prose: first, that he is of interest primarily because of his family connections (as the brother-in-law of Óláfr Tryggvason and the father of Sigtryggr) rather than for his own sake, and second, that he is always remembered as a king of Dublin. With the possible exception of the story of Gyða's first marriage, all connection with England, let alone specifically with York, has vanished.

There is, however, a further reference to an Óláfr which requires attention. *Fagrskinna* gives the following account of Eiríkr blóðøx's adversary in his final battle: *Þá kom í móti hönum Óláfr konungr; hann var skattkonungr Játmundar konungs* (Bjarni Einarsson 1985, 77) ('Then King Óláfr came against him; he was a tributary king of King Edmund').



Snorri gives a similar account in his *Hákonar saga góða* (Snorri Sturluson 1941–51, I 154):

Óláfr hét konungr sá, er Játmundr konungr hafði þar sett til landvarnar. Hann dró saman her óvígjan ok fór á hendr Eiríki konungi, ok varð þar mikil orrosta.

The king whom King Edmund had appointed to guard the land there was called Óláfr. He gathered together an invincible army and advanced against King Eiríkr, and there was a great battle there.

This too is also mentioned in the Danish translation of *Orkneyinga saga*: *Den Kong sem Jatmunder haffde skicket til at regere det Land heed Oluff* (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965, 18) ('The king whom Edmund had appointed to rule the land was called Óláfr'). Which Óláfr is this—Guðfriðsson, or cuaran, or even an altogether different one? The two problems in deciding are, first, that Edmund had dealings with both Óláfrs, and second, that the entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which record these dealings are confused and corrupt. Óláfr Guðfriðsson's 940 agreement with Edmund is recorded in the following terms: *begeat Anlaf Eadmundes cynges freondscipe* ('Óláfr gained the friendship of King Edmund'). The outcome for Óláfr cuaran in 943 was as follows: *se cyning Eadmund onfeng þa Anlafe cyninge æt fulwihte, 7 he him cynelice gyfode* (Cubbin 1996, 44; the compiler of the D version has confused the two Anlafs, and thus misplaced part of the entry for 940 under 943) ('King Edmund sponsored King Óláfr at baptism, and royally gave him gifts'). Bearing in mind the accounts of the *Chronicle*, the very different political situations in 940 and 943 (with the West Saxons in control in 943 but not 940), and the identity of Eiríkr's predecessor in York, it seems to me that Óláfr cuaran is much the more likely to lie behind the *skattkonungr Játmundar* of the saga accounts. But whichever it is, one can see that Old Norse authors have failed to connect the Óláfr who was remembered as Edmund's *skattkonungr* with either Óláfr cuaran (who was remembered as a Dublin king) or Óláfr Guðfriðsson (who was remembered as a king of the Scots). So completely have these two kings' associations with England and York disappeared that neither was identified with the Óláfr who featured in the story of Eiríkr as a tributary king in England.

This review of Old Norse prose references has been unavoidably lengthy and in parts complex, but the findings can be summarised easily enough. Of the three great kings of Scandinavian York and Dublin, one is not remembered at all in Old Norse tradition (Sigtryggr caoch, whose fame is eclipsed and taken over by his later namesake Sigtryggr silkiskegg), one is remembered only as a king of the Scots (Óláfr Guðfriðsson, whose patronymic is forgotten), and one (Óláfr cuaran) is

so exclusively remembered as a king of Dublin that his activities in England are apparently stripped away and re-attached to an invented figure of identical name (Óláfr, the obscure sub-king of Edmund). The overall picture is clear: the York–Dublin dynasty was not remembered in Old Norse prose tradition, any more than it was in Old Norse poetic tradition.

As has been seen, there are enough hints to indicate that poems in honour of the York–Dublin kings were once composed and in circulation, but the extant remains, which cluster around the exceptional figure of Eiríkr blóðøx, form a sorry remnant of what might once have been. This discussion began by invoking the ‘homeostatic’ nature of oral cultures—in short, what is not relevant is not remembered. The obvious conclusion from the present investigation is that the history of Viking-Age York in the time of the York–Dublin dynasty was, for a variety of reasons, simply not relevant to the transmitters and recorders of Old Norse literary culture. As Sarah Foot has said of religious houses, ‘once a community had been dissolved, who was to preserve its corporate memory?’ (1999, 196). Once the York kingdom of the Ívarr dynasty had come to an end, who cared enough to preserve its poetry and traditions? As Eric John writes, ‘Had they lost Dublin they must have disappeared from history’ (1996, 94).

The memory of the York–Dublin dynasty thus perished on two fronts. They were not remembered in Old Norse tradition, as poems in their honour were not retained in the skaldic canon, and no one wished to trace descent from them; but they were little commemorated in English tradition, presumably because, with one or two exceptions, they were not Christian. The classic way for an early medieval barbarian dynasty to be commemorated was, of course, to convert to Christianity, and so find its way into (Latin) texts composed by the church which it patronised (for multiple examples see Fletcher 1997). But with rare exceptions, such as the Guthred who is commemorated in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* (see Arnold 1882–85, I 203, §13), this was not the route taken by the York–Dublin dynasty. The religious environment of early tenth-century York remains desperately unclear (for recent discussion see for example Stocker 2000, 191–200, and Abrams 2001), but to the text-making clerics of West Saxon England the Ívarr dynasty was sufficiently blurred in its religious allegiances to be easily depicted as a heathen enemy (as for instance, in the poem *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, included in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sub anno 942*; for text see Dobbie 1942, 20–21). Neither Christian nor ancestral, the York–

Dublin rulers of the time were thus neglected in both English and Norse tradition.<sup>29</sup>

This need not have been so. It is worth suggesting in conclusion a contrast with certain other spheres of Scandinavian activity in the Viking Age. As Catherine Cubitt has commented, ‘Communities create a shared identity through the negotiation and exploration of memories’ (2000, 253), and Diana Whaley has suggested some of the ways in which traditions about Norway were important in the formation and articulation of Icelandic identity (2000, 179–82). But Norway was not the only sphere of Icelandic or, more broadly, Scandinavian activity in the Viking Age which was to hold a significance for later Icelandic identity. One might, for example, consider the role played by descent from settlers who came from Ireland; or in terms of Viking colonial achievements, one might think about the role played by traditions and memories of *Garðaríki* and of Greenland. Even Anglo-Saxon England seems to have been important in the construction of an Icelandic identity and world-view, as suggested by such varied indicators as the descent of the *Hítðælir* from St Edmund, the composition of sagas about Oswald, Dunstan and Edward the Confessor (see for example Fell 1981), and even the First Grammarian’s comments about English orthography (see Haugen 1972, 13).

This article has explored some of the ways in which poems for the York–Dublin dynasty, and traditions about Scandinavian York and Dublin during their time, failed to be retained in the ‘homeostatic’ cultures of the skaldic community and of medieval Iceland. On the one side, traditions about their predecessors, the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók, maintained their relevance and were preserved; on the other, their Scandinavian successor, *Eiríkr blóðøx*, was remembered in poetry as well as story. But as one contemplates ‘this interplay of intentionality and serendipity, of remembering and of forgetting’ (Geary 1994, 26), it is clear that, notwithstanding the remarkable nature of their Viking-Age achievements, the York–Dublin dynasty itself was simply dropped from the Icelandic world-view.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This is a suitable point at which to note, though, that Óláfr cuaran may in some way have lived on in the medieval folklore of eastern (Scandinavian-settled) England in the figure of Havelok the Dane (see for example Dunn 1965, and Smithers 1987, lv–lvi).

<sup>30</sup> This article is based on a paper read to the Viking Society on 26 October 2001. I am grateful to members of the Society for discussion on that occasion, and to Heather O’Donoghue, Elizabeth Tyler and the editors of *Saga-Book* for comment on earlier versions.

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## HERMANN PÁLSSON

26 May 1921 – 11 August 2002

Hermann Pálsson was born on the farm of Sauðanes á Ásum, near Blönduós on Húnafljörður. His mother reared the large family single-handedly, following the death of her husband when Hermann was ten years old. The farm was relatively isolated, and winters in the north of Iceland can be cold. Hermann remembered the fire going out one day, and his mother asking him to walk to a neighbouring farm to get more. He carried home the smouldering logs in a bucket, wrapped in green, damp leaves, the bucket gradually becoming hotter and hotter, and more painful to carry. The episode reads like an extract from a saga.

Hermann was born into a Europe recovering from the trauma of the first World War, and he began his studies at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík during the second. A lifelong pacifist, he spoke with feeling about the inhumanity and brutality of militarism, and watched with horror the conflict in Vietnam.

At the University of Iceland, where his teachers included Sigurður Nordal and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, he took a degree in Icelandic studies. It was while he was a student there that he met his wife, Guðrún Þorvarðardóttir (Stella), with whom he had a daughter Steinvör; he is survived by Stella and Steinvör.

After graduating in 1947, Hermann entered the National University of Ireland in Dublin, where he studied for three years, reading for an honours degree in Irish Studies. His two degree courses gave him an unusually broad background in the languages and cultures of the western Viking world. Many of his early publications are on Celtic topics, and he remained fascinated by Irish culture.

In 1950, he was appointed to a lectureship in Icelandic in the English Language department at the University of Edinburgh. He recalled that in his early years in that city, he had to report regularly to the police 'Aliens, Dangerous Drugs and Firearms' department. In his teaching at Edinburgh, he paid proper attention to the need quickly to establish a knowledge of core vocabulary, and of such details of phonology and morphology as would make possible the reading with a dictionary of Norse texts. For Hermann, philologist and literary critic, introducing his students to Icelandic literature was as important as getting them to learn the mechanics of the language.

Hermann was happy at the University of Edinburgh, and was to spend his whole career there as, successively, lecturer, senior lecturer, reader,

and, from 1982, professor. On his retirement in 1988, he was granted the title of Professor Emeritus in Icelandic Studies.

In 1971 the University of Edinburgh hosted the First International Saga Conference. This event, which was Hermann's brainchild, proved so successful that a series of saga conferences was established. This triennial series, which has continued up to the present without a break, has become the most important forum for colleagues working in saga studies.

At the Ninth International Saga Conference (1994), held at Akureyri, where Hermann had attended high school, it was jokingly remarked that mere mortals were unable to read his publications as rapidly as he could produce them. In half a century of scholarship he published around 150 items, including monographs, articles, editions, reviews and, of course, translations. The translations from Norse represent a major achievement: seventeen titles, many of them the results of collaboration with others, notably Magnus Magnusson and Paul Edwards, covering the most important of the *Íslendingasögur*, together with important examples of historical works, *fornaldarsögur* and *þættir*.

Hermann produced the first of these translations, *Njal's Saga* (Harmondsworth, 1960), in collaboration with Magnus Magnusson. In the first paragraph of their introduction they acknowledged that the corpus of medieval Icelandic prose literature was '(to the English-speaking world, alas) largely unfamiliar'. Hermann did more than any other individual to make this literature accessible to English-speakers, using an English style that sought to capture without archaism the convention-governed variations of tone and formality found in the originals. The introductions to these translations, valuable to specialists and non-specialists alike for their literary insight, draw unobtrusively upon great breadth of learning.

The range of this scholarship encompassed the editing of Irish and Norse texts, as well as discussions of Celtic and Norse names, intertextuality between sagas, the social, cultural and ethical background to the sagas, and patristic influences and traditional Scandinavian elements in Norse literature. Much of this work provided detailed evidence in support of his constant belief that to read the sagas without acknowledging their debt to the literatures and learning of medieval Europe is to read them incompletely. It is thanks to the scholars of Hermann's generation, and in no small measure to the industry of Hermann himself, that this claim no longer seems controversial.

Hermann got a particular satisfaction from reading texts written in the so-called 'learned style' of Old Norse prose, responding to the rhetorical

riches of this style: rhythm and rhyme, alliteration and assonance, repetitions and variations. He was a poet himself, whose compositions combined the technical skills of verse-form and word-play with power of thought and a complex shifting of emotion. His poems simultaneously explore the large-scale and the personal. Some ten years ago, he said he was working on a poem with the theme of exile from one's native land, a theme that was intellectually fascinating to him as a medievalist, and emotionally important to him as an Icelander who had lived abroad for almost all of his adult life. (He was indeed to die abroad, following a road accident while on holiday in Bulgaria.)

There may therefore be an expression of personal sentiment in a brief remark which occurs in a recent monograph, in a discussion of the settlement of Iceland: 'it has always been regarded as a particularly cruel fate to forfeit the right to live in one's fatherland and suffer a life-long separation from family and friends' (*Oral Tradition and Saga Writing*, *Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia* 3 (Vienna, 1999), p. 14). But one shouldn't make too much of this point's relevance to Hermann. While his academic career certainly removed him and his family from Iceland, the warmth and breadth of his humanity, which so informed his scholarship, won him friends at home and throughout the world: *sermo datur cunctis*.

ANDREW HAMER

## REVIEWS

ORDBOG OVER DET NORRØNE PROSASPROG. A DICTIONARY OF OLD NORSE PROSE. 2: BAN–DA. Edited by JAMES E. KNIRK, HELLE DEGNBOL, BENT CHR. JACOBSEN, EVA RODE, CHRISTOPHER SANDERS, ÞORBJÖRG HELGADÓTTIR. *The Arnarnagnæan Commission*. Copenhagen, 2000. 1241 columns.

Accompanying volume: ONP 1–2: NØGLE // KEY. 190 pp.

Many might argue that the ‘golden age’ of lexicography is now coming to an end, if not already long behind us, judging from the dwindling ranks (often remarkably congruent with the dwindling pay-cheques) of staff at work on full historical registers requiring several lifetimes to complete. But despite the often inauspicious climate for such undertakings, there are still a lot of dictionaries on the go, and, at least if one is to judge from the steady growth of reviews, seminars, conferences and other burgeoning offshoots of the booming word industry, even more lexicographers. All too often, however, many of the latter are of the armchair variety, and no doubt the classic example of this sub-species is the type that settles down to pass judgement on many columns of hard work in a few pages of facile prose. For armchairs, although unquestionably comfortable, tend to be the natural furniture of home rather than the office, and the lexicographer-for-a-day who attempts to review new work in the field from such a well-padded position finds himself inevitably far removed from the special problems faced by the workaday dictionary-maker. And since all dictionaries are different, even a reviewer with some lexicographical experience of his own will have difficulty appreciating the many problems philological and physical, professional and personal, textual and temporal, which inevitably beset such long-term projects. Of course, all authors have problems to contend with; but one should not lose sight of the special difficulties faced by a changing team of editors, none of whom can pretend to exercise complete control over every aspect of a work they may never live to see completed.

Lexicography is a practical undertaking, and for purely practical reasons, lexicographers must limit the body of texts from which they draw citations, the degree of detail permitted in a definition, the sorts of cross-references to be provided in an entry, even which words will be treated in the dictionary at all. Yet despite their best efforts to contend (or perhaps because they have no choice but to contend) with such obvious constraints, writers of dictionaries are regularly challenged by the diverse expectations and sometimes conflicting demands of their readers. It is said that the first letter received by the editors of the newly-published *Concise Oxford Dictionary* in 1911 was from an irate reader who, having bought the book for no other reason than to check the correct spelling of the word *gal(l)iot*, was outraged to see it had been omitted. The editors of the second volume of *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP) have tried to anticipate any such customers’ complaints by presenting fully and clearly the method, format and scope of their dictionary in the updated *Key* published with each new volume, and it goes without saying that this companion text must be regularly consulted by anyone using the dictionary. It may then seem an exercise in

perversity if, having pointed out the general clarity and utility of the introductory volume, I devote the rest of this review to commenting on details in the dictionary for which an attentive reader of the *Key* would doubtless require no commentary.

For the reader who accidentally mislays, or blissfully ignores, the introductory volume, the title of *ONP* should signal that the dictionary does not treat vocabulary found only in poetry. But confusion may arise when a specialised sense of a word well attested in prose contexts would be best supported by a citation from poetry. One such case which has already prompted discussion on 'Oldnorsenet' (18–20 February, 2002) involves the omission from the *ONP* entry '*bjarga vb.* 'help, save' of an apparently specialised sense of this verb: 'to act as a midwife'. Such a contextual sense of *bjarga* is thought to be attested in *Sigrdrífumál* 9: 'bjargrúnar skaltu kunna ef þú bjarga vilt ok leysa kind frá konum'. Compare the cognate noun *bjargrúnar* in the same passage, defined in Cleasby-Vigfusson as 'runes for helping women in labour' (and cf. Gering, *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zu den Liedern der Edda*, s.vv. *bjarga*, sense 2; *bjargrúnar*). A similarly specialised sense has been proposed for the expression *bjarga kúm* 'to attend cows casting calf' in chapter 16 of *Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa*, since this is the sense of the phrase implied by the general context in which it appears. The relevant passage in *Bjarnar saga* is in fact cited in *ONP* s.v. '*bjarga vb.* A.3 (col. 358.6–7) as BjH<sup>s</sup> 153<sup>14</sup>, although the editors are clearly reluctant to attach to the verb any specific association with midwifery in this instance, instead citing the phrase in question under a general sense 'to attend to, take care of', but adding a tentative parenthetical note after the citation: *spec. 'tage sig afkælvende ko'?* *sál. andre ordbøger; cf. Blöndal bjarga konu, bjarga kú // spec. 'care for a calving cow'?* thus other dictionaries (*ONP* 2, 358.4–6). Since overly narrow interpretations of words within a context are always open to dispute, the editors' general scepticism is admirable. In this case, however, treating the phrase *bjarga kúm* separately as a possibly specialised sense of *bjarga* might have been a better way of drawing attention to early evidence of a meaning of this verb which is attested in Modern Icelandic (as the editors acknowledge in their reference to Sigfús Blöndal's *Íslandsk-dansk Ordbog*). This would at least save some readers familiar with the passage in *Sigrdrífumál* from the false impression that this specialised sense of *bjarga* was restricted to poetry. One might also expect a cross-reference to the cognate compound *bjargrýgr*, which is usually regarded as a term for a midwife (cf. e.g. Gotfredsen, 'Barsel', *KLNM* 1, 357), although the editors resist such a definition in their treatment of that word, glossing *bjargrýgr* under a general sense 'helping-woman', and then tentatively adding as uncertain explanations: 'at childbirth? as a witness?' (*ONP* 2, 364.2–4). I am really quibbling here over a matter of simple convenience. Distinguishing *bjarga kúm* as a possible subsense of the main verb, with appropriate cross-references to cognates in prose and poetry which support interpretation of the phrase in a specialised sense, would make it easier for a reader to review the available evidence in one place, and to decide on that basis whether the verb had developed a specific association with midwifery. To be fair, the bibliographical references supplied in the entries are intended to direct readers to just

such broader discussion of disputed terms, and s.v. *bjargrýgr* the editors appropriately refer the reader to the article by Gottfredsen cited above, as well as to ‘Meissner 1942 63 note 2 for a different explanation’ (*ONP* 2, 364.2–5), although they are perhaps needlessly coy about revealing what Meissner’s explanation actually is.

At this point it is worth noting that the editors are to be commended for adopting in the layout of their entries regular reference to relevant secondary literature on any given word. Dictionaries which fail to adopt this feature deprive readers of easy access to more detailed study of words and their contexts, and condemn the unfortunate entry-writers who work on them to the always thankless and often impossible task of reducing to a few words of definition arguments and explanations which other commentators have needed the space of one or more articles to treat in any adequate way. Compare, for instance, the *ONP* entry for *brjóstpungr*, which briefly explains that the adjective describes ‘a chest complaint’, and then refers the reader to Guðrún P. Helgadóttir’s edition of *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, where discussion of what medical condition might be implied by the term takes up five pages of the introduction. This feature likewise anticipates the appeal of such bibliography to readers who wish to use the dictionary as a general guide to both the surviving literature and the material culture which that literature describes. Anyone investigating the history of Nordic church furniture will appreciate the bibliography added s.v. *brík sb.f.*, including studies of the decorative altarpiece described by this term published as recently as 1997. Readers interested in birth, childhood and childcare in medieval Scandinavia can turn to the bibliography appended to entries such as *barnburðr*, *barndómr*, *barnfóstrlaun*, *barnskírn*, *barnssótt*, *barnsútkast* as a useful preliminary guide to research on the subject.

It is surprising to see stated in the introductory matter that ‘no attempt is made to arrange the senses in a semantically orientated hierarchical structure’ (*Key* 26, ‘User’s Guide’ II. A. 1). The editors state that the ‘meaning . . . regarded as primary is as far as possible given first’. Although it is not always clear what the editors consider a ‘primary meaning’, most entries are presented, as one would expect, with senses arranged from concrete to abstract, from the most general to the more specialised (cf. e.g. *ONP* 2, s.vv. *bogi*, *brauð*, *bréf*, *breidd*, *bróðir*, *dagr*). Occasionally, however, it is confusing to discover a different ordering principle at work, so that, for instance, the entry <sup>1</sup>*benda vb.* begins with the collocation *benda boga* ‘string (one’s) bow, draw a bow’, followed by the general sense ‘bend’, which one would normally expect to find presented first. Similarly, there seems little to draw between two passages cited s.v. <sup>2</sup>*berja vb.*: ‘varo (bóndr) barðer til batnaðar toko við kristni *ÓHLeg* 35<sup>15</sup> (*ONP* 2, 240.37)’, and ‘væri þá nýðingar barðir til batnaðar *Knýtll1741*: 127<sup>21</sup> (*ONP* 2, 241.49)”; yet the first is cited as an example of the general sense A. 1: ‘hammer, knock, strike, hit, beat, whip, batter, smash (to pieces)’, and the second is set off as an example of a specialised sense A. 6: ‘punish, strike/afflict with a scourge’. Although the collocation *berja til bókr* is treated separately s.v. <sup>1</sup>*bók* 7: ‘force to learn by thrashing’ (*ONP* 2, 554.6–10), an example of the same idiom cited s.v. *berja* A. 1, col. 240.38–41 receives no special comment.



In some cases, it would be helpful to have distinct subsenses divided more clearly. Thus, for example, s.v. *bí, bý sb. n.*, the separate meaning ‘swarm of bees’ should be set apart from the main sense ‘bee’, especially since in the final citation in this entry, from a well-known passage in *Ambrósíuss saga*, there can be no doubt that the term describes a ‘swarm’ rather than a single ‘bee’, or an indefinite plural ‘bees’: ‘J því kom faderenn at þeim er hvn villde ama byinnv AmbrReyk 58<sup>25</sup>’ (*ONP* 2, 275.47–48); cf. Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum* II, 53.33 *examen apum*).

The decision to provide definitions in both Danish and English presents a special challenge. Naturally, the parallel definitions are, to some extent at least, independent of one another. They are generally equally clear, although occasionally one definition is less felicitously phrased than the other. Consider, for example, the entry for the adjective *brattleitr*, usually interpreted along the lines of ‘having a broad, flat face’ (cf. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s.v.). This general idea may be adequately conveyed by the Danish definition, ‘med skarpe træk’, but it is less clear what is meant by the second gloss ‘with perpendicular features’. Similarly, it is peculiar to define the past part. *búinn* as ‘in the bag’ (*ONP* 2, 914.24, s.v. <sup>2</sup>*búa vb.*, A.17), a colloquialism which does not suit the following citations (where *búinn* modifies words meaning ‘victory’ or ‘sorrow’) as well as would a less colourful definition such as ‘absolutely certain, assured’. Among the definitions of *brunnvaka* is a tentative gloss ‘?ishakke’, rendered by an English equivalent ‘?ice-hack’, which I am unable to find in any English dictionary. Perhaps ‘ice-pick’ would be a better choice.

Readers who assume that the inclusion of English definitions will allow them to make full use of the dictionary without a reading knowledge of Danish should not delude themselves that this is the case. Once again, it pays to consult the introductory volume, which states: ‘In some respects the English definition is secondary in relation to its Danish counterpart; thus, for example, certain details such as bibliographical references are to be found in the Danish version only’ (*Key*, p. 34, ‘User’s Guide’ II. C. 2). The editors try to avoid a jungle of repetition, especially in definitions which are long and complex, by presenting editorial comment and cross-references in Danish only (see, for example, *ONP* 2, s.vv. *benregn*, <sup>2</sup>*blanda vb.*, <sup>3</sup>*blanda vb.*, *bragðalr*, <sup>1</sup>*braut sb. f.*, I. B, *bregða*, *brigða*). In treatment of words termed ‘of uncertain status’ (*Key*, p. 12, ‘User’s Guide’ I. D.), the commentary is entirely in Danish (see, e.g., *?bekkfloti*, *?bergligr*, *?brigðarskalli*). Where comments deal primarily with alternative interpretations of a word, however, they are written out in both Danish and English, and in such cases even bibliographical references are supplied twice (see *Key*, p. 40, ‘User’s Guide’ II. D. 4, and cf., e.g., *beltadrátr*, *bjargrýgr*).

The volume is a marvel of modern typesetting, and despite the complex format, I noticed no typographical errors, aside from one case (s.v. <sup>1</sup>*bjarga vb.*, A. 4, col. 357, 46) where English ‘hay’ is misspelled ‘hey’, perhaps through unconscious association with Icelandic *hey*.

If only on a symbolic level, the arrangement of the headwords themselves might be said to hold out fair prospects of future progress. For if the volume begins ominously, with treatments of terms such as (*at*) *bana sér* ‘to kill oneself’, this

perhaps less than auspicious opening is offset by the bright promise of the final entry, *dávænn* ‘fascinatingly beautiful’. Let us hope this happy coincidence reflects the authors’ growing confidence that their years of self-sacrifice have produced a work which deserves the lasting admiration of all students of Old Norse–Icelandic.

IAN McDOUGALL

NORSKE DIPLOM 1301–1310. Edited by ERIK SIMENSEN. *Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi, Quarto Series X. Selskapet til Utgivelse av gamle norske håndskrifter*. Oslo, 2002. 236 pp. 99 colour illustrations.

The present volume of *Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi, Norske diplom 1301–1310* by Erik Simensen, includes all known Norwegian original diplomas dating from 1301 to 1310. The number of diplomas from this period is 88, including one from Jämtland (now in Sweden) and one from Shetland. Five of these documents are preserved in two variants. The number of texts from the period thus amounts to 93. In addition to the diplomas from the period 1301–10, the volume contains as a supplement five fragments—some of them very small—of older documents which have been discovered since the publication in 1960 of Norwegian diplomas in the vernacular up to 1300 (Finn Hødnebo, ed., *Norske diplomert til og med år 1300*, *Corpus Codicum Norvegicorum Medii Aevi, Folio Series II* (Oslo 1960)). Norwegian diplomas in Latin are not included in the volume, and neither are amendments.

In his introduction Simensen offers an overview of the documents and their contents, explaining what types of diplomas are represented in the volume and how many of each type, their provenance, and the different methods used to date the various documents. There are short notes on the place of writing, seals and composition. The introduction also contains sections about the scribes, palaeography, orthography and language of the documents.

The 93 texts were probably written by 73 different scribes, only seven of whom are named in the documents. Two other scribes not mentioned by name can, however, probably be identified. One of them is the Icelander Haukr Erlendsson, the owner of the famous *Hauksbók*. He himself wrote and issued diplomas 6 and 86 when he was lawman in, first, Oslo, and then Bergen. Though a few of the documents are written in Gothic book hand, most are in different versions of Gothic cursive hand.

A major priority of the introduction is its investigation of the language of the different documents. The description of the language is thorough, with new linguistic forms and developments identified and explained with great care. One could, however, have wished for a short description of the language in the different districts of Norway, based on the source material in the volume.

The footnotes offer useful references to older literature, and the edition has a good bibliography. At the end of the book there are indexes of the personal names and places mentioned in the diplomas. A short English summary gives the most important facts covered in the Norwegian introduction, though its

description of the language of Trøndelag contains a slip of the pen. The text states that one characteristic of the language of this region is ‘*a* written instead of *æ* for unstressed /a/ after a long syllable’ (p. 31). It should be the other way round.

Each diploma is presented in the following way. First there is a colour photographic facsimile, on a deep green background, of the document, in most cases in natural size, with seals where they exist. This is followed by a short summary of the contents of the diploma. There follows information about the document, such as its present location and printing history, and any scholarly discussion relating to it. Thereafter the Old Norse text is presented in a diplomatic edition. Any text which may be written on the back of the diploma or on the parchment strips that connect the seals with the diploma is then printed. There follows a translation into modern Norwegian (nynorsk), first of the diploma, and thereafter of any text on the back of the diploma or on the parchment strips. Accompanying notes discuss vocabulary and social, religious and legal conditions referred to in the diploma which might puzzle modern readers.

The presentation of the diplomas in the present volume meets the needs of scholars within different fields of research. The photographic facsimiles are with a few exceptions extremely legible. They are thus more than mere illustrations, and will be useful to scholars interested in scribes, palaeography, and related matters. In the diplomatic edited text, each line of the original diploma is numbered, thus making it easy to correlate a word or sentence with the corresponding text in the photographic facsimile. This way of connecting the diplomatic edited text with the facsimile represents an improvement on the format of the 1960 diploma edition. The new volume also addresses the needs of scholars within the field of Old Norse language. Together with Simensen’s introduction this scientific edition of Norwegian diplomas from the first decade of the fourteenth century provides us with a solid basis for the study of the Norwegian language in this particular period. The language of diplomas is not always easily understood, however, and many scholars who are not experts of Old Norse language, but for whom the diplomas, in the original language, still represent important source material will be grateful to Simensen for his translations. Since these are printed immediately after the diplomatic edited texts—unlike the edition of 1960 in which the translations were printed together at the end of the volume—it is now easier to read the diploma in Old Norse with the help of the translation. Simensen’s translations are excellent, moreover. The only objection one could make is that they are too ‘good’. In some cases the style is certainly more eloquent in the modern Norwegian translations than in the original language. This may, however, be considered a forgivable fault.

ELSE MUNDAL

RUNES AND GERMANIC LINGUISTICS. By ELMER H. ANTONSEN. *Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs* 140. Mouton de Gruyter. Berlin and New York, 2002. xxii + 380 pp.

*Runes and Germanic Linguistics* comprises sixteen chapters, all except chapter 12 reworkings of earlier articles. These span the period 1967–99. The work thus represents the fruits of almost a lifetime's study of the runic inscriptions in the older *futhork* and early Germanic language.

Given the length of time he has worked in the field, the consistency with which Antonsen has defended his often controversial views is noteworthy. His thesis is that the early runic inscriptions must be treated first and foremost as linguistic artefacts. Before they can be pressed into service by scholars from other disciplines, their texts must be established by the application of rigorous linguistic analysis, undertaken without preconceptions about possible meaning. The book is thus emphatically not about magic rituals, numerical puzzles or the Germanic priesthood (except in so far as these are dismissed as figments of the imagination or irrelevant for a proper interpretation of the material). The chapters bear titles such as: 'What is runology?', 'The oldest recorded Germanic', 'The graphemic system of the older runes', 'Age and origin of the *futhork*', 'Reading runic inscriptions', 'Runic typology', 'Phonological rules and paradigms', 'Runic syntax'. The approach is 'modified American structuralist' since this 'lends itself most readily to the study of written language' (p. vii).

Whatever else, Antonsen's approach is strictly methodological. Current understanding of, or carefully argued opinions about, the language systems of those who carved the older *futhork* inscriptions are what inform his analyses. He does not allow himself the luxury of postulating otherwise undocumented lexical items, sound changes or morphological developments in support of hazardous readings or interpretations. In many respects this is a welcome departure. Runology is a discipline of which some scholars have despaired because it seemed 'that for every runic inscription there shall be as many interpretations as there are runologists studying it' (Page 1970, 202). But the strictly methodological approach does have its drawbacks when applied to a body of material and a language of which we otherwise know so little. It promotes the kind of rigidity that says: 'form X can only be interpreted in the following way because no other interpretation is in keeping with framework Y, which I regard as established'. The paradox of the strict methodology that may obscure fundamental insights is admirably captured by Syrett (1994, 31):

whilst it is admittedly sound methodologically to try to match up a uniform reconstruction with the evidence from the inscriptions, to avoid the ad hoc practice of plucking dialectal and other irregularities from nowhere to justify speculative readings, there is no reason to suppose urnordisch runesmiths were forced to share our preconceptions, and no grounds for assuming urnordisch was variation-free.

Rigidity of approach can also foster rigidity of belief in the correctness of one's conclusions. The way Antonsen seems to reason is as follows. Given the sparseness

and uncertain nature of the data, a clear and consistently applied methodology is essential; my methodology is the best available and I am therefore bound to assume that the results achieved by it are correct. I agree with the first two parts of this line of reasoning but not with the conclusion. The results achieved—given one has confidence in the method—will naturally be judged preferable to results arrived at by other means, but one needs to be alert to the danger that they will reflect the method rather than the reality.

An example will perhaps serve to make the point clear. In chapter 14 Antonsen argues (on the basis of what he takes to be reversed as well as orthophonic spellings) that the seventh-century Blekinge inscriptions (Gummarp, Istaby, Stentofthen, Björketorp; Antonsen 1975, nos. 116–17, 119–20; Krause and Jankuhn 1966, nos. 95–98) provide clear evidence of mutation, breaking, syncope, the monophthongisation of historical /ai/ and /au/, the lowering of /e/ to /æ/ and /e:/ to /æ:/ and the coalescence of /z/ and /r/ immediately after apicals. That is indeed a reasonable inference to be drawn from the linguistic data that emerge from his interpretation of these four inscriptions. However, to use that inference to proclaim as fact that East Norse monophthongisation and coalescence of /z/ and /r/ after apicals began in Blekinge in the 600s (pp. 305–06, 310) is for me a step too far. I have several reservations. First, the total number of words on the four stones does not appear to exceed fifty—a large number by the standards of the early runic inscriptions, but not a vast quantity of data on which to base wide-ranging conclusions. Second, analysis is sometimes dependent on Antonsen's own views about the words found in the inscriptions and their history. Thus according to him Stentofthen's **hider** and Björketorp's **haidr** descend from Proto-Germanic \*/haidr-a-/ 'bright' 'clear', which means the **r**-spellings are evidence for the neutralisation of the contrast between /z/ and /r/ after apicals. But not all have agreed that \*/haidr-a-/ is the etymon of this runic sequence (cf. Krause and Jankuhn 1966, 215). Antonsen may well be right, of course, but the fact that the beginning of the Stentofthen inscription, **niuhaborumr niuhagestumr**, has changed meaning from 'Not Ūha to the sons [i.e. natives], not Ūha to the guests [i.e. non-natives]' (Antonsen 1975, 87) to '(With) nine he-goats, nine stallions' (p. 304) does suggest the advisability of caution. Third, and perhaps most important, Antonsen's assumption that the linguistic features he identifies on the four inscriptions are to be seen as the start of changes that went on to sweep through the whole of eastern Scandinavia is fraught with difficulty. If East Scandinavian monophthongisation began in or had spread to Blekinge by the 600s, it is truly remarkable that we do not see evidence of it again until the 900s—and then in Jutland and the Danish islands. Much the same goes for the coalescence of /z/ and /r/ after apicals. Antonsen's approach does not allow him to see the Blekinge data in any other terms, however. If the methodology is to remain intact, there must be a strictly linear progression; variation must have a chronological, not a geographical explanation. But there is surely reason to ask: why need the Blekinge monophthongisation be related to that we find three hundred years later? Apart from the four inscriptions under discussion we know virtually nothing of language in this corner of the Scandinavian peninsula during the syncope period or in its aftermath. Conceivably the four present us with our only glimpse of an otherwise undocumented

dialect. Antonsen's unwillingness to entertain the possibility of dialectal variation leaves other questions to do with the monophthongisation process unexplored. In his analysis, the A of **-IAS** 'less' in the Stentofen inscription is a way of writing /ɔ/, an initial stage in the monophthongisation of /au/, which soon gave way to /ø/, as illustrated by another Stentofen form **-dud** /død/ (supposedly an endless dative 'to death'). Björketorp also has the suffix meaning 'less', but in the more conventional form **-IAUSR**. Between them, reasons Antonsen, the two inscriptions represent three stages in the development of East Scandinavian monophthongisation, /au/ > /ɔ/ > /ø/. But why must the difference between these three forms have a chronological basis? Widmark (2001, 85–86) argues for a dialectal split whereby speakers in some areas (originally those in contact with Old Saxon) monophthongised to /o/, others, originally in parts of Denmark not exposed to Old Saxon—and somewhat later—to /ø/. Whatever one thinks of Widmark's thesis about the places of origin and spread of the new forms, there is certainly good evidence for /o/ as the monophthongisation product of /au/. Against this Antonsen would clearly argue that A can represent /ɔ/, but not /o/ (pp. 310–11). I agree. I am not suggesting that **-IAS** should be seen as an early example of the development /au/ > /o/, rather that the monophthongisation process seems to have involved geographical variation as well as change over time and was thus more complex than Antonsen's treatment of the data allows.

With so much to be uncertain about, I cannot share Antonsen's conviction (manifest throughout the book) that his structuralist approach can be relied on to lead to the truth. It is hard, though, to escape the paradox referred to earlier. If we admit the possibility of dialectal variation, we are in danger of opening the floodgates to 'the ad hoc practice of plucking dialectal . . . irregularities from nowhere to justify speculative readings', as Syrett warns us. Yet if we do not, we are closing our minds to a large part of the reality. We need only ask how the changes of the syncope period could have been accomplished *without* significant dialectal variation to see the point. Unless it is assumed these changes took place simultaneously throughout Scandinavia (an unparalleled scenario), then the whole area must, for a longer or shorter period of time, have been riddled with isoglosses.

These problematic considerations aside, I am in broad sympathy with Antonsen's view of runology and his treatment of the inscriptions in the older *fupark*. I agree that the linguist should be 'the primary actor in the deciphering and interpreting of runic inscriptions' (ch. 1, p. 14). I am satisfied that the language of the pre-AD 500 inscriptions (in so far as we can date individual pieces of runic writing to before and after this watershed) is closer to Proto-Germanic than to Old Norse (ch. 2 *et passim*)—though I observe that Nielsen (2000, 381) found what he terms 'the Early Runic language' to be more closely linked to early Norse (AD 500–700) than North-Sea Germanic and, especially, Old High German. I find Antonsen's graphemic analysis of the older *fupark* (ch. 4) and his discussion of the layout of the early inscriptions (ch. 7) illuminating. I think there is much to be said for his view that the transliteration of the fifteenth rune as **R** was in part motivated by political events in the mid-nineteenth century (ch. 5), and I agree that **Z** is preferable. He is certainly right to challenge the basis on which the early inscriptions have hitherto been dated, in particular the reliance on supposed developments in the shapes of certain runes (ch.

8). Antonsen's disavowal of special connections between early runic writing and heathen religion, cult practices and magic (ch. 9) not only gives a healthy boost to my own prejudices but is clearly the only possible conclusion that dispassionate consideration of the evidence allows. Chapter 10 on runic typology shows how much closer we can come to an understanding of the early inscriptions if we look for common features rather than treating each inscription in relative isolation as was wont to happen in the past.

On two points I remain unpersuaded by Antonsen's arguments. His analysis of 'runic syntax' (chiefly word-order; ch. 13) suffers from the extremely limited and often fragmentary nature of the data, and also from being in part dependent on particular interpretations of individual inscriptions. Nor can I share his belief that the runic alphabet originated in the Proto-Germanic period (i.e. some centuries before the birth of Christ). The evidence he adduces in chapter 6 in favour of this position (chiefly the 'archaic' features of runic writing) is not to be lightly dismissed. However, the absence of finds that can be reliably dated before AD c.200 (it remains very uncertain whether the early first-century Meldorf fibula is runic), contrasted with their relative plentifulness thereafter, seems to me crucial counter-evidence. Whether knowledge of runic writing came to the North by land or, as Antonsen suggests (p. 116), by sea (an explanation for the absence of early examples in continental Europe), it is hard to understand how some five hundred years of runic activity could have failed to leave a single trace.

These and my earlier reservations notwithstanding, *Runes and Germanic Linguistics* is clearly essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in either runology or the history of the Germanic languages. It shows how a theoretically well-founded linguistic approach can rescue the older *futhark* inscriptions from the limbo into which they have been banished by the speculative approaches of the past. The book is the more persuasive for being well integrated—this in spite of the diverse themes treated and the different times and places at which its component parts originally appeared. The strands knit together in a secure if somewhat unpliant rope, by ascending which the open-minded reader may reach new levels of understanding.

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MICHAEL BARNES

CORPUS OF ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE. VI: NORTHERN YORKSHIRE. By JAMES LANG. *Oxford University Press for the British Academy*. Oxford, 2001. 540 pp., 1204 illustrations, 20 figures, 4 tables.

With the posthumous publication of James Lang's survey of the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture of *Northern Yorkshire*, the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (CASSS) has reached its sixth volume to appear in print. The first volume, covering *County Durham and Northumberland*, was published in 1984. The format remains the same, for CASSS is designed to make the full range of the post-Roman, but pre-Conquest, stone sculpture of England available to both researchers and heritage/clerical administrators, by means of detailed descriptive catalogues and photography. In addition, each volume is provided with introductory sections devoted to discussion and dating, even though it has always been recognised that their significance would inevitably be moderated as more material became available in print, and as other researchers take up the study of the sculpture as it is made generally accessible.

Jim died in January 1997 and remains greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues. He had managed to complete much of the text of Volume VI during his final illness, with the assistance of Louise Henderson, ably supported and nursed by his wife, Anne. Some parts of the volume were subsequently completed by Rosemary Cramp (the General Editor of the series, and the overall Director of the Research Project), but the greater part of the remaining burden, including most of the photography, fell upon the Project's Research Fellow, Derek Craig, who with characteristic modesty then declined to have the extent of his contribution credited on the title page. The inscriptions are discussed by John Higgitt, with the assistance of David Parsons, and the geological contributions are by John Senior.

The geographical scope of this volume is the historic North Riding of Yorkshire, excluding those parts already covered in Volume III, which was Jim's own survey of *York and East Yorkshire* (1991). It contains some 450 carvings (of which 375 pieces from 66 sites comprise the main catalogue), including such important pre-Viking-Age monuments as the excavated sculpture from Whitby Abbey, and the crosses at Croft, Easby and Masham. It is, however, the Anglo-Scandinavian monuments that predominate, as across northern England as a whole (cf. Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (1980), which remains the best general introduction to this material); these reveal not only the influx of Scandinavian taste and ideas, but also a degree of Irish influence, which together were grafted onto the Northumbrian sculptural tradition.

The Anglo-Scandinavian material is sufficiently extensive for Lang to have felt confident in the identification of one 'school' and three 'workshops' (pp. 44–50). What he actually meant us to understand by these terms, however, is not explained, although he considered that the 'Allertonshire workshop', which 'served a large area of north Yorkshire', is 'part of the Brompton school'. Lythe has 'nearly forty Anglo-Scandinavian monuments, many of them hogbacks', which have features 'peculiar to Lythe', and thus there are reasonable enough grounds for supposing that these might represent another 'workshop



group', even if it was one that 'did little to influence sculpture outside Lythe'. The 'Lower Wensleydale workshop', on the other hand, comprises just four pieces 'clearly carved by a single hand', and 'this small group is so crude in design and cutting technique that its sculptor hardly merits the title of "master"'. The term 'workshop' as it is normally used by medieval art-historians implies the existence of a group of artists or craftsmen working together. Greater clarity in such matters, as an aid to discussion, is highly desirable—and only requires the definition of terms at the outset.

'The most striking innovation in the region during the tenth century was the hogback . . . there are eleven types, all of which are represented . . . Indeed, the distribution of hogbacks in England is at its most dense in northern Yorkshire . . . suggesting that the form was initiated in this region' (p. 28, fig. 8). Jim Lang's career as a student of Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture began with his (1967) MA thesis, at Durham, on 'Hogbacks in North-Eastern England', so that the publication of this volume brings it full circle. *Northern Yorkshire* (or CASSS Vol. VI) may thus stand as an appropriate monument to Jim's many achievements in this field, as witness the fact that there are over thirty contributions listed under his name in its 'Bibliography'.

Finally, there will doubtless be some readers of *Saga-Book* interested to learn that the CASSS website (<http://www.dur.ac.uk/corpus>) now contains not only a searchable composite database of all the previous bibliographies, but also a 'Digital Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament', including discussions of classification, shape, technique, dating and epigraphy.

JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL

HISTORIA NORWEGIE. Edited by INGER EKREM and LARS BOJE MORTENSEN. Translated by PETER FISHER. *Museum Tusulanum Press*. Copenhagen, 2003. 245 pp. 4 black-and-white illustrations.

The arrangement of the editorial material in this new edition of *Historia Norwegie*, the first of the Latin text for over a century, has in part been determined by the fact that Inger Ekrem died in 2000, leaving a manuscript which Lars Boje Mortensen has completed and prepared for the press, wisely but respectfully presenting Ekrem's introduction as an 'Essay on Date and Purpose' at the end of the book and providing an up-to-date introduction of his own.

By writing in Latin the author of *Historia Norwegie* made his history of Norway potentially accessible to an international audience and this new edition similarly makes itself available to a wide readership by adopting English as the editorial language and providing a facing-page English translation by Peter Fisher. Mortensen's English is fluent and lucid but Ekrem's 'Essay', understandably in the circumstances, does not read quite as easily or naturally as the rest of the volume and also sports a handful of typographical errors (I noticed almost none elsewhere in the book), such as the misspelling of Lars Lönnroth's surname as Lönroth (p. 208), a mistake reproduced in the book's bibliography (p. 233).

Ekrem's editorial work relied on photographs of the surviving manuscript. At a late stage in the production of the edition Mortensen was able to consult the manuscript itself, after its owner, the Earl of Dalhousie, deposited it in the National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh (where it is now Dalhousie Munits GD 45/31/1–II). The section on the manuscript in the Introduction (pp. 28–31) is a summary by Michael Chesnutt of the thorough study he published in 1986. For a very small part of the text we have three textual witnesses, as two Swedish Latin texts include brief excerpts from the Yngling genealogy in *Historia Norwegie*; Ekrem and Mortensen make as much as possible of this slender evidence, constructing a stemma which suggests that at least three earlier manuscripts of the full text must have been lost (see pp. 31–43).

Instances where the new Latin text differs significantly in sense or style from that in Storm 1880 are conveniently listed by the editors on page 46: on average there are slightly more than two such divergences per page of the new edition. The textual apparatus records the originators of all emendations (including several new suggestions by the editors of this volume) and lists alternative possibilities in controversial cases. Perhaps the most striking innovation is the proposed new reconstruction of the beginning of the damaged first folio of the manuscript in which Tullius (i.e. Cicero) is proposed as the missing name (see the commentary, p. 108, but note that within the book Ekrem dissents from this solution in her 'Essay', p. 173).

Storm classicised spellings and (occasionally) syntax in his edition, but here that classical façade has been removed to reveal the medieval orthography and grammar of the surviving manuscript, inconsistencies and all. One symptom of this 're-medievalisation' is the spelling of the text's title, in which the scholarly 'classical' spelling *Norwegiae/Norvegiae* is replaced by the medieval *Norwegie* (Mortensen explains that the familiar title has been retained for reasons of 'tradition and bibliography' although he believes the title in the manuscript was probably *Ystoria Norwagensium* (pp. 8 n.1, 112)).

In the parallel English translation Fisher succeeds in being faithful to both the sense and the stylistic range of the original Latin. Comparison with Kunin's recent translation (2001) indicates that Fisher sometimes prefers to follow the original a little less closely, as for example in the ordering of elements within the sentence, but on occasion his is the more literal rendering (e.g. on p. 85 Fisher's 'to every bleary-eyed man and barber' is more literal than Kunin's 'to all and sundry' (2001, 16), though the commentary (p. 140) makes it clear that this is what the more colourful phrase amounts to).

On the few occasions when Fisher and Kunin diverge significantly it is usually easy to determine from the commentaries to the two volumes why different interpretations have been adopted and it should be valuable in future to be able to compare two independent translations. Just occasionally I found myself a little uncomfortable with Fisher's lexical preferences: translating *homunciones* as 'dwarves' (p. 55) introduces undesirable mythological echoes (compare Kunin's 'manikins' (2001, 3)); 'porter' (p. 61) is arguably less felicitous than Kunin's 'load-bearer' (2001, 6), and Fisher's Mount Etna 'twitches' (p. 71) where Kunin's

'quakes' (2001, 10). The translation of *siluas Finnorum* as 'Finnmarken' (for example page 59; compare Kunin's literal 'forests of the Lapps' (2001, 5)) is defended in the commentary and in Ekrem's 'Essay' (pp. 120, 181–83) although it is acknowledged that the area is 'much less precisely delimited than the present-day county of Finnmark' (p. 120).

Fisher translates Latin *Finni* as 'Finns', whereas Kunin's translation has 'Lapps'; the commentary to the present volume notes (p. 114): 'For the translation of *Finni* by 'Finns', i.e. the Lapps (or Sami) cf. Essay §6.1.6 with note' (a slight inconvenience resulting from the arrangement of editorial material in the book is that when looking up a passage in the commentary one is frequently referred from there to the 'Essay' for further discussion). Consulting §6.1.6 turns up the following statement: 'In this wilderness live the *Finni* (in the present edition translated by the Norwegian [*sic*] term 'Finns'), i.e. the Samis or the Lapps, not to be confused with the people of Finland' (p. 181) and a note further emphasises that 'Finn' is being used to mean Lapp (Sami) rather than in its normal English sense.

In both translation and editorial material Scandinavian names are generally spelled as in the relevant modern Scandinavian language (though Icelanders are obliged to compromise somewhat: Oddr Snorrason, for example, appears as both Odd and Oddr Snorresson (pp. 160 n. 23, 167; compare pp. 168, 190 and elsewhere)). One curious effect of this policy is that two kings called *Olauus* in the Latin, one Norwegian and one Swedish, appear respectively as Olav and Olof in the English translation (pp. 97–99), which nevertheless still refers to Olav as 'namesake' of (p. 99) and 'of the same name' as Olof (p. 103).

Mortensen's explanation that he wrote a new introduction because Ekrem's 'Essay' seemed inappropriately speculative and contained little that was 'neutral to any theory of date and place' (p. 6) might lead the reader to expect him to sit on the fence in relation to the much-debated issue of the date of the text, but in fact he has quite definite views on this, which he argues lucidly and persuasively in a very clearly structured discussion of the relevant evidence (pp. 11–24), concluding that the text was written c. 1150–1200 and very probably in the first half of that period (narrowing this even further to 1160–75 on page 24).

Rather than join in the debate about possible authors or dedicatees of the work Mortensen much more usefully delineates the intellectual milieu in which such a text could have been written and the implications of this for determining the possible place of origin (see pp. 16–23). In doing so he emphasises a 'European' intellectual context which has sometimes been neglected by scholars primarily concerned with Norwegian and Icelandic connections.

A great strength of this new edition, indeed, is that it has been produced by specialists in medieval Latin: the commentary, for example, provides detailed notes on medieval Latin usage and full documentation of Latin sources and parallels. The limits of this approach are also evident, however: some Norse parallels are cited, but Mortensen directs specialists in Old Norse to supplement the commentary with earlier scholarship more focused on the text's relations with vernacular literature (p. 47). When Mortensen writes that a dating of the text to c. 1150–75 would make it the 'earliest literary monument by a Norwegian in our possession' (p. 9), Old Norse enthusiasts might have appreciated an acknowledgement that

much surviving poetry by Norwegians dates from before 1150, even if it was not written down until after that date.

The lengthy 'Essay on Date and Purpose' which was originally to have been Ekrem's introduction to her edition is, as Mortensen explains, a 'slightly edited English version of her 1998 book' (p. 6) on *Historia Norwegie*, and those who have read that book will find no surprises in this thought-provoking attempt to imagine a context for the text in mid-twelfth-century Norway. As readers of her monograph will know, Ekrem's theories about the text's genesis and purpose are highly speculative (the word 'could' is ubiquitous and Ekrem herself can be discouragingly apologetic about her theories (see e.g. pp. 216, 222)). Moreover, her dating of the text to c.1150 is idiosyncratic and she is the only scholar to have suggested that it was written before the establishment of the archiepiscopal see at Nidaros in 1152/53; Mortensen explicitly disagrees with her on this (p. 15).

A commendable respect for Ekrem's posthumous memory constrains Mortensen from engaging in a sustained critique of her ideas, but to some extent this edition embodies two distinct views of the text (not necessarily a weakness), and Mortensen makes clear several areas of disagreement with his late colleague: on page 19 n. 29, for example, he explains that he does not recognise the sustained anti-Danish attitude which Ekrem finds in the text, and when he speaks of scholars lowering their standards by indulging in guessing games about the identity of the text's author (p. 11) one becomes uncomfortably aware that a considerable amount of Ekrem's 'Essay' is devoted to just such guesswork.

Museum Tusulanum Press deserves credit for making such an attractive hardback book available at an unusually affordable price. The comparatively large print of the text and translation is very gratifying to the eye and photographic plates of four leaves of the manuscript are a welcome additional feature.

This new edition of *Historia Norwegie* will be used by all historians of medieval Norway and its literature as well as by scholars interested in the Icelandic Kings' Sagas. Even the most charitable reviewer ought not to hope that a new edition will remain unchallenged for as long as Storm's 1880 edition of this text, but if the present volume is superseded before the year 2126 it will surely in large part be because its editors' deep and humane learning will have stimulated the increased scholarly attention which will render it in need of replacement.

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CARL PHELPSTEAD

SKRIFT OG HISTORIE HOS ORDERIK VITALIS. HISTORIOGRAFI SOM UDTRYK FOR 1100-TALETSRENAISSANCE I NORMANNISK OG NORDISK SKRIFTKULTUR. By PERNILLE HERMANN. *Museum Tusulanums forlag*. Copenhagen, 2002. 119 pp.

This is a study, according to its title, of 'Writing and history in Orderic Vitalis: historiography as an expression of the twelfth-century renaissance in Norman and Nordic written culture'. Pernille Hermann sets out to analyse the *Ecclesiastical History*, written in Latin by the Norman monk Orderic Vitalis (1075–c.1141), not in the modern edition and English translation by Marjorie Chibnall (6 volumes, Oxford University Press, 1969–80), although this is mentioned in the bibliography, but, as is shown in the footnotes, in the abbreviated Danish translation of 1889. She argues that Orderic's work can be set in the context of the Nordic written tradition and points to the works of Aelnoth (12th century) and Saxo Grammaticus (c.1200). In four chapters the author reviews the structure of the work of Orderic (Part I), his concept of history and hagiography (Part II), the place of history in medieval literacy (Part III) and the *Ecclesiastical History* as a renaissance work (Part IV). A conclusion and a modest bibliography, which for Orderic and Norman historiography does not reach further than the mid-1980s, conclude the book. Apparently this relative lack of references to other medievalists is the result of Hermann's preference for an analytical-interpretative approach, rather than a source-critical treatment (p. 9). Now, Orderic Vitalis, a Norman monk of English origin, is indeed one of the most important twelfth-century writers of western European history. Having been trained as an historian by writing annals and a revision of William of Jumièges' *Deeds of the Dukes of Normandy* (c.1070), in c.1110 he set out to write a history of his own monastery of Saint-Evroult. What started off as a modest local chronicle grew over the next three decades into an unique history of Normandy, England and their neighbours. Writing in Latin, with a limited number of medieval books at his disposal, he compiled a history of his own time combining oral stories with documents and some other narratives. Both his revision of the *Deeds of the Dukes of Normandy* and his *Ecclesiastical History* have survived in autograph manuscripts, allowing an unique glimpse of a medieval historian's workshop and historical method. Very little of this basic, but essential, information can be found in Hermann's study, which ignores Orderic's early works, because of its over-ambitious goal of setting the *Ecclesiastical History* in two specific contexts, namely that of the twelfth-century renaissance and that of Nordic culture. It is certainly true that we can place Orderic in the context of cultural renewal and intellectual development. After all, he wrote using texts from the school of nearby Le Bec (not mentioned by Hermann), and deeply influenced by the thinking of one of its foremost teachers, Anselm of Le Bec/Canterbury (d. 1109). Orderic is also a significant witness from among the large group of historians that give expression to aspects of everyday life, and as a recorder of folk stories not found anywhere else. But this tradition of historical writing, in my opinion, owes very little to what went on in the schools of Paris, where Plato and Aristotle were being studied. Their works, translated from Greek via Arabic into Latin, were indeed introduced in the schools from c.1130 onwards, but none of them, as far as we know, had either been read or used previously by Orderic, as Hermann seems to imply (pp. 97–

100). As for the notion that Orderic can be placed in a Scandinavian tradition of oral and written culture of the twelfth and thirteenth century, without any substantive evidence the suggestion at the moment is no more than a thesis awaiting corroboration.

ELISABETH VAN HOUTS

STAÐUR Í NÝJUM HEIMI: KONUNGASAGAN MORKINSKINNA. By ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON. *Háskólaútgáfan*. Reykjavík, 2002. 352 pp.

Ármann Jakobsson remarks, in this monograph which is his doctoral dissertation for the University of Iceland, that *Morkinskinna* has more often been studied for the sake of its relations with other Kings' Sagas than for its own sake ('Það hafa verið örlög Morkinskinnu að dragast inn í rannsóknir á öðrum konungasögum', p. 31). A recent attempt to redress the balance was the translation of *Morkinskinna*, with copious notes and introduction and newly edited verses, by Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade (Cornell University Press, 2000; reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXV:4 (2001), 432–35). They, too, noted in their introduction that 'despite its key position in Norse-Icelandic letters it has suffered surprising neglect over more than a century of intense research in the field of Icelandic literature generally and the kings' sagas in particular' (p. ix).

Ármann's contribution to the rehabilitation of *Morkinskinna* is not the new edition so urgently called for by Andersson and Gade, but relies on the 1932 edition of Finnur Jónsson—something of a hero (and role-model?) for Ármann, who dedicates the book to him. Despite a workmanlike chapter on the origins and literary relations of the text ('Uppruni', pp. 19–59), he also largely turns his back on the intricate question of the relation of the existing version of *Morkinskinna*, dating from about 1280, to the presumed original version from c. 1200 (called here *Frum-Morkinskinna* 'Original Morkinskinna', though the book's English summary cautiously opts for 'Older Morkinskinna'). On this depend the status and age of the so-called *Íslendingaþættir*—so much better known than their parent text—which until recently were assumed by many scholars to be later interpolations. Ármann dismisses such speculations, rightly relating them to the early twentieth-century fashion for dissecting texts to see what they were made of, a methodology now considered obsolete in the evaluation of more fashionable texts such as the *Íslendingasögur* (pp. 51–52). Instead, the emphasis of his study is on offering 'a literary assessment based on an attempt to see the saga as a unified whole' (p. 328, translating p. 17).

Ármann proves himself a sympathetic reader. Andersson and Gade had already come to the conclusion that *Morkinskinna* should be treated as, by and large, the work of a single author, but their close concentration on its diverse origins and style leaves the impression of an author more distinguished for enthusiasm than any sense of literary or historical proportion:

The author was more of a storyteller than a critical historian like Snorri and the author of *Fagrskinna* . . . The author seems to have 'collected' oral materials

from a variety of sources and set them down in a somewhat arbitrary way not dictated by a preexisting biographical structure but guided only by a rough chronology. (Andersson and Gade 2000, 57, 64)

The present work treats the diverse nature of *Morkinskinna* more constructively. In particular Ármann addresses himself to the significance of the *þættir* as an integral part of the author's artistic purpose—thus begging the question of their origins. In his view *Morkinskinna* offers an interrogation of the concept of kingship, in which the representation of each ruler reveals a different facet. One function of the *þættir* is to take into account the point of view of the common man, and often also an Icelandic perspective shared by the author and the original audience of the work. That author and audience were Icelandic is another assumption, but a less controversial one. Andersson and Gade, too, comment on the role of the *þættir* in offering an alternative point of view, saying that they 'function as a sort of opposition literature' (2000, 80) in the saga of Haraldr harðráði, but Ármann rightly points out that the representation of Haraldr is more positive, and the diversity of viewpoints more nuanced, than this suggests: 'Haraldr is treated very sympathetically by the saga-writer, who takes pleasure in describing both his good and bad sides. At the very worst he is an attractive rogue' (p. 334, translating p. 201).

Ármann takes as emblematic the incident in *Hreiðars þáttur heimska* where the 'clever fool' Hreiðarr, encountering a king for the first time, insists on walking around King Magnús góði and studying him from all angles, as the viewpoint of *Morkinskinna* circles around the concept of kingship. Once the principle of diversity is admitted, it makes sense of many of the unevennesses of the text. The rigid demarcation between core narrative and supposed interpolations can be dispensed with, since contrasting views of kingship can be seen within the more strictly historical narrative as well as in the fictional *þættir*: Haraldr harðráði is contrasted with his nephew Magnús, the three jointly-ruling sons of Magnús berfœttr with each other. *Hreiðars þáttur* is emblematic also in revealing diversity in another area of the text: its hero's progress from boorish ignoramus to polished courtier highlights a contrast between two types of Icelanders:

The Icelanders in *Morkinskinna* fall into two groups: some are refined courtiers, well-mannered and with skaldic verses on their lips, of great use to the king as messengers and court poets. Others are clumsy and unpolished at court and objects of ridicule. It is possible to see these two types as a single man's *Bildungsroman*: even the most refined of courtiers was once a newcomer to the court and an object of laughter (pp. 335–36).

The book is at its best in its analysis of specific scenes: full of lively perceptions and provocative parallels, and informed by the author's earlier work on medieval constructions of kingship (*Í leit að konungi. Konungsmynd íslenskra konungasagna* (Reykjavík, 1997)). Rather less convincing is the attempt to theorise the organising principle, if any, of the work ('Formgerð', 61–108). Reference is made (pp. 66–68) to the 'interlace' theory (*vefnaður*) expounded by Carol Clover (*The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca, 1982)), but without any very detailed attempt to apply it to *Morkinskinna*; nor is there much more than a thought-provoking analogy with the

'the so-called *nykrat* in skaldic poetry, where variety replaces uniformity and a mixture of forms is not considered a deformity' (p. 332, translating p. 84). *Morkinskinna* is described as 'an offshoot of courtly culture' (p. 336), but its courtly characteristics are not pinned down in detail. These vaguenesses result partly from the book's determined avoidance of the traditional questions about origins; the emphasis being on the (laudable) endeavour of seeing the work as a whole, its disparities of style, register and (at times, apparently) age are somewhat smoothed over in Ármann's analysis. After referring throughout to *höfundurinn* 'the author', Ármann is understandably coy when it comes to further identification of this figure: 'no claim is made for a single author . . . this saga reports on historical events and takes much of its subject matter from others, making it difficult to determine how much of the finished product comes from the author himself'. More than a century of inconclusive research lies behind these qualifications. But he does lay his cards on the table in some further speculation which sums up his view of the work as a whole: 'He appears to have been an Icelander who served in the court of the Norwegian king, and he was probably a poet' (p. 336, translating pp. 272–75).

The very thorough bibliographical apparatus supplied probably reflects the book's origin as a dissertation, and will be useful to those wishing to pursue the troubled history of research into the Kings' Sagas as well as their more accessible literary qualities. Those unable or unwilling to read the Icelandic text will find the bare bones in an efficient English summary; it is also noted in the Preface that earlier versions of several of the chapters have appeared in print in a range of journals in a variety of languages, including English and German.

ALISON FINLAY

ST BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN. By BRIDGET MORRIS. *Studies in Medieval Mysticism 1. The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge, 1999. xi + 202 pp.

Born into a prominent aristocratic family, with links both to the royal court and the upper echelons of the Church, St Birgitta (c. 1303–73) was instrumental, in life and in death, in the development of Sweden as a European state. The influence of this married woman, mother and pilgrim, however, spread far beyond the shores of her native land. During her lifetime, Birgitta's extraordinary visions lent her the authority and temerity to advise and even to command religious and secular rulers across Europe up to and including the Pope himself, much as her fellow mystic, the equally charismatic Hildegard of Bingen, had done some three centuries before her. After her death, Birgitta's writings and reputation were closely studied and debated, and she inspired many pious admirers, ranging in grandeur and outlook from Pope Gregory XI (who is said to have kept her portrait in his private chamber) to Margery Kempe (who made a pilgrimage to Birgitta's house in Rome). Birgitta was the only woman to be canonised in the fourteenth century, and, thanks to political complications she sought to unravel, the only saint to be canonised in Rome during that century.



Bridget Morris's engaging study, the first volume in the 'Studies in Medieval Mysticism' series, offers a narrative biography of St Birgitta, seeking to introduce her to an anglophone audience of 'students, scholars and general readers with a keen interest in medieval female saints' (p. 3). Morris arranges her chapters by the chronological details of the saint's life, rather than her spiritual and political activity. Thus, we find chapters on her early life to the birth of her children, the early years of widowhood spent living alongside the monks of Alvastra, her later life in Rome and her final pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Other chapters are devoted to a brief summary of the geographical and socio-political background to Birgitta's upbringing in fourteenth-century Sweden, the process leading to her eventual canonisation in 1391, and the foundation and history of the Birgittine Order.

In reconstructing the biography, Morris is necessarily reliant on the *Revelations* themselves, as well as on the *vita*, which was prepared by Birgitta's Swedish confessors as part of the documentation submitted to the canonisation inquisition. The narrative is peppered with well-chosen extracts from these materials which, while contrasting dramatically with Morris's own tone of scholarly detachment, lend the story a compelling authenticity. Bridget Morris addresses the complex textual history of her source material in a well-reasoned and careful introduction (pages 1–11), which considers the nature of editing and translation, the contributions of Birgitta and her confessor and redactor Alphonso of Jaén, and the relative merits of the Latin and Swedish traditions. A tantalising glimpse of Birgitta as author is afforded by the reproduction of a fragment in her own hand from MS A65, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm.

Lengthy quotations from the revelations enable the reader to come into direct contact with Birgitta herself. Morris translates these into clear, readable English, giving the original in footnotes. Staunchly orthodox in their theology, the visions are characterised by practical details, some of which are surely drawn from Birgitta's life-experience. In the celebrated account of the Nativity in Book VII, Chapter 21 (quoted on pp. 135–36 and 136 note 48), for example, Birgitta captures the difficulty of giving birth while kneeling and includes the details of the afterbirth and umbilical cord, describing the infant Christ in strikingly maternal terms:

Et tunc puer plorans et quasi tremens pre frigore et duricia pauimenti, vbi iacebat, voluebat se paululum et extendebat membra, querens inuenire refrigerium et matris fauorem.

This concern for detail is also seen in the great vision of the Passion of Christ (Book VII, Chapter 16), where, before unfolding a relentless catalogue of horrifically vivid details of the torture, Birgitta addresses the problem of how Christ and his tormentors actually mount the Cross (pp. 130, 132 note 38). Elsewhere, Morris uses the *Revelations* to great effect in reconstructing her subject's awareness of the tensions between her political and financial position and her responsibility as a mother in the account of the dealings between Giovanna I of Naples, Birgitta and the saint's son, Karl (pp. 122–26).

Bridget Morris is outstanding among Birgittine scholars outside Scandinavia for her command of the Swedish material. One of her concerns in this study is to emphasise the importance of the Swedish context in the development of Birgitta's

spiritual identity. This background is outlined in Chapter One (pp. 13–34), which offers a wide-ranging survey of the geographical, socio-political and religious structure of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Sweden. Throughout her work, Morris stresses the Scandinavian scholarly context, and her bibliography is up to date and comprehensive. I would, however, quibble with the attempt to associate Birgitta with a literary tradition of prophecy in Scandinavia, represented by *Völuspá* (which is postulated as a source for part of one of her visions of Rome in note 18 on page 99) and ‘saga visionaries’. As Morris herself concedes in her review of Claire Sahlin’s *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (*Saga-Book* XXVI (2002), p. 157), Birgitta is just as likely to have modelled herself on such Old Testament heroines as Judith and Esther, who used their authority as visionaries to influence rulers.

Bridget Morris has done her namesake proud in this ambitious, but highly readable study. Her biography offers *inter alia* a helpful synthesis of recent Birgittine scholarship, and provides a useful starting-point for scholars seeking to explore Birgitta’s multiple legacies—spiritual, political, feminist, artistic and social—further.

KATRINA ATTWOOD

THE NORSEMEN IN THE VIKING AGE. By ERIC CHRISTIANSEN. *The Peoples of Europe*. Blackwell. Oxford 2002. xiii + 378 pp.

This book aims to present ‘sketches of Nordic people in Viking times less firmly framed than usual’ (p. 8), without ‘hitching’ them either to an historical theme, or to developmental theories according to which urbanisation and commercialisation, or state-formation in embryo, were the particular result of Norse activities in the Viking Age. It draws upon a wide range of archaeological, historical, art-historical, onomastic and textual evidence, and is organised in an interesting and innovative way. The first five chapters exhibit a ‘bottom-up’ approach, through ‘Individuals’, ‘Families’ (including military households, read as ‘all-male families’, p. 57), ‘Communities’, ‘Districts and Territories’, to ‘Peoples’; chapters 6 to 9 cover subjects of particular importance to the Norse: ‘Politics’, ‘War’, ‘Work’, and ‘Emigration’; and the final three chapters attempt to present something of the mentalities of the Norse by tracing their ideas about the ‘Past’, ‘Present’, and ‘Future’. Five varied appendices are also offered, including a lengthy section on ‘Modern Research’, along with a limited index and a problematic bibliography (on which, see below).

The first five chapters, labelled ‘descriptive’ surveys (p. 9) and subdivided into short sections that sometimes provide unexpected and illuminating juxtapositions, are rather difficult to summarise, but it should be stressed that they are not descriptive at the expense of critical engagement with earlier work. In fact, their arrangement seems partly the result of Christiansen’s desire to combat certain scholarly notions. For example, the choice of first chapter, ‘Individuals’, in itself refutes theories of the primacy of the collective over the individual in Germanic

societies (see pp. 11, 37 for explicit statements to this effect; though if all the evidence drawn upon in this chapter—for example inheritance rights for women—is evidence of ‘individualism’ then this is a rather fuzzy notion). Each chapter tackles at least one thorny issue head-on: ‘Families’ disputes the importance of the kin-group (and pays unusual attention to the family as ‘emotional centre’, p. 38), ‘Communities’ gives short shrift to any suggestion that we should see ‘inherent proclivities towards urbanization and commercialization’ in the development of Ribe, Hedeby and Birka (p. 72); ‘Districts and Territories’ attacks the notion that particular regions of Viking-Age Scandinavia were ‘essentially subdivisions-in-waiting for the invigorating kiss known as “the process of state-formation”’; they were rather ‘small-scale territorial associations’ that did not cohere into patterns corresponding to modern boundaries (p. 88), and ‘Peoples’ continues where ‘Districts and Territories’ leaves off. In fact, ‘state-formation addicts’ (p. 335) come in for a particular bashing throughout the book: ‘Politics’, the first of the ‘subject’ chapters, starts with the premise that ‘to study the underlying state-formation process . . . would be like drinking wine for the calcium content’ (p. 135). Instead, the author examines the evidence (and lack of it) for a variety of figures and bodies with political power: kings, chiefs, freeholders and assemblies. Chapter 7, ‘War’, stresses continuity—‘it was not as if Norsemen had been peace-loving householders before the 790s, and then exploded’ (p. 168)—and covers tools of roving warfare (ships, horses and, my favourite, spades) and strategies (time-honoured and not peculiarly barbarous). ‘Work’ treats agricultural practices in fruitful detail, but there is less on industry and, in particular, trade than might be expected, perhaps because the author wishes to distance himself from the urbanisation camp (see also Chapter 3, pp. 69–74, for equivocal comments on these subjects). Chapter 9 is ‘a review of some instances of migration’ (p. 215) where Iceland and the Danelaw receive the lion’s share of attention (and where it is suggested on page 231 that Danelaw settlement ‘can only be inferred from a sparse record of events composed from the Wessex point of view’, which will come as a surprise to archaeologists and place-name scholars). The three ‘mentalities’ chapters are an interesting proposition, but inevitably in part skewed towards discussion of what we *cannot* know about how the Viking-Age Norse read and understood their past, present and future. Thus, Chapter 10 discusses the inadequacies of genealogy and of saga, Eddic and even skaldic texts before presenting a brief but interesting reading of their use of landscape—appropriation, imitation and rejection—as the ‘best record of the past’ (p. 247). Chapters 11 and 12 are more positive, with lengthy sections on what can be deduced from contemporary evidence of the Norsemen’s views on the relevance of their gods to everyday life; their imitation (and assimilation) of ideas, objects and foreign models; the importance of commemoration; and their hopes for life after death.

In each of the chapters, the evidence is culled from all areas of the ‘Viking’ world, and the author’s breadth of knowledge of the scholarship in the various relevant disciplines is very considerable. One of the stated aims of the book is to avoid presenting any overarching scheme or argument imposed onto the material by, say, the economic historian or developmental theorist. It certainly succeeds in this aim, and can be read as a lively corrective, but as a result it is quite difficult for

the reader to extract any comprehensive idea of subjects such as the Conversion, or of chronological development and geographical variation throughout the period. The treatment of sources also deserves comment. Throughout the book, Christiansen quite rightly stresses the value of contemporary sources over later narrative accounts, but in dismissing pretty much all non-contemporary texts he is sometimes in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Later texts can embody older traditions even if they should not be seen as primary evidence, and this seems to be implied in his regular quoting from, for example, *Landnámabók*, but he rarely explicitly credits them with any source-value. His emphasis on the contemporaneous could also lead the unwary reader or unversed student into murky waters; given that he levels such harsh criticism at those who use saga and other post-Viking-Age texts as evidence for earlier customs (and gives explicit—and judicious—reasons for avoiding such texts, pp. 223–24, 238), a reader could certainly be forgiven for assuming that the contemporary texts used are unproblematic. Only on pages 308–09, buried in Appendix A, is there any acknowledgement that skaldic verse is not an uncomplicatedly contemporary source (in contrast to, for example, the bald statements on pages 214 and 243: ‘the contemporary northern sources, rune-stones and skaldic poetry’; ‘skaldic verse recorded contemporary events’); similarly, the particular challenges of runic study are only addressed on pages 306–08. The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is cited without caveat, and the poem on Athelstan preserved by William of Malmesbury is very charitably described as a ‘twelfth-century reworking of a tenth-century poem’ (p. 172) and quoted as if reliable.

The quotations included in this review should give a taste of the humour and lively style of much of the book, but there are regular descents into cutting sarcasm not much leavened by the humour: considering the constraints imposed upon a book with so rangy a subject, much space is devoted to needling criticism of individuals’ views not necessarily widely held. A survey does not seem the appropriate place for this kind of writing. However, as much of the book is a polemical engagement with an extraordinary range of scholarship which takes account of publications as recent as 2001 (the year preceding the book’s appearance), it is interesting from a historiographical perspective, and a valuable record of this scholarship (see particularly the scathing Appendix A: Modern Research, which is more of an afterword than an appendix).

It is most unfortunate, then, that there are many problems with the book’s referencing. Some sections seem to assume an audience ‘in the know’: scholars’ names, together with their hypotheses and conclusions, are sometimes cited with no further explanation of where these conclusions can be found (or checked for accurate representation; for example, ‘as Stahlsberg suggested’ p. 19); quotations—or at least text enclosed in quotation marks—are included without reference to author or source; and casual allusion sometimes renders primary sources inaccessible to the student or non-specialist, who, for example, would have to wait until page 290 to find out that Wulfstan’s account of Scandinavian practices can be found in the Old English Orosius, despite regular reference to it throughout the earlier chapters. Where references are provided—and very many are—they are often unreliable. In Chapter 1, of the 49 ‘name date’ references in the footnotes,

eleven are not listed in the bibliography, two have the wrong date (Jesch 1990 for 1991; Norr 1996 for 1993), and one is ambiguous, failing to distinguish between two Göransson's who published in 1999. References which use Christiansen's (sometimes extraordinary) abbreviations are also unreliable: EG, Mks, MGH, and UOÅ are not unpacked in the Abbreviations section, and VIRE and VINAS in the chapter's footnotes correspond to VIR and VINA in the Abbreviations. Spot-checks throughout the later chapters confirm that Chapter 1 is not an anomaly: missing and incorrect references and abbreviations, failure to distinguish between authors with the same surname, and inconsistent use of letters to differentiate same-year publications (such as 1999a, 1999b) abound throughout the book. It is possible that some of these errors result from what seem to be three competing methods of referencing: the 'name date' system (the predominant one); full bibliographical information in the footnotes; and a system of complex abbreviation (pp. vii–xiii), the like of which I have never before seen. Less significant but nevertheless irritating is the somewhat haphazard approach to the spelling of titles, place-names and, in particular, personal names. The book's Introduction states that 'no consistent principle will be followed in the spelling of personal or place-names, and apologies are offered to all jealous lovers of Normalized Old Norse or Current Usage' (p. 9); fair enough, but some of the spellings are simply wrong (e.g. *Tógdrápa, jófurr*, Skalagrímsson), and consistency at the level of an individual name does not seem to be too much to ask, especially when indexing is affected. Thus we find Hallfreðr, Hallfroðr, Hallfrøðr and Hallfred; Aelfric, Ælfric and even Elfric; Birca and Birka—such variation sometimes occurring within a single paragraph. Christiansen's style is also variable: always full of humour, it is sometimes a model of lucidity, sometimes syntactically tortuous to the point of incomprehensibility (p. 68 provides a memorable example), with some very odd punctuation. There is also a large number of typographical errors, some trivial, some more significant. Where was the copy-editor?

Doubtless Christiansen would class me among those 'precisians' to whom he gives such short shrift (for example, p. 290) for attending so closely to the nuts-and-bolts of his book, but when an author decries in such sarcastic tones practitioners of so-called 'New Philosophies' for their perceived dismissal of 'fact-fetishism', and writes that 'in overcrowded archaeological departments, ignorance makes theory all the more enticing; ideology smooths the brow of incompetence' (p. 320), his argument for detailed, fact-based scholarship should not be undermined by such basic flaws. Many of the book's problems could have been sorted out by a vigilant copy-editor or proof-reader. Blackwells has produced this book at a reasonable price, one which may well attract students and general readers, but this is no excuse for the lack of care taken over its publication, which flaws this thought-provoking survey of, and engagement with, the whole gamut of Viking-Age activities and resulting scholarship.

JAYNE CARROLL

BISKUPA SÖGUR III: ÁRNA SAGA BISKUPS, LÁRENTÍUS SAGA BISKUPS, SÖGUPÁTTUR JÓNS HALLDÓRSSONAR BISKUPS, BISKUPA ÆTTIR. Edited by GUÐRÚN ÁSA GRÍMSDÓTTIR. *Íslensk fornrit XVII. Hið Íslenska fornritafélag*. Reykjavík, 1998. cxxxvii + 496 pp. 9 genealogical tables, 9 maps, 24 colour plates.

Twenty-one volumes in the *Íslensk fornrit* series have been published, covering the sagas of Icelanders as well as a number of kings' sagas, and now, with the twenty-first volume, a couple of bishops' sagas. With their copious and informative introductions, explanatory notes and selective textual apparatus, these editions are very attractive and have become popular among scholars in the field of Old Norse–Icelandic literature, despite the fact that the series, with its normalised texts based on fabricated conventions of often hypothetical thirteenth- or fourteenth-century exemplars, was originally intended for a more general (Icelandic) readership.

This latest volume, published on the occasion of the millennial celebration of the Conversion of Iceland to Christianity, is entitled *Biskupa sögur III* and forms part of a planned five-volume edition of all the bishops' sagas. Included in the volume are: *Árna saga biskups*, *Lárentíus saga biskups*, *Söguþáttur Jóns Halldórssonar biskups*, and *Biskupa ættir*. Common to these texts is that they were composed in Iceland in the fourteenth century.

*Árna saga biskups* tells of Árni Þorláksson, bishop of Skálholt 1271–98. The saga is both a biography of the bishop and a political document; the focus is on Árni Þorláksson's struggle with leading laymen over property donated to the churches. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir defines it as *kirkjupólitísk landssaga sem var ætlað að tryggja stefnu Árna biskups framtíð í Skálholtsbiskupsdæmi* ('church-political history intended to secure a future for Bishop Árni's policy in the Skálholt bishopric', p. xviii) and emphasises its importance as a source of Icelandic history for the 1270s and 1280s (in its present form, the saga ends in 1290–91). The author, who is believed to be Árni Helgason, Árni Þorláksson's nephew and successor to the bishop's office, or someone closely associated with him, makes reference to a great number of written documents as his sources and presents the events in strict chronological order; in terms of structure, therefore, the saga has many of the characteristics of annals or chronicles. The saga survives in around forty manuscripts, including two vellum fragments, that is, two leaves in AM 220 VI fol. written 1340–60 and three leaves from AM 122 b fol. (*Reykjarfjarðarbók*) written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. No copy of the version represented by AM 220 VI fol. has survived, but of the version represented by *Reykjarfjarðarbók* more than thirty copies are extant. The text of *Árna saga biskups* in this volume is in the main based on the diplomatic edition of Þorleifur Hauksson (1972), whose detailed analysis of the saga also underlies much of Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir's introduction. In his edition, Þorleifur Hauksson prints the two leaves in AM 220 VI fol. separately; he uses *Reykjarfjarðarbók* as his main text and fills the lacuna from London, British Library Add. 11.127. In contrast to Þorleifur Hauksson, Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir attempts to reconstruct the text of *Reykjarfjarðarbók* and departs from Add. 11.127 if variants from other

manuscripts (Stock. Perg. 4to no. 12, Stock. Papp. 4to no. 8, AM 1041 4to, AM 204 fol., AM 114 fol.) appear closer to the original text of the vellum manuscript.

*Lárentíus saga biskups* is an altogether different sort of narrative in terms of both style and contents, one which *má . . . skilgreina sem kirkjusögulega æviþætti biskups styrkta með annálagreinum og ívafi helgisagnamínna* ('can be interpreted as church-historical episodes from the life of a bishop supported by entries from annals and supplemented with matter drawn from hagiographical commonplaces', p. lxxxiii). The saga records the life of Lárentíus Kálfsson, bishop of Hólar 1324–31, from his youth and education in Hólar and Niðaróss to his episcopal career, and although it is highly subjective, it is an invaluable source about the daily life and habits of a bishop, the hierarchy among clerics, the division of labour among laymen, the payment of tithe and the resistance of leading laymen in the north to the bishop's pecuniary claims. The author is almost certainly Einar Hafliðason, Bishop Lárentíus's student and later assistant, who also wrote the so-called *Lögmannsannáll*, and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir demonstrates his use in the saga of letters and documents that would appear to have been housed in the Hólar archives. The saga is preserved almost complete in two vellum manuscripts, AM 406 a I 4to from around 1530 and AM 180 b fol. from c.1500. The two manuscripts are independent of each other, and in both there are small lacunae, one of which is common to both. This missing part can be supplied from AM 404 4to, which was copied from AM 180 b fol. and filled in from AM 406 a I 4to at a time when the two vellum manuscripts were more complete than they are now. The edition in this volume is based on Árni Björnsson's 1969 diplomatic edition; the texts of AM 406 a I 4to and AM 180 b fol. are printed synoptically with supplements from AM 404 4to.

The third text, *Sögubáttur af Jóni biskupi Halldórssyni*, is a short biography of the Norwegian Jón Halldórsson, bishop of Skálholt 1322–39, which, in Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir's opinion, may have been intended as a frame for a more detailed biography similar to the life of Bishop Lárentíus. The focus is on the bishop's ability to recount *exempla*, and the three such tales included as specimens of his repertoire take up a fair portion of the narrative. The *þáttur* is preserved in a number of manuscripts, the oldest of which is AM 657 a–b 4to from the mid-fourteenth century. This manuscript forms the basis of the text in this volume, though AM 164 fol., AM 1010 4to, and AM 967 4to are also used to fill in the lacunae.

The last text, *Biskupa ættir*, consists of genealogical notes on Icelandic bishops. They are preserved as two separate *þættir* in AM 162 m fol. from the mid-fourteenth century and in a copy in AM 408 i 4to. The former *þáttur* lacks the beginning and ends with the family of Brynjólfur Bjarnarson, a farmer in Akrar, who may well have compiled it on the basis of older genealogical lists. It names some of the contemporaries of Bishop Lárentíus as well as people mentioned in *Árna saga biskups* and in annals from the fourteenth century and is therefore a highly relevant text. The latter *þáttur*, which is more or less complete, traces the families of the first five bishops of Skálholt and is believed to have been originally composed in the late twelfth century. The edition of the *Biskupa ættir* is based on Jón Helgason's diplomatic edition in his *Byskupa sögur* (1938).

The Introduction concludes with a bibliography, genealogical lists pertaining to Árne Þorláksson, Brandur Jónsson, Árne Helgason, Jörundur Þorsteinsson, and Lárentíus Kálfsson; an overview of the terms of office of popes, archbishops of Niðaróss, bishops in Skálholt and Hólar, and kings of Norway during the lives of the people with whom this volume is concerned; maps; facsimiles; and photographs of, for example, John Cleveley's painting of Skálholt in 1772, Bishop Lárentíus's seal and a fourteenth-century chest belonging to Hólar.

The editorial principles are sound, and attempts are made to adhere as closely as possible to the manuscripts. With regard to spelling, the age of the texts—the fourteenth century—is taken into consideration. Accordingly, for example, the mediopassive ending is *-z*, and the indefinite pronoun *nokkurr* is *nokkorr*. The texts are accompanied by explanatory notes and a selective textual apparatus and furnished with relevant dates in the margins. A name index rounds off the volume.

This latest volume maintains the high standards of the *Íslensk fornrit* series. The introduction may be said to be characteristic of Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir's scholarly works: it is authoritative and clear and written in a beautiful prose style. In about 130 pages, she has managed to compress an enormous amount of information and critical analysis, not only presenting a thorough survey of previous scholarship on the texts contained in the volume, but also contributing original historical research. On some points the volume may in fact be said to exceed the standards of earlier volumes in the series, for in contrast to these it has clear bibliographical references and provides a proper bibliography, including a guide to abbreviations. This meticulously prepared edition will be much admired by scholars for its wealth of learning and careful editing and will prove an invaluable resource for the study of the bishops' sagas.

KIRSTEN WOLF

SÖGUGERÐ LANDNÁMABÓKAR: UM ÍSLENSKA SAGNARITUN Á 12. OG 13. ÖLD. By SVEINBJÖRN RAFNSSON. *Ritsafn sagnfræðistofnunar* 35. *Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands*. Reykjavík, 2001. 208 pp. 3 black-and-white illustrations.

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson introduces his new book as a collection of observations that have preoccupied him over recent years, some of which he has already published in article form. These observations relate primarily to *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga*, but also touch on a small number of other texts, in particular the various sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason and the two versions of *Íslendingabók*. The main body of the book focuses on clarifying the complicated textual relationships between these works and thus aims to draw a clearer picture of saga-writing activity in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iceland.

Many of Sveinbjörn's arguments follow up and revise the conclusions of his 1974 monograph on *Landnámabók*. As there, he argues against Jón Jóhannesson and Jakob Benediktsson that the lost *Styrmisbók* redaction of *Landnámabók* was historical in nature, like *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*, rather than purely genealogical like *Melabók*. He labels these three redactions of *Landnámabók*



‘sögugerð Landnáma’, and argues that all three must have been followed by *Kristni saga*, which was always an essential part of the historical redaction. The author of the first ‘historical’ *Landnámabók* and *Kristni saga* was one and the same person, and may perhaps be identified with Styrmir himself (not, as commonly thought, Sturla Þórðarson). He then goes on to show at some length that the accounts of Christian settlers in *Landnámabók* and the missions in *Kristni saga* come from an Old Icelandic *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* written after Oddr and Gunnlaugr’s Latin lives but before 1189 (a date which has implications for when Gunnlaugr wrote his saga). Just as there was more than one version of *Landnámabók* and, indeed, of *Íslendingabók*, so there were many redactions of this *Óláfs saga* and these can explain the material on the settlement and the Conversion in Theodoricus’s history, *Laxdæla saga* (which Sveinbjörn dates earlier than *Heimskringla*), *Heimskringla*, *Kristni saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. The book ends with a couple of chapters on Ari’s *Íslendingabók*, reviving an old argument (dating back to Konrad Maurer) that chapters fourteen to eighteen of *Kristni saga* derive from the older redaction of *Íslendingabók*.

Any attempt to deal with relationships between texts of which many are lost is bound to be largely conjectural, and this study is no exception. Sveinbjörn notes the uncertainty of his conclusions on several occasions (see for example pp. 16, 35) but one may still feel that he is too apt to argue on too little evidence. His proof that *Kristni saga* was in the lost *Styrmisbók* redaction of *Landnáma* is a good example. According to Sveinbjörn, the *Kristni saga* in *Hauksbók* attempts to harmonise two different chronologies for Þorvaldr and Friðrekr’s mission: the generally accepted chronology (981–86) is from the lost *Kristni saga* in *Sturlubók*, and the other (985–94) must therefore, he argues, be from the lost *Kristni saga* in *Styrmisbók* (pp. 25–32). He infers the second chronology from calculations based on the given number of years from the settlement in 1118 (*CC vetra tolfrað*, giving a date of 878, rather than 874, for the settlement) and a manuscript reading (usually emended) to the effect that the missionaries stayed five years after their initial four. Although this is possible, it hardly provides solid evidence. The probability remains that 240 is a rounded number on which exact calculations should not be based, and, if Þorvaldr and Friðrekr did stay so much longer than is usually thought, it is surprising that nothing more is recorded from this time (especially if, as *Kristni saga* states clearly and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* implies, they had both been made outlaws after four years). In addition, Sveinbjörn makes no mention of Ólafur Halldórsson’s article ‘Rómversk tala af týndu blaði úr Hauksbók’ (*Jóansbolli færður Jóni Samsonarsyni fimmtugum* (Reykjavík, 1981), 109–114, reprinted in *Grettisfærsla* (Reykjavík, 1990), 461–66), which questions whether *Kristni saga* was ever in fact in the *Sturlubók* redaction of *Landnáma*; this clearly affects the validity of his argument.

Similar doubts could be raised regarding Sveinbjörn’s other arguments as to what stood in *Styrmisbók*. That it contained the story of Ingólfr and Hjörleifr he bases on the fact that *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* has a longer and, he claims, therefore more original text than *Sturlubók* at this point (p. 35). The small explanatory additions he notes in the text of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*

*en mesta* are all typical of the kinds of changes the compiler makes elsewhere, yet the possibility that the compiler has expanded the text is nowhere mentioned, despite the fact that recent research has tended to emphasise his creative capacities. The same goes for the account of Christian settlers in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (p. 42). While Sveinbjörn argues that the explicit links between these settlers and Óláfr Tryggvason betray their origins in a previous Icelandic *Óláfs saga*, it seems at least as likely that the compiler himself may have made these links to justify the inclusion of the settlers in his *Óláfs saga*. The tendency for arguments about originality to cut both ways is rather nicely illustrated in Sveinbjörn's discussion of *Stefnis þáttur*, where he argues the exact opposite to Björn M. Ólsen (who claimed that *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* has a more original text than *Kristni saga*) on exactly the same grounds: that the text in *Kristni saga* is 'eðlilegri' (pp. 102–03). In such cases, it seems, more is required to carry the point.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the book is Sveinbjörn's exploration of how far the conversion *þættir* in *Kristni saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* can be attributed to Gunnlaugr Leifsson. It has become a maxim of scholars working in this area that more than his fair share has been allotted to Gunnlaugr, although as yet no systematic research has been done on what can reasonably be attributed to him. Sveinbjörn raises the issue of whether stories including skaldic verse, Icelandic word play, genealogies and place-names could really have been translated from his Latin life; even what is explicitly derived from Gunnlaugr (for example, in *Þorvalds þáttur ens víðförla*) must be very different in its present form from the Latin original. Sveinbjörn would dissociate *Stefnis þáttur* and *Þangbrands þáttur* from Gunnlaugr altogether, making them instead part of an Icelandic *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* based on Gunnlaugr's but with considerable additions; in his analysis *Þangbrands þáttur*, for example, consists of multiple layers, first written in Haukadalur in c.1100, used by Ari and Gunnlaugr, translated into Icelandic, and then expanded with stories from Álptafjörður, Borgarfjörður and Mýrar. Particularly illuminating is his observation that much of the additional information in the *þættir* relates to Hjalti Skeggjason, clearly more of a hero in some traditions about the Conversion than he was for Ari. (A reference to Guðbrandur Vigfússon, who made this point in his 1905 edition and translation of *Kristni saga*, would not have come amiss here.) Sveinbjörn's view of the conversion *þættir* as composite texts, enshrining traditions from different parts of the country, seems ultimately more fruitful than tracing them all back to a Latin original written c.1200 by Gunnlaugr Leifsson. It also accords in some respects (although by no means all) with Ólafur Halldórsson's conclusions in the forthcoming *Íslensk fornrit* edition of the *þættir*. These two works together are likely to stimulate further discussion of the conversion *þættir* and to contribute to a new and better understanding of their origins.

THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF ICELAND: PRIESTS, POWER, AND SOCIAL CHANGE 1000–1300. By ORRI VÉSTEINSSON. *Oxford University Press*. Oxford, 2000. xvi + 318 pp. 12 figures (maps, graphs, genealogies).

Orri Vésteinsson has made his name and career mainly as an archaeologist, and was recently appointed to the first academic position in that subject at the University of Iceland. His Ph.D. (University of London 1996) was, however, a sidestep into history, and he has subsequently reworked his Ph.D. thesis into the present monograph, the ‘first historical study of high-medieval Iceland to be published in English’ as the book jacket claims.

*The Christianization of Iceland* is not concerned with the official conversion of the country (c. 1000 AD), but instead charts the development and significance of Christianity, with its ideas and institutions, over the next three centuries, until Iceland had become part of a mainstream European kingdom and, at the same time, been thoroughly integrated into the ecclesiastical structure of Catholic Europe. Central to the study is the *political* significance of religious and ecclesiastical developments, in a society gradually superimposing more state-like structures on the small-scale, fluid and highly personal social framework of the Viking Age.

As is rightly emphasised by author and publisher, the availability of written sources, narrative, legal and documentary, offers an opportunity to observe these processes in Iceland at a remarkably early stage of social development. The book is, therefore, aimed not only at readers whose primary interest is Icelandic history or the background to Old Icelandic literature, but more generally at those interested in the social or ecclesiastical history of medieval Europe. Orri’s approach is, however, not comparative. His emphasis is, instead, on an exact interpretation, in detail as well as in more general terms, of particular pieces of evidence, and his argument with earlier scholars is largely limited to Icelandic matters. The book is thus, I am afraid, by no means easy going for those unacquainted with medieval Iceland, although they are offered some guidance in the Introduction and a most useful ‘List of Terms’ (pp. 287–96), which is much more than a plain glossary. On the other hand, readers familiar with Old Norse may regret that Orri, who quotes his sources in English translation, only occasionally provides the original text.

Orri Vésteinsson is by temperament a revisionist, tending to treat accepted conclusions with healthy scepticism, and a minimalist, wary of assuming any earlier developments or more organised structures than the evidence clearly indicates. Fortunately, he is innocent of the revisionist’s besetting sin: impatience with the detailed evidence. On the contrary, he has thoroughly studied the sources, critically re-examining the well-known principal texts, going through every reference to priests or clerics in all sorts of narrative sources, and systematically surveying the charter material—a study in its own right deserving a more comprehensive exposition than it receives in the present book. No less impressive is his grasp of modern scholarship (including the nineteenth-century pioneers but of necessity excluding three important studies, Gunnar F. Guðmundsson’s and Hjalti Hugason’s respective volumes in *Kristni á Íslandi* (Reykjavík) and Magnús Stefánsson’s *Staðir og staðamál* (Bergen), all published, like the present book, in 2000). Wherever it is relevant for his argument, Orri patiently examines

technicalities such as the philological intricacies of written sources (resulting, for instance, in important observations on the tithe law and other legal provisions) and the informed guesswork involved in twelfth-century genealogy. Orri's confident use of archaeological evidence serves him well for the 'prehistory' (as he calls the eleventh and earlier centuries), providing a firmer base than the non-contemporary written sources. He handles his vast amount of detail carefully ('Teitr's son Ísleifr' instead of 'Ísleifr's son Teitr', p. 187, is a rare exception) and is consistent in his interpretation (again one exception: the age of the *Canones Nidarosiensis*, p. 118 vs. p. 235).

Orri Vésteinsson's meticulous scholarship combines admirably with his revisionist bent, resulting not so much in a grand theory or a new solution to a single central problem as in numerous small—and not-so-small—advances on various fronts. As an example, we may note his treatment of clerical celibacy (pp. 234–37), a short section of no special importance for the main thrust of the study. Here Orri hastens to identify an accepted conclusion, the limited success of celibacy in the Icelandic church, and proceeds to debunk it. Taking in his stride the fact that 'as elsewhere, clerics had concubines and fathered children' (they did, indeed, but not without opposition and to a widely varying extent), and some examples of celibate twelfth-century clerics, he stresses that only after 1237 was there any attempt made to outlaw clerical (or even episcopal) marriage in Iceland, concluding from the two known clashes over the subject after 1264, concerning the marriage of a deacon and subdeacon respectively, that the celibacy of priests had been quickly and totally accepted. Two later cases of married priests, mentioned in a fourteenth-century text, are brushed aside by Orri as 'myth' and 'miracle stories' (p. 237). This is bold, refreshingly clever, and typical of the author's approach to the many issues encountered in the broad sweep of his valuable study.

Despite not being a native writer of English, Orri for the most part manages to make his points clearly and succinctly, even humorously (wondering, *à propos* presumed sacrificial feasts, 'to what extent the business of getting drunk was considered to be a religious act in pre-Christian times', p. 8). Among the exceptions are sentences like: 'The killing of Knútr represents the final collapse of order in Bishop Guðmundr's retinue and he was soon afterwards interred at Hólar and the following dispersed' (p. 222). Here the paratactic syntax has misled a proof-reader into supposing that the slain Knútr was 'interred' where, in fact, the bishop himself was 'interred' (confined in house-arrest). It is mainly, however, in the translation of terms and quotations that language occasionally becomes a problem. Orri offers his own translations without even consulting such standard tools as the *Grágás* translation (*Laws of Early Iceland*, trans. Dennis et al., University of Manitoba Press, 1980 and 2000), resulting in, for instance, 'paupers (men who had to support incapable persons)' (p. 83, note 34) instead of simply 'men with dependents' (*incapable person* is Orri's consistent rendering of the Norse *ómagi*, of which *dependent* is a much more exact equivalent, while 'pauper' in this context is simply wrong).

While more thorough language editing might have cleared up some problems, the main editorial weakness of the book is its lack of bilingual proof-reading. Old Norse special characters are liable to transformations with such improbable out-

comes as 'Mrar' (p. 120), 'Niðarbs' (p. 234) and "D.,RAFJÖRÐUR" (Map 4). The genealogical tables (Figs. 2–8, 11–12) are particularly inexact, both in spelling and layout, even resulting in apparent errors of fact (Figs. 2 and 7). The English is reasonably well proof-read, with only a couple of obvious errors such as 'Victorian' for 'Victorine', (p. 140, note 44). Both Index and Bibliography are extensive and seem to be meticulously done. Every Icelandic place-name in the entire book is located on one of the five Maps.

To sum up: *The Christianization of Iceland* is a competent, important and in many respects brilliant contribution to the history of church and society in medieval Iceland.

HELGI SKÚLI KJARTANSSON

SHIPS AND MEN IN THE LATE VIKING AGE: THE VOCABULARY OF RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS AND SKALDIC VERSE. By JUDITH JESCH. *The Boydell Press*. Cambridge, 2001. xiv + 330 pp. 4 maps; 52 black-and-white illustrations.

Judith Jesch's thorough and lucid book represents 'an attempt to write history through language' (p. 6). As such, it constitutes an important contribution to Viking studies, and in particular—since the contemporary Viking-Age sources in Old Norse which engage with Jesch's chosen subject matter are skaldic verse and runic inscriptions—to skaldic, runic and (of course) lexical studies.

The book begins with a careful introduction to sources and methodology, painstakingly presenting the challenges and difficulties involved in the handling of such material, and supplying an overview which could function in its own right as a compact introduction to Viking-Age sources. Five chapters then provide the main sections of analysis: on 'Viking Activities' (such as trade, war, and—inevitably—death); on 'Viking Destinations'; on 'Ships and Sailing'; on 'The Crew, the Fleet and Battles at Sea'; and on 'Group and Ethos in War and Trade'. A brief epilogue sketches in some of the shifting characteristics of the end of the Viking Age, and the book concludes with a series of useful appendices and indices which enable easy consultation on individual points. The book is amply illustrated with maps and photographs (though some of the rune-stone pictures have reproduced poorly), and translations are provided for all Old Norse quotations.

The many strengths of this book should therefore be apparent. One may feel that for a long time runic and (perhaps especially) skaldic sources have remained shamefully under-used in the historical and cultural study of the Viking Age, and Jesch's book represents an important act of redress. The book essentially comprises a linked series of detailed lexical studies, in which Jesch gathers together the occurrences of a certain term within the skaldic and runic corpus, and endeavours to elucidate its meaning and connotations. Among the old favourites that receive illuminating attention are such terms as *drengr* and *félagi*, *lið* and *leiðangr*, *skeið* and *snekkja*, while more unfamiliar topics include hulls and stems, sails and rigging, landfall and shipwreck. Wherever possible, Jesch endeavours to connect the lexical evidence with the archaeological evidence of recovered Viking-Age

ships. In all cases, Jesch's discussions look set to become, at least for the foreseeable future, the standard analyses.

One possible reservation, in the midst of such exemplary work, is that—to my mind at least—there is not quite enough discussion of the questions of literary register and poetic (and inscriptional) diction. A poem is not, after all, a technical manual, and a word in poetry may bear a different meaning from its use in non-poetic contexts, especially when that poetry is as metrically demanding as skaldic verse. Of course, Jesch knows this perfectly well, and she demonstrates herself throughout to be an extremely sensitive and accomplished reader of skaldic verse; but still there is a nagging suspicion that, at least to a degree, literary sources are being homogenised and made to function as documentary resources, thereby suppressing for example the potential role of poetic archaism, or the verbal innovations of individual poets.

Some readers might also feel that there is occasionally a preoccupation with methodology at the expense of sustained argument, and might wish for a little more boldness in speculation. On the other hand, it could be said that a book like this doesn't really have a cumulative argument as such, but rather is itself an argument and demonstration in favour of a certain type of scholarship, that traditionally styled 'philological', and as a product of the philological approach *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* is, to repeat, a major contribution to Viking studies. As a book to read from cover to cover it is illuminating and enjoyable; as a reference work for repeated use it will prove invaluable.

MATTHEW TOWNEND

THE MATTER OF THE NORTH: THE RISE OF LITERARY FICTION IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ICELAND. By TORFI H. TULINIUS. Translated by RANDI C. ELDEVİK. *The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern Civilization* 13. Odense University Press. Odense, 2002. 340 pp.

The long title of this book—a translation of Torfi's *La 'Matière du Nord': sagas légendaires et fiction dans la littérature islandaise en prose du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995)—gives a good idea of its argument: Torfi is concerned with the emergence of written prose fiction in Iceland, which he sees as taking place in earnest in the first half of the thirteenth century (pp. 63, 65). In the course of the book he discusses six *fornaldarsögur*: *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Völsunga saga*, *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. He also discusses *Jómsvíkinga saga*, which he sees generically as falling somewhere between the Kings' Sagas and the *fornaldarsögur* (p. 29), and chronologically as paving the way both for the latter and for the Family Sagas (pp. 215–16). Finally, he discusses *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, which he tentatively regards as the first Family Saga (p. 234). His choice of sagas for discussion is limited to ones that, in their written form, may be dated with reasonable confidence to the

thirteenth century (p. 20), though he emphasises that the verse elements, at least, in some of them must certainly have existed earlier, and in oral form (pp. 54–55). The *fornaldarsögur*, as he sees them, reflect an Icelandic equivalent of the development elsewhere in Europe of the Matters of France, Britain and Rome, in that they involve the creation of a secular literature by the dominant class in Iceland (pp. 45–46) on the basis of a reconstruction of the country's prehistory (pp. 40–41). Behind them lie impulses from religious and historical writings (pp. 58–61), from eddic poetry (pp. 55–58), in which German literature seems to have stimulated an increased interest in Iceland in the thirteenth century (cf. pp. 49, 57), and from translations of courtly literature (pp. 59, 122–23, 186–87, 224). While the Icelanders took a greater interest than other Europeans in the pagan aspects of their past (pp. 66, 223), the fact that they had no king (until their submission to Norway in 1262–64) made them no less interested in kingship than other peoples (p. 173): their internal history, as well as their relations with Norway in the thirteenth century, are reflected in the accounts of relations between king and subject in many sagas, not least the *fornaldarsögur*. Of the two main types of literary fiction in thirteenth-century Iceland, the *fornaldarsögur* and the Family Sagas, both project the preoccupations of their time of composition onto the past, dealing as they do with a relatively distant and recent past respectively. Whereas in the *fornaldarsögur* this projection is comparatively obvious and open, in the Family Sagas it is comparatively subtle and oblique, perhaps betraying the influence of skaldic poetry (pp. 186, 227–33, 258–59).

As an example of the former kind of projection let me choose among those given by Torfi the case of *Ragnars saga*, the one I happen to know best. Torfi notes that here and in *Ragnarssona þáttur* (which, as he indicates, probably reflects an older redaction of *Ragnars saga* than either of the two which survive), Ragnarr's relations with his sons is presented as highly competitive. In the saga his invasion of England is motivated by a wish to win a fame no less lasting than that of his sons; and in *Ragnarssona þáttur* the hostile relations of his two sons by Þóra with the Swedish king Eysteinn are the result of an attempt by them to transfer Eysteinn's allegiance, as a vassal king of Ragnarr's, from Ragnarr to themselves. According to Torfi, this reflects the attempts by chieftains in thirteenth-century Iceland to transfer to themselves the loyalties of the *þingmenn*, or liegemen, of rival chieftains (pp. 135–37). While I would not disagree with this, I would suggest that what is described in *Ragnars saga* and *Ragnarssona þáttur*, where, as Torfi also notes, Ragnarr and his two families of sons always act, as warriors, independently of each other, may equally well reflect the competitive nature of Scandinavian kingship in the period in which these narratives are set, i.e. the Viking Age. This aspect of Viking-Age kingship is well brought out by C. Patrick Wormald in his article 'Viking studies: whence and whither?' in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London: Phillimore, 1982), 128–53; see pp. 144–48.

A particularly interesting observation of Torfi's relates to the possible influence on *Ragnars saga* of a saint's life in Old Norse prose, *Agnesar saga*, which was known in Iceland from at least the end of the thirteenth century (p. 134). In this narrative the saintly heroine's lover, furious at her refusal to yield to his advances

or even to marry him, strips her naked, whereupon her hair grows miraculously long in such a way as to cover her entire body and preserve her chastity. In Chapter 5 of the more fully preserved redaction of *Ragnars saga*, the so-called Y-redaction, one of the supposedly impossible conditions imposed on Áslaug by Ragnarr before he marries her is that she should visit him 'neither clad nor unclad'. She decides to fulfil this condition in two ways: by wearing nothing but a net, and by allowing her hair to fall over her body, so that her nakedness is covered. This in spite of the fact that, in the first chapter of Y, the farmer's wife who found her as a child and brought her up has shaved her head and rubbed it with tar, to prevent her hair growing. I have argued elsewhere (as Torfi indirectly acknowledges, p. 134; see McTurk in *Gripla* 1 (1975), 43–75, esp. pp. 61–64) that the more fragmentarily preserved redaction of *Ragnars saga*, the X-redaction, which I see as dating from c.1250, may have differed from the Y-redaction, which I see as dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, in, among other things, not including the chapter corresponding to Chapter 1 in the Y-redaction. Although the fulfilling of the 'neither clad nor unclad' condition clearly formed part of the story told in the X-redaction, the fragmentary state in which that redaction has been preserved makes it difficult to say for certain just what form it took there. The information provided by Torfi (pp. 130–35) opens up the interesting possibility that *Agnesar saga* influenced the Y-redaction of *Ragnars saga* (as opposed to the X-redaction) in the way he suggests.

It is *Egils saga* that Torfi uses to illustrate the relatively subtle, oblique projection of thirteenth-century Icelandic preoccupations onto the past, which he sees as more characteristic of the Family Sagas than of the *fornaldarsögur*. He argues tentatively and with great ingenuity that Snorri Sturluson, if he was indeed the author of this saga, as Torfi believes is likely (pp. 234–36), was projecting aspects of his own life onto that of the saga's hero, Egill, in presenting him as a man with regicidal and fratricidal tendencies who was punished for his sins by the death of his son and redeemed by the poetry he composed (pp. 278, 280). This conclusion, which I have greatly simplified here, is arrived at partly by a reading of the prose text of *Egils saga* that endows it with certain of the characteristics of skaldic poetry, i.e. metaphor, metonymy, and the temporary interruption of one piece of information by another (pp. 227–33); partly by the application of a principle of intertextuality, which allows events of *Egils saga* to be understood in the light of events related in earlier stories and sagas (notably *Hervarar saga*) from which it is likely to have borrowed (pp. 183, 231–32, 251–56, 263–64); partly by an interpretation of the events of *Egils saga* in the light of Christian thinking, according to which God is both Father and King and all murder is fratricide (pp. 259–63, 278); and partly by a comparison of events of Snorri's lifetime with those of the saga (pp. 279–89). Torfi is aware that his interpretation of *Egils saga* may on occasion seem 'far-fetched and unlikely', but defends it by grounding it in the assumption that everything in the text has a meaning, and that in looking for meaning it is necessary to see the relevant part of the text 'in a broader context' (p. 264), such as is likely to be provided by (for example) any one or more of the various perspectives just outlined. In emphasising much that is implicit rather than explicit in *Egils saga*, Torfi's approach is comparable that of Hallvard Lie in the



latter's essay 'Jorvikferden' (*Edda* 33 (1946; printed 1948), 145–248); it is more authoritative and compelling than Lie's, however, with the range and variety of perspective, and of concomitant opportunity for comparison, that it brings to bear on the text.

The imminent publication under the auspices of Institutionen för nordiska språk vid Uppsala universitet of a collection of papers given at the Uppsala conference on 'Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi' in August–September, 2001, will allow Torfi's book to be seen in the context of recent work on the *fornaldarsögur*; and his discussion of *Egils saga* may now be profitably looked at in the light of Chapter 3, in particular, of Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, *Psychonarratology: foundations for the empirical study of literary response* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60–96, where it is argued that the narrator of a literary text is a reader construction, i.e. a representation in the mind of the reader, and that narratorial transparency, or the tendency for such a narrator to be clear and understandable, is conditioned by the extent to which the reader responds to hints within the text to make inferences beyond what is actually stated in it.

Torfi's book is a splendid one: full of interesting ideas, wonderfully adroit in its manipulation of different topics and approaches, logically arranged and clearly sign-posted (though an index would have helped). The translation also reads fluently and convincingly. I am hardly competent to judge the accuracy of a translation from French, but must admit (at the risk of seeming to be inordinately preoccupied with *Ragnars saga*) that my heart missed a beat when I read on p. 48 of Ragnarr loðbrók 'as well as his brothers', since brothers (as opposed to sons) of Ragnarr loðbrók, have, as far as I know, never been prominent in discussions of the background of that mysterious figure. Here I did check the original (p. 46 of the French edition), where I read, to my relief, of Ragnarr loðbrók 'ainsi que ses fils'. *Merde!*

RORY MCTURK

THE POETIC EDDA: ESSAYS ON OLD NORSE MYTHOLOGY. Edited by PAUL ACKER and CAROLYNE LARRINGTON. *Routledge*. New York and London, 2002. xviii + 289 pp. 4 illustrations.

This volume contains thirteen numbered essays on mythological poems of the Poetic Edda. The first eleven essays deal with the first eleven poems in the Codex Regius, in the order in which they occur in that manuscript; it is not quite a case, however, of one essay per poem. While the first essay (by Lars Lönnroth) and the second (by Svava Jakobsdóttir) deal respectively with *Völuspá* and *Hávamál*, the third (by Carlyne Larrington) treats *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* together. The fourth essay (by Joseph Harris), the fifth (by Carol Clover), and the sixth (by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen), deal with *Skírnismál*, *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Hymiskviða* respectively. The seventh and eighth, by Philip N. Anderson and Jerold C. Frakes respectively, both deal with *Lokasenna*, while the ninth essay (by Margaret Clunies Ross), the tenth (by John

McKinnell) and the eleventh (by Paul Acker) deal respectively with *Prymskviða*, *Völundarkviða* and *Alvíssmál*. The remaining two essays deal with poems not preserved in the Codex Regius: the twelfth (by Thomas D. Hill) treats *Rígsþula*, while the thirteenth (by Judy Quinn) discusses *Baldur's draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* in relation to *Völuspá*.

Most of the 'essays' (as I follow the editors in calling them) have appeared before: Lönnroth's in Swedish, as a chapter in his book *Den dubbla scenen* (Stockholm, 1978), and Svava Jakobsdóttir's in Icelandic, as an article in *Skírnir* 162 (1988), 215–45. These now appear in English for the first time, translated by Paul Acker and Katrina Attwood respectively. Harris's essay (which now appears with a well-documented Afterword by the author) first appeared in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975), 26–33, and Clover's in *Scandinavian Studies* 51 (1979), 124–45. Meulengracht Sørensen's essay first appeared in an English translation by Kirsten Williams (as in the book under review) in *Words and Objects*, ed. Gro Steinsland (Oslo, 1986), 257–78. Anderson's essay appeared in *Edda* (1981), 215–25, and Frakes's in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 86 (1987), 473–86. McKinnell's essay, which in the book under review appears in somewhat abridged form, first appeared in *Saga-Book* XXIII:1 (1990), 1–27; and Hill's appeared in *Speculum* 61 (1986), 79–89.

The essays by Larrington, Clunies Ross, Acker and Quinn, on the other hand, appear here for the first time ever, while those by Lönnroth and Svava Jakobsdóttir, as already indicated, do so for the first time in English. Paul Acker also writes an Introduction (entitled 'Edda 2000') to the volume as a whole, and one or other of the two editors introduces each essay with a summary of the poem or poems discussed, a survey of previous research, and a list of books (mainly but not exclusively in English) for further reading, which serves to supplement and broaden the essay's original bibliographical apparatus. The volume concludes with a three-page General Bibliography (of texts and translations, reference works, and studies of Old Norse mythology and eddic poetry), a descriptive list of contributors to the volume, and a seven-page Index. A good deal of helpful supplementary material is provided, in brackets both round and square, throughout the volume, in the form of translations of passages quoted from Old Norse and other languages, cross-references from one essay to another, up-dating of information in footnotes, etc., and while it is not always clear whether it is the editors, the translators or the authors themselves who are responsible for this (cf. p. xiv), credit should go for it wherever it is due. Only on pages 108–09, as far as I can see, has the final editing gone at all seriously awry, with 'it is hard suppose' appearing near the end of the second paragraph on p. 108, and 'preceeding' and 'forumulas' in the paragraphs following the second indented quotation on p. 109. There is also something strange about the positioning of 'therefore' in l. 3 of the second paragraph on page 99; a comma and a subsequent 'but' seem to have been missed out between the words 'shame' and 'is' on page 105, l. 3; and the second 'in' should surely have been omitted from the final sentence of the second paragraph on page 148.

Larrington makes a reasonable case for the world of Old Norse mythology, as portrayed in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*, being 'a knowable and mappable

elsewhere' (p. 74), and Clunies Ross's view that, in *Þrymskviða*, 'Loki is successfully bisexual, whereas Þórr's masculine identity is compromised but not obliterated' (p. 189) chimes interestingly with John McKinnell's view (recently expressed in *Medium Ævum* 69 (2000), 1–20; see pp. 5–6) that Loki's use of *tvau* (n. pl. of *tveir* 'two') with reference to himself and Þórr at l. 80 of the poem should be interpreted not in terms of gender role, with Loki mocking Þórr now that he is dressed as a woman, but rather in terms of Loki literally turning into a female while Þórr remains male, albeit disguised (McKinnell's article is referred to in the editor's introductory bibliography to Clunies Ross's essay, but could not have been known to Clunies Ross when she wrote the essay). Acker's essay investigates *Alvíssmál* as a source of information about dwarves in Old Norse mythology, and Quinn's, which has 'Dialogue with a *vǫlva*' as its main title, has a good deal to say about giants as well as *vǫlur*, and argues interestingly that *Vǫluspá hin skamma* may be identical with *Hyndluljóð*, rather than a separate poem interpolated into it, i.e. that both these titles may well refer to the same 50-stanza poem.

As for the items which appear here in English for the first time, Lönnroth's contribution (in which his concept of 'the double scene' is clarified on pages 5–6 and on page 23, note 7) reads convincingly in Paul Acker's translation, as does Svava Jakobsdóttir's article in Katrina Attwood's (though here the consistent misspelling of Coomaraswamy's name with an *e* instead of the first *a* is strange and irritating). The central argument of Svava's article (see pp. 39–41) is that *Hávamál* st. 107, l. 6, 'á alda vés iarðar', means 'up onto the high island's shrine of Earth', but this summary gives little indication of the extraordinarily wide-ranging scope and ramifications of her article, which, as I have tried to show elsewhere, has implications for the study of Viking-Age kingship, *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, and Svava's own novel, *Gunnlaðar saga* (see *Skírnir* 165 (1991), 343–59), as well as for the interpretation of Chaucer's poem *The House of Fame* (see the *Festschrift* for Klaus Düwel, *Runica – Germanica – Mediaevalia*, ed. Wilhelm Heizmann and Astrid van Nahl (Berlin, 2003), 418–29). Now that it is available in English, let us hope that many others will find it no less inspiring.

A few nit-picking points about translation may be made. On page 105, 'þá er ec véltá þær frá verom' (*Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 20, l. 3), surely means 'when I lured them from their husbands' rather than 'those whom I lured from their husbands'. The terms 'epic' (p. 123, l. 3) and 'non-epic' (p. 129, l. 10), both in Meulengracht Sørensen's article, are potentially misleading; what the Danish originals of these words mean, I strongly suspect, is 'narrative' and 'non-narrative' respectively. There is at least a case, I suggest, for saying that st. 23 of *Lokasenna*, l. 6, 'kír mólcañdi oc kona' (quoted on p. 152), means '(as) a milch cow and a woman', rather than 'a woman milking cows'. I am not convinced by the translation 'the wise ones of the rock' (on p. 218) for 'veggbergs vísir', applied to dwarves in *Vǫluspá*, st. 48, l. 6); does it not rather mean '(those who are) knowledgeable of (the) rock (because they live in it)', i.e. 'rock-inhabitants'? E. V. Gordon at any rate thought so. And while Quinn's translation 'listen to my account', for *Hyndluljóð*, st. 25, l. 8, 'hlýð þú sǫgo minni' (quoted on p. 269) certainly has the

authority of *Lexicon Poeticum* behind it, I would suggest that the translation ‘do what I say’ (with *hlýða* + dative taken here as meaning ‘to obey’) would be a perfectly legitimate and perhaps even better way of conveying what Quinn rightly calls the ‘imperious’ tone of the line.

To judge from the title of Paul Acker’s Introduction, and from the inclusion of McKinnell’s *Medium Ævum* article of 2000 in the ‘Further Reading’ for *Þrymskviða* (on p. 178) and of the *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. 3: Götterlieder*, ed. Klaus von See, et al. (Heidelberg, 2000) in two of the other ‘Further Reading’ lists (pp. 214 and 247), the editors have aimed at bibliographical coverage ‘through 2000’ (p. 214), i.e. up to and including that year. ‘Further reading’ hardly implies complete coverage, however, and it would be unfair to expect this of the volume under review. The editors do not seem to have taken the Régis Boyer *Festschrift* (*Hugur: mélanges d’histoire, de littérature et de mythologie offerts à Régis Boyer . . .*, ed. Claude Lecouteux with Olivier Gouchet (Paris, 1997)) into account, which is perhaps a pity, since it contains useful articles on, among other things, *Völuspá* (by Hermann Pálsson, pp. 259–77) and *Rígsþula* (by Jenny Jochens, pp. 111–22). On the other hand, they could not have been expected to include references to (for example) Rudolf Simek’s article on *Skírnismál* in *Sagnaheimur: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson . . .*, ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir and Rudolf Simek (Vienna, 2001), 229–46; or Jón Karl Helgason’s on *Þrymskviða* in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology . . .*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York, 2002), 159–66; or John McKinnell’s on ‘Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England’, in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress . . .*, ed. James Graham-Campbell et al. (Oxford, 2001), 327–44 (which discusses both *Þrymskviða* and *Völundarkviða*); or Frederic Amory’s on *Rígsþula* in *alvíssmál* 10 (2001), 3–20. Nor are they likely to have realised, when preparing the volume under review, that it would take its place in a happy three-year sequence of books on Old Norse mythology, with John Lindow’s *Handbook of Norse Mythology* (Santa Barbara, Ca, 2001) and *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense, 2003) appearing a year before and a year after it respectively. They need feel in no way discouraged by this, however; their book differs from Lindow’s in consisting mainly of essays by divers hands and from Clunies Ross’s in drawing not just on work produced around the time of the millennium, but also on work published over the last quarter of the twentieth century. Although it does not treat heroic poetry, it serves in many ways as a valuable follow-up to Joseph Harris’s comprehensive treatment of ‘Eddic Poetry’ in *Old Norse–Icelandic Literature: a Critical Guide*, ed. Carol C. Clover and John Lindow (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 68–156 (cf. Lindow’s essay, ‘Mythology and Mythography’, in the same volume, pp. 21–67). It makes its own distinctive contribution to an aspect of Northern Studies in which there seems to be no lack of interest at the present time, and is greatly to be welcomed.

RORY McTURK

LAWS OF EARLY ICELAND: GRÁGÁS. THE CODEX REGIUS OF GRÁGÁS WITH MATERIAL FROM OTHER MANUSCRIPTS. Translated and edited by ANDREW DENNIS, PETER FOOTE and RICHARD PERKINS. Volume II. *University of Manitoba Press*. Winnipeg, 2000. xii + 453 pp.

The gap between the publication of the two volumes of the English translation of *Grágás*, the compilation of early Icelandic legal provisions, has been considerable, so long in fact that the present reviewer was attending primary school when the first volume was published. Although I was unaware of it at the time, that first volume (1980) was not only an excellent translation but an important contribution to *Grágás* scholarship. The second volume matches the achievement of the first in every respect. More importantly, it completes the translation of the basic text and contains material of particular interest for understanding Icelandic society.

The format of *Laws II* follows that of the first volume. The main part (pp. 3–235) is a continuation of the translation of the legal material in the Codex Regius (Konungsbók, and hence referred to as K by the translators) following the standard edition produced by Vilhjálmur Finsen in the nineteenth century (*Grágás. Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid, udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks haandskrift* (Copenhagen, 1852), and supplementary volumes). *Laws I* contains translations of *Kristinna laga þáttur* through to *Lögréttu þáttur*. *Laws II* continues with ‘Inheritance Section’ (*Arfa þáttur*), ‘Dependents Section’ (*Ómaga bálkr*), ‘Betrothals Section’ (*Festa þáttur*), ‘Land-claims Section’ (*Landbrigða þáttur*), ‘On Hire of Property’ (*Um fjárleigur*), ‘Searches Section’ (*Rannsóknna þáttur*), ‘On Commune Obligations’ (*Um hreppaskil*); various short sections follow, which the translators group together under the heading ‘Miscellaneous Articles’ (pp. 195–219), and the book finishes with ‘On Tithe Payment’ (*Um tíundargjald*). Two tables support the translated text: one at the beginning illustrates the standard inheritance sequence (p. 2), and the other, just after the beginning of the ‘Betrothals Section’ (p. 54), illustrates degrees of kinship. The ‘Additions’ section (pp. 239–364) contains manuscript variations, mainly from the Staðarhólsbók text of *Grágás*, which ‘either amplify the contents of K in various ways or supply matter not represented in K at all’ (p. viii). This seems a sensible solution to the problem.

The remainder of the volume is an extremely helpful apparatus for making sense of both the translation itself and the process of translation. There is a detailed glossary which is longer than that for *Laws I*. The terms contained here are those which are relevant to the sections translated in this volume and so there is some overlap with the glossary of the first volume. In these instances updated entries are noted with a ‘†’ symbol. Similarly, several terms relevant to the subject matter of *Laws I* are not included here. One of the strengths of the translation is that great effort has been expended in maintaining consistency, and so the ‘Selection of Terms Normally Used as Equivalents’ (pp. 405–23) is of real value for anyone unfamiliar with Old Norse: when any term used in the translation is checked against Finsen’s edition, it is almost certain to correspond with that given in the list of equivalents.

*Laws II* concludes with four sections which are absent from *Laws I*. A fairly lengthy ‘Key to Material Included or Cited from Sources Other Than Konungsbók’

(pp. 431–48) makes it readily possible to check the translators' sources for alternative readings. A dozen or so random checks suggest that this information is accurately presented. Apart from textual issues, there is a list of topics commented on by the translators (pp. 447–48) and an index of names (p. 449); these act as indices for both volumes. This seems an efficient solution to the problem of how to index a legal text which is heavily formulaic but also has some idiosyncracies worthy of discussion. These sections allow one to find the two textual references to Swedes, for example, and the translators' note on the term *skáli*, things which if happened upon just once might otherwise never be found again. Lastly, there is a list of corrections and additions to *Laws I* (pp. 451–53).

My complaints about the translation are few and extremely picky. The translation of the frequently-used *lýsa*, which has the the general meaning of 'bring to light', as 'publish' seems a little odd; 'make public' might have been better in the context of a society which relied very little on written communication. For the sake of consistency, perhaps *ráða skilnaði* ought to have been 'arrange a separation' rather than 'institute a separation', as *ráða staðfestu* is glossed as 'arrange a fixed home'. There is also a handful of terms absent from the glossary which might have been included. For example, for anyone interested in the Icelandic landscape or economy it would be as useful to know that 'brushwood' (p. 114) translates *hrís* as it is to have glosses given for terms for meadow and woodland; there is also a footnote on p. 116 referring to the possible occurrence of the presumably related verb *hrísa*, and one on the same page discussing the meaning of *sina* (rough grass?).

This book represents an enormous step forward in the scholarship on *Grágás*, something which is emphasised by the shortage of items the editors have found to include in the list of recent relevant publications on pages 426–27. A complete translation of *Grágás* obviously facilitates more comparative research and will add an important dimension to undergraduate courses on early Icelandic society. Yet it is the footnotes and other explanatory material which give this volume particular value and make it an essential purchase for scholars in the field. There is a great deal of learned and useful comment on linguistic, legal and historical issues, and the copious cross-referencing (not found in Finsen's text) allows the reader a full understanding of what the original text is like. Many questions remain unanswered about the origins and significance of *Grágás*, but anyone considering them would do well to pay close attention to what the translators of *Konungsbók* have to say about them. Twenty years is not a long time to wait for such a thorough piece of work.

THE ICELANDIC SAGAS. Translated by MAGNUS MAGNUSSON. *The Folio Society*. 2 vols. London, 1999 and 2002. xx + 809; 754 pp.

Magnus Magnusson has assembled revised versions of a number of the translations which he and Hermann Pálsson have made of the family sagas over the years, along with a new version of *Grettis saga* 'based on' the Denton Fox–Hermann Pálsson translation, and some other new translations, and versions, both new and old, of certain *þættir*. These are presented in two handsome illustrated volumes, contained in slipcases, in the usual Folio Society format, a welcome sign that a broad range of medieval Icelandic prose is judged worthy to take a place beside Shakespeare, *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and other masterworks of Western European literature. The contents of Volume I are largely translations which have already been published (*Hrafnkels saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Egils saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Bandamanna saga*, the two *Vínland* sagas, *Auðunar þáttur* and *Þorsteins þáttur stangarhöggs*), but *Vápnfirðinga saga*, *Gunnlaugs saga* and *Þiðranda þáttur ok Þorhalls* are new in this volume. This review will concentrate largely on the new translations in Volume II, notably *Vatnsdæla saga*, and the joint Magnusson–Hermann Pálsson works *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Gísla saga* in the longer version and the *þættir*: *Ívars þáttur Ingimundarsonar*, *Ólkofra þáttur* and *Hreiðars þáttur*. *Ólkofra þáttur* is a slightly odd inclusion in Volume II, since it fits best with *Vápnfirðinga saga* and *Bandamanna saga*, both in Volume I. One suspects that Magnus was not certain that there would be a second volume when the first was compiled.

One of the aims of the second volume seems to be, where there is a choice between redactions, to publish the fuller, often less familiar text. Hence the version of *Fóstbræðra saga* published here is based on paper copies of the lost *Codex Regius* (*Membrana Regia*). It is certainly useful to have a translation of this version available, since this late text contains some unusual meteorological observations and quasi-poetical references to Rán and her daughters, together with frequent invocations of the Supreme Maker and his modification of Þorgeirr's physiology. Such antiquarian and learned authorial comment differs markedly from the more uniform saga style the reader encounters in the other translations, but the decision demonstrates to the reader how saga style is modified over time. The differences between this and earlier, more sober versions is adequately explained in the notes; those dramatic highlights found only in *Flateyjarbók*—Þorgeirr dangling over a cliff clinging onto an angelica stalk, the foster-brothers' parting and Þorgeirr's motiveless beheading of a shepherd—are provided in an appendix. Similarly, a full translation of the longer version of *Gísla saga* with its amplification of the Prologue in Norway is to be welcomed. The longer version explains and expands in comparison to the shorter: in the overhearing scene Ásgerðr says of Vésteinn, 'I love him more than my husband Þorkell, though we shall never be able to enjoy one another' (p. 37) (*ok meira ann ek honum en Þorkeli bónda mínum, þótt vit megim aldri njótask*); the saga dissipates the mystery surrounding the murder of Vésteinn by definitely ascribing it to Þorgrímr. The subtlety and indirection of the shorter version is lost, but at least now the two versions can be compared in translation, since George Johnston's translation of the shorter version is readily available again, reprinted with Anthony Faulkes's translations of *Grettis saga* and *Harðar saga* in *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas* (Everyman, 2001).

Magnus asserts in the Introduction to Volume I that, apart from the Edwards–Hermann Pálsson translation of the verses in *Egils saga*, he has been content to render the imagery of skaldic verse in free prose, without attempting to retain alliteration or rhyme. Indeed, comparison of the translation of the verses in his version of *Gísli saga* with Johnston’s verses does demonstrate that the Magnusson–Hermann Pálsson translations are not as accomplished in terms of conveying aural effects as those of Johnston, but what they lack in terms of alliteration and half-rhyme is compensated for by the clarity of syntax and meaning. Compare Johnston’s densely knotted version of the verse in which Gísli contrasts his sister with Guðrún Gjúkadóttir:

Wife veil-hearted wavering  
Warped to miss, my sister,  
Gjúki’s daughter’s great heart,  
Gudrun’s soul, stern moody.

with this version’s pedestrian

My headdress-loving sister  
Lacks the soul of Guðrún,  
Gjúki’s steadfast daughter  
And her undaunted spirit.

For the Folio Society readership it seems probable that straightforwardness is best, even at the risk of losing a sense of the formal qualities of skaldic verse.

The new translations are similar in style to the partnership’s earlier Penguin translations. Thus a colloquial breeziness is maintained: ‘Good idea!’ (*Vel má ráða*) exclaims a character in *Ólkofta þáttur* (II, p. 95); ‘they are a nasty lot’ (*þetta er ill sveit*), says Þorsteinn of the demonic cats in *Vatnsdæla saga* (II, p. 424). There is lively use of idiom: ‘we have had our ups and downs’ is a good rendering of *margt hefir verið um með okkr ok fátt* (II, p. 39); ‘you may think you are living in clover now’ loses some of the immediacy of the farmyard image in *nú þykkisk þú öllum fótum í etu standa* (II, p. 66), both from *Gísli saga*. The informality will irritate some readers, though others will find it preferable, in rendering conversation at least, to a more formal diction. In general, the translations are unfussy and clear, though occasional obscurities remain: ‘This has turned out as I feared, but it will mean something to them’ (*nú fór sem mik varði, ok mun þeim nú þetta til nokkors koma um þetta*) says Gísli mysteriously of the abortive blood-brother oath-taking (II, p. 33).

Commendably, Magnus has decided, between Volumes I and II, that his readership can cope with ‘thorn’ in addition to the ‘eth’ ventured in Volume I, which had produced odd formations such as ‘Thiðrandi’. Names are given in the (modern) Icelandic nominative, though in the notes kings of Norway are encountered in modern Norwegian forms—Håkon, Olav, Harald. Nicknames are translated in the text, where their meaning is known. The volumes come with extensive apparatus: a great deal of information is given in footnotes—some vital for interpretation, some rather quirky; the characterisation of Gunnhildr *konungamóðir* in a number of sagas as a ‘baleful nymphomaniac sorceress’ (p. 23) seems incontrovertible,



however. There is a degree of squeamishness too about spelling out the significance of mare and stallion-mounting insults, though the *trénið* in *Gísla saga* is not fudged. Useful maps appear in endpapers, and lists of personages are provided, saga by saga. The introduction is humane and well-pitched; the illustrations, simple and woodcut-like, are best when illustrating the insignificance of human endeavour in the Icelandic landscape. Both volumes have been carefully proof-read, though some instances of *Porbjörn* instead of *Þorbjörn* survive in the notes in Volume II, p. 73, and we learn—surprisingly—that Hallfreður *vandræðaskáld* was Valgerður's sister (II, p. 441).

All Norse scholars should welcome the appearance of these two volumes; of their type they are excellent, and may well reach a readership different from the purchasers of the earlier Penguin translations and the Leifur Eiríksson collection.

CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

ICELANDIC HISTORIES AND ROMANCES. Translated and introduced by RALPH O'CONNOR. *Tempus*. Stroud, 2002. 192 pp. 24 black-and-white illustrations.

Single-volume collections of translations of the more fanciful and fantastical Icelandic sagas are few in number. In both style and subject matter, *Seven Viking Romances* (trans. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Penguin Classics*, London, 1985) is probably the nearest to a precedent to the six translations offered by Ralph O'Connor in *Icelandic Histories and Romances*. Two of these, *Mirmann's Saga* and *The Saga of Hjalmther and Olvir*, have not previously been translated into English; indeed, there is no previous translation of *Mirmann's Saga* into any language. There have been various translations of the other four, *Star Oddi's Dream*, *The Saga of Bard the Snowfell God*, and the two short stories from *Flateyjarbók*, *The Tale of Thidrandi and Thorhall* and *The Tale of Thorstein Shiver*, and all of them appear in the compendious *The Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* (ed. Viðar Hreinsson, 5 vols. (Reykjavik, 1997); reviewed in *Saga-Book XXV:3* (2000), 327–29). Although it would be inappropriate to compare O'Connor's miscellany with a five-volume collection, reference to these earlier volumes does raise one point about O'Connor's choice of material. While the rationales behind *The Complete Sagas* and *Seven Viking Romances* are more or less expressed in their respective titles, O'Connor's 'histories and romances' appear, at first glance, to be an eclectic choice from a broad field. As he observes: 'Applying the traditional pigeonholes to sagas translated in this book results in chaos' (p. 25). Accordingly, O'Connor raises some familiar doubts about the value and precision of saga genre theory, noting that if the sagas he offers 'are "hybrids" then so—in differing degrees—are almost all sagas' (p. 25) and going on to admit that his selection is 'designed to blur the distinction between so-called "genres"' (p. 26). If there is a principle of selection involved in O'Connor's choices, apart from a declared bias towards sagas set in the Viking Age, it is that: 'all the sagas in this volume, and many others beside, glance searchingly at the

lineaments of “old style” heroism, whose ethics and efficacy are held up to edify and entertain the audience’ (p. 27).

So it is that all the translations here are of sagas that post-date the age of classical saga writing and are chiefly the products of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century imaginations. The world that O’Connor presents is one of marvellous dreams, quest heroes, hideous trollogy, enchanted love and a gallimaufry of disturbed and distracted ‘others’. It is a world that reaches back beyond the classical themes of honour versus law to embrace the legendary past of the Eddas, producing a febrile conjunction of romance sensibilities, folktale confabulations and Heroic-Age *drengskapr*. ‘Old style heroism’ in this eventuality means, more often than not, a proving-ground where the contest is played out on the very margins of community or in the liminal terrain between this world and another. Thus, in *Star Oddi’s Dream*, the eponymous astronomer journeys through space and time to become a skald at the court of King Geirvid in ancient Gotland; in *The Saga of Hjalmther and Olvir*, a motley crew of enchanted heroes face perilous adventures in search of both sexual and political independence; in *The Tale of Thidrandi and Thorhall*, vengeful female fetches from the old world outpace their more compassionate, Christian, counterparts to claim, in tragic fashion, the man of greatest courage and mettle; and in *The Tale of Thorstein Shiver*, the hero must endure ghoulish lavoatory humour in order to assert his fidelity to King Olaf and the new faith embodied by the king. There is much entertainment in these sagas, as well as art.

O’Connor explains that his translations ‘are not word-for-word “decodings”’; they are translations, rendering the texts’ literary qualities as well as their linguistic forms’ (p. 47). Although literal translation is preferred where possible, for the sake of lucidity and in order to avoid ‘stiffness’ O’Connor occasionally feels bound to give modern English idiom in place of an exact but awkward translation from the Old Norse. Inevitably, most difficulty is encountered in the case of skaldic verse, where efforts to convey sense frequently undermine efforts to reflect the subtleties of the prosody, and vice versa. Overall the emphasis is on readability, and with this as the chief criterion O’Connor’s translations are well-crafted, elegant and sensitive to the literary art of the sagas. Each translation is subjected to a careful analysis of plot, and the author is both critically informed in respect of saga scholarship (such as there is on this material) and balanced in his judgements of the merits of the sagas in hand. Readers will be pleased to have the opportunity of exploring, perhaps for the first time, the strange and often surprising sagas of Hjalmther and Olvir and of Mirmann. The latter, in particular, is a valuable resource for those following the knightly adventures of the ‘Matter of the South’, with its crusader mentality and disdain of Old Northern muscularity. Welcome, too, in this collection is *The Saga of Bard the Snowfell God*, a generational tragedy which has, in the past, attracted more interest as a place-name phenomenon than as a serious literary saga, and whose chief subject matter is the conflict between the claims of the heathen past and the demands of a Christian present.

Students and others seeking to approach this relatively, and perhaps unjustly, neglected corner of medieval Icelandic literature will be greatly helped by O’Connor’s ‘Introduction’. This, as well as including the critical commentaries

on individual sagas, offers a broad-ranging and deft three-part survey, consisting of: 'Viking Age explorers and Icelandic historians', 'Icelandic sagas: histories or romances?' and 'The art of the saga-author'. The glossaries and bibliographical information will prove helpful to scholars and students alike.

*Icelandic Histories and Romances* is a well-presented book that, on the one hand, is modest in its claims but, on the other, manages to break new ground in an area that has been drawing increased critical attention in recent years. It deserves a wide readership and is clearly designed to attract one. To this end, it is handsomely illustrated by Anne O'Connor with twenty-four black-and-white scenes from the sagas in an engraving style that might well be called Vikonography.

MARTIN ARNOLD

GRETTIS SAGA: DIE SAGA VON GRETTIR DEM STARKEN. Edited and translated by HUBERT SEELOW. *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur: Island—Literatur und Geschichte. Diederichs*. Munich, 1998. 304 pp.

SAGAS AUS OSTISLAND: DIE HRAFNKELS SAGA UND ANDERE GESCHICHTEN VON MACHT UND FEHDE. Edited and translated by DIRK HUTH. *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur: Island—Literatur und Geschichte. Diederichs*. Munich, 1999. 403 pp.

ISLÄNDISCHE MÄRCHENSAGAS. BAND I: DIE SAGA VON ALI FLEKK, DIE SAGA VON VILMUND VIDUTAN, DIE SAGA VON KÖNIG FLORES UND SEINEN SÖHNEN, DIE SAGA VON REMUND DEM KAISERSOHN, DIE SAGA VON SIGURD THÖGLI, DIE SAGA VON DAMUSTI. Edited by JÜRIG GLAUSER and GERT KREUTZER. Translated by JÜRIG GLAUSER, GERT KREUTZER and HERBERT WÄCKERLIN. *Saga: Bibliothek der altnordischen Literatur: Helden, Ritter, Abenteuer. Diederichs*. Munich, 1998. 483 pp.

Hubert Seelow does not mention in the 'Vorwort' to his translation of *Grettis saga* that it was first published in an earlier Diederichs series, also called *Saga*, in 1974, though he does list that version in the bibliography. In fact, it made a considerable splash (see the reviews by Oskar Bandle in *Scandinavica* 15 (1976), 54–56 and Anne Heinrichs in *Wirkendes Wort* 32 (1982), 69–75), and it is regarded today as having carried the doctrine of literal saga translation to lengths that have not been matched in the German-speaking world before or since (Julia Zernack, *Geschichten aus Thule*, 1994, 78, 329). As a high degree of literalness is the goal of the new *Saga* series as well, few changes to Seelow's volume were necessary. Nevertheless, the prose translation has been made more precise and idiomatic in a number of spots, and the preterite subjunctive has been consistently replaced by the present subjunctive in indirect speech, an evident concession to prescriptive stylistics. The loosely alliterative verse translations, on the other hand, are now even more literal than in 1974, reproducing all kennings element for element. Given its faithfulness to the tense shifts, sentence boundaries and onomastic material of the original, the text is surprisingly readable, but a less precise reproduction of the grammatical structures might sometimes have made for more effective translation: on page 157, Seelow translates *honum hefir verit víða kunnigt* as 'der hat sich weithin ausgekannt', an awkward German perfect (one would expect the

preterite) that, moreover, misses the ‘inferential’ force of the Icelandic perfect (‘it is to be assumed that he . . .’). In keeping with the series format, the apparatus now includes a timeline, genealogies, a note on pronunciation and a subject index in addition to the ‘Nachwort’ and name index, and the existing footnotes have been transformed into endnotes and expanded. (As in the *Egils saga* volume, the timeline and genealogical tables are presented uncritically. Readers will be grateful for them but may wonder how such lists of apparent facts square with the statement at the beginning of each volume’s preface that the saga is a ‘literary work’.) The commentary no longer contains the references to individual scholars given in 1974, but it remains balanced and reliable, and the works in question are included in the expanded and updated bibliography. Seelow himself will hardly be responsible for the unprofessional appearance of the Icelandic characters in the apparatus. In a score of places, they are missing or confused, and over a stretch of ten pages in the notes, *þ* and *ð* appear consistently as roman letters in the middle of italic words, while in the bibliography the opposite is true; nor do they (or *ý*) match the rest of the word in size.

Dirk Huth is not the first scholar to have assembled a volume of *Austfirðinga sögur*, but he has made independent editorial decisions, leaving out five *þættir* that appeared in the corresponding volume of *Íslenzk fornrit* (XI) and adding three others so as to complete a series of ‘fünf Geschichten über die Söhne Sidu-Halls’, which closes the volume. Twelve texts have been translated in all: *Þorsteins saga hvíta*, *Vápnfirðinga saga*, *Þorsteins þátr stangarhöggs*, *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, *Fljótsdæla saga*, *Droplaugarsona saga*, *Brandkrossa þátr*, *Þátr Þiðranda ok Þórhalls*, *Egils þátr Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Þorsteins þátr Síðu-Hallssonar*, *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*. In the case of *Hrafnkels saga*, Huth has departed from Schier’s rule that each translation in the *Saga* series follow the corresponding *Íslenzk fornrit* text (*Die Saga von Egil*, 1996, p. 348) and has instead translated from an edition which follows a different manuscript, AM 551c, 4to, but the important variants (such as the famous *land/lund* crux, which is not in this manuscript) are discussed in the apparatus. This group of well-crafted texts is presented in an accurate translation that reads smoothly despite its stylistic closeness to the original. In places, however, the diction has been modernised so freely as to verge on anachronism—for example, ‘keine Ahnung’ (p. 48), ‘voller Panik’ (p. 58), ‘Anwalt’ (p. 161)—and on page 63 the translation ‘mein Freund’ for the father-to-son vocative *frændi*, while effective, does not meet the standard of semantic equivalence that Huth otherwise adheres to. In *Þorsteins saga hvíta* the sentence *varð Einarr nokkut fár við* is translated as ‘Einar . . . wurde ziemlich kleinlaut’ (p. 23), which carries a connotation of meekness hardly appropriate to a speaker steeling himself to ward off a threatening guest; *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* contains the same idiom in the same situation, but here the translation is the more satisfying ‘verhielt sich kühl’ (p. 253). The apparatus, consisting of a ‘Vorwort’, pronunciation and transliteration tables, notes, a ‘Nachwort’, a bibliography, seven genealogies, a timeline, five maps, a name index and a subject index, has been compiled with assiduity and testifies to an impressive command of saga scholarship, but the wealth of sometimes indiscriminate detail can make orientation difficult. What is the point of

giving readers bibliographical references to a debate on the length of a vowel in a particular word (p. 284) if it is irrelevant for the translation? The unnecessary etymological note on *hirðmaðr* (p. 317), in the form given, will mislead anyone but Old English specialists. A similar imbalance is evident in the otherwise praiseworthy afterword to *Hrafnkels saga* (pp. 326–32). Huth reviews scholarly interpretations of Hrafnkell's character and concludes that the 'Machiavellian' view is the prevailing one, but of the twenty-one books and articles cited, not one is identified as an exponent of this view (except for two articles said to offer a compromise). Oddly, one of the most influential 'Machiavellian' treatments, and an obvious suggestion for further reading in German, Klaus von See's 'Die *Hrafnkels saga* als Kunstdichtung' (*Skandinavistik* 9 (1979), 47–56, repr. in his *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung* (1981), 486–95), is missing entirely. The notes are generous, but their selection and placement occasionally seems arbitrary. For example, a note on the term 'Gefolgsman' (for *hirðmaðr*) is provided only to page 256, not to the previous occurrence on page 240, to say nothing of the instances in which the concept is expressed in other words (as on pages 109 ff., 229 ff., 238–39); the subject index lists only page 256. I noticed about forty typographical errors, most involving Icelandic letters. In the most egregious example, the sentence fragment with which the acephalous *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* begins is printed in a note (p. 312) in a form so garbled that not even specialists will be able to decipher it. More thorough proofreading might also have caught the inconsistencies in citation form, in the name transliterations and in the spellings of the Icelandic forms in the apparatus. The bibliography may not have been intended for lay readers, as it contains entries with the unresolved journal title abbreviations *BONIS*, *MLR* and *PBB*; one such article is listed with an inaccurate title and without page numbers.

For the inaugural volume of the subseries 'Heroes, Knights, Adventures', Jürg Glauser and Gert Kreutzer have chosen six sagas representing the broad spectrum of 'Märchensagas', the standard German term for the 'indigenous *riddarasögur*' or *lygisögur*. While *Flóres saga ok sona hans*, one of the best known and most carefully composed of these texts, occupies a relatively central position in the genre, Glauser observes (p. 401) that *Vilmundar saga víðutan* and *Ála saga flekks* display clear affinities with the *foraldarsögur*, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar* and *Sigurðar saga þøgla* point more in the direction of chivalrous literature, and *Dámusta saga* ends as a Marian legend. Following the model of recent editions of 'folkloristic and ethnographic texts', the editors sought to reproduce not only parataxis and tense shifting but also lexical repetition, alliteration, present participle constructions, shifts between direct and indirect speech and shifts between the familiar and formal second-person pronouns. Complete agreement on these principles among the three translators, however, was not attempted (p. 17), and they were followed with varying strictness. The translation is reliable, though there are errors, such as 'möglichst bald' for *skemmst* 'möglichst kurz' on page 111 (the translator seems to have mistaken the word for *snemmst*—an illogical reading, as comparison with the similar curse on page 335 shows). The apparatus, which takes the usual form (though without genealogies, timelines or maps), is

exceptionally well prepared, and a congenial balance has been struck between the literary and folkloristic perspectives. Both indices have been furnished with detailed sub-headings and cross-references. The rich subject index includes narrative elements ('Abdankung', 'Ächtung'), folklore motifs and tale types ('Aschenbrödel', 'Brautwerbung'), realia ('Gegenstände', 'Handwerk'), terms of literary history and analysis ('Alexandersage', 'Anrede an die Zuhörer/Leser') and text titles. Typographical errors in this volume are very few, but there is a cluster of inconsistent and inaccurate bibliographical citations, perhaps due to late additions before printing.

MARVIN TAYLOR

PÍSLARSAGA SÉRA JÓNS MAGNÚSSONAR. Edited by MATTHÍAS VIÐAR SÆMUNDSSON. *Mál og menning*. Reykjavík, 2001. 439 pp.

The *Píslarsaga* of séra Jón Magnússon (1610–96) is, with the exactly contemporary autobiography of his friend Jón Ólafsson Indíafari and the sermons of Jón Vídalín, the only prose work of the entire period 1550–1750 considered worthy of mention by Stefán Einarsson in his *History of Icelandic Literature* (New York, 1957). It is not however merely the lack of competition which has attracted a readership to Jón Magnússon's 'Passion Story' or account of his 'martyrdom' at the hands of malevolent witches and unsympathetic judges, nor is it only a work of interest to social and linguistic historians, important as they may find it. Even more than Cotton Mather in *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1692), séra Jón takes us to the heart of the fear, suspicion and partisanship which tear apart a close-knit community in the grip of witchcraft hysteria, and does so in a style which is vividly descriptive, immediate and impassioned. Séra Jón describes how he was bewitched first by a father and son, both called Jón Jónsson, farming at Kirkjuból in his parish, and then after their execution by their daughter and sister Þuríður, who (to his fury) was cleared of his accusations.

Séra Jón's work remained in manuscript and effectively unknown until Þorvaldur Thoroddsen hit upon it in Copenhagen in the 1890s. The first edition was produced by Sigfús Blöndal (Copenhagen 1912–14) and a second, popular edition by Sigurður Nordal (Almenna Bókafélagið, Reykjavík, 1967), still widely available second-hand. This, however, used Blöndal's text, with slightly updated spelling, and although it added an introduction and a few biographical end-notes by Nordal, it omitted a substantial section of afterthoughts and postscripts to the manuscript (answering to pp. 137–97 of the present edition) as well as other contemporary material included by Blöndal.

Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson can therefore reasonably claim that his is only the second edition of the manuscript and can also fairly boast of having incorporated a wealth of background material, some of it never previously printed, and much else formerly difficult of access. The book, with many illustrations and several editorial essays, is beautifully produced, designed for the study rather than, as Nordal's, for the pocket (in either sense). But for whose study? Matthías Viðar

describes it (p. 472) as an edition for the general reader and, as Einar G. Pétursson has pointed out in his review (*Saga: Tímarit Sögufélags* XL:2 (2002), 275–80), the modernisation of spelling and grammatical forms diminishes the value of the edition for the linguistic scholar. The presence of multiple well-thumbed copies of Nordal's edition on the library shelves of the University of Iceland suggests that *Píslarsaga* is required reading for many undergraduate students, whether of history or literature. Will they (and the intelligent, well educated, affluent Icelandic general reader Matthías Viðar seems to expect) receive the editorial help they need to grasp all the nuances of this seventeenth-century text?

In many respects the reader is indeed offered much helpful background information, beginning with a useful map on page 8, but the information is not always presented in the most helpful way. Pages 9–45 are devoted to a Life of séra Jón by Matthías Viðar which gives all the available details of his life and career, most of which are also to be found more succinctly in the editions of both Blöndal and Nordal. The most significant feature of this essay, although it is not clear why it should belong in the Life, is the persuasive case made (pp. 42–44) for the time and place of transcription of the sole extant text of *Píslarsaga*, MS Copenhagen Royal Library NKS 1842 4to, in a hand identified for the first time as that of séra Jón Sigurðsson (1702–57). He had assisted Árni Magnússon with transcription work while studying in Copenhagen and continued this after he took over séra Jón Magnússon's old parish of Eyri í Skutulsfirði in 1730. Plenty of manuscripts in Jón Sigurðsson's hand survive for comparison; it might have been nice to have a facsimile of one, in place of some less necessary illustration, such as the title page of *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Other details in the Life show Matthías Viðar as rather careless in his use of sources, for example in citing *Vestfirzkar ættir* IV (Reykjavík 1968) to establish family relationships between people who figure in *Píslarsaga*. He ignores all the reservations of his source to state (p. 23) that Jón Jónsson eldri and Þorleifur Þórðarson (Galdra-Leifi, d. 1647) *hafa sennilega verið skyldir* 'were probably blood relatives', when the most that Théodór Árnason, who wrote the relevant section of *Vestfirzkar ættir*, claims is that Galdra-Leifi may have married the granddaughter of the illegitimate half-sister of Brigit Jónsdóttir, who was probably the grandmother or great-grandmother of Jón eldri—hardly a blood relationship. Moreover on page 29 Matthías Viðar takes Théodór Árnason's word for the 'probability' that Þuríður's betrothed, Örnólfur Jónsson, was the brother of Björn and Magnús Jónssynir of Engidalur, without noticing that Théodór bases this entirely on what he claims (pp. 363 and 385) is a reference in *Píslarsaga* which Matthías Viðar should have known does not exist.

More importantly, on page 30 Matthías Viðar cites Jón Egilsson in a letter to Eggert Björnsson í Skarði shortly before the conclusion of the case against Þuríður, saying that *séra Jón sé nú mest þjádur af veiki í hendinni og handleggnum* 'séra Jón is now suffering most from weakness in his hand and arm'. The reference given is 'JS 667 4to; sbr. Hannes Þorsteinsson: *Æfir lærðra manna* 41, bl. 15 [Þjóðskjalasafn Íslands]'. In other words Matthías Viðar has taken his information straight from Hannes Þorsteinsson, the first person to realise the relevance of this letter to Þuríður's case and to attempt a transcription. He has either not tried to

consult or not succeeded in consulting the original letter, which is no longer in MS Reykjavík Landsbókasafn JS 667 4to, a miscellany which has been broken up and redistributed, only part remaining under the original classification. Jón Egilsson's letter is now in MS Reykjavík Þjóðskjalasafn Einkaskjalasafn E2 Skarðverjar. It is an unimpressive scrap of paper, closely written in a daunting hand, primarily on family business. At the end the writer found himself with a couple of spare inches which he filled with items of gossip, one of which is that Þuríður has already found eight *eiðakonur* (women to back her oath of innocence). This is significant because we would otherwise have no clear evidence that the court had allowed Þuríður to select most or all of the twelve *eiðakonur* herself, whereas for her father and brother the majority of compurgators were nominated by the court (p. 203). The reference to séra Jón [Magnússon] still suffering is however a misreading. The letter is now, happily, accompanied by a transcription by Gunnar Sveinsson skjalavörður which makes it plain that another priest entirely, séra Jón Arason (1606–73), is the sufferer, with no suggestion of witchcraft.

After the Life comes a two page summary of the main events of *Píslarsaga*, a good idea (had it been reliable) since séra Jón has a habit of doubling back in his narrative. Unfortunately there are three errors in the first paragraph: the incident of the stinging sensation in séra Jón's palm occurs on the second Sunday after the initial 'attack', not the first (p. 63), when séra Jón shakes hands with Jón yngri, not eldri (p. 64 and cf. Jón yngri's confession, p. 211). And séra Jón's attempt to talk to Björn í Engidal, interrupted by Jón yngri, took place not at a church service but during the first hearing of the case against the two Jóns (p. 72), where Jón yngri not unreasonably saw it as an attempt to nobble a witness.

On page 49 the final paragraph of the summary contains the statement that *Þing er haldið að Eyri um Þuríðarmál, líklega vorið 1658, en það ekki útkljáð og því vísað til alþingis* 'A hearing of Þuríður's case was held at Eyri, probably in the spring of 1658, but not being concluded, it was referred to the Alþingi'. This claim of a 1658 court hearing is repeated on page 380, backed by the heading of what in this edition is called *Rök og andmæli* (pp. 165–80) but in the manuscript is entitled *Innlegg framlagt hér að Eyri (að ég meina) Þuríðar líkindi* 'Deposition of evidence against Þuríður submitted here at Eyri (as I think)'. Now on page 43 Matthías Víðar has attributed this title to séra Jón Sigurðsson and used it as his main argument for the manuscript having been copied at Eyri. He is therefore on shaky ground in using it also to prove that there was a court hearing at Eyri in 1658, which there was not. Þuríður, then staying in Dýrafjörður, had been legally summonsed to appear before the court at Eyri in January 1657 and came, escorted by Sheriff Magnús Magnússon and Deputy Gísli Jónsson, as far as Holt í Önundarfirði, but the party got no further because of blizzards and the court was cancelled (p. 152). Þuríður had, however, answered her summons; no one told séra Jón that he would therefore need to issue a new one if he wanted her to appear before the regular meeting of the court at Eyri in April 1657. In his frustration at finding there would be no proceedings against her then, séra Jón recalled that it was illegal to hold secular courts on church premises (a point which had never bothered him when the two Jóns were condemned) and he therefore banned the entire meeting (p. 144). In so doing he defeated his own purposes, since courts



could only be held at legally established venues (which the church at Eyri had been before the Ordinance quoted on page 144). The problem was brought to the Alþingi in July 1657 (p. 300), where it was decreed that the sheriffs and the local farmers should agree a new venue, suitable and causing no one disadvantage. Either this proved difficult or there were deliberate delays, because the Alþingi in 1658 repeated its instructions (p. 303). For this reason there can have been no court hearing at Eyri in spring 1658, and it is also why, when Þuríður's case was referred back to the region for the oath-swearing, this was done (conveniently for her) at Mosvellir í Öndarfirði, not at Eyri.

It was an excellent idea to preface the text of *Píslarsaga* with that of the 1617 letter of Kristján IV against witchcraft, which was cited in the case against the two Jóns (p. 213) as well as by séra Jón in his complaints about the delays of the sheriffs (pp. 183–85). Using Þuríður Jónsdóttir's *Kæruskjal* (her suit for damages against séra Jón after her acquittal) as another preface also makes sense, since the argument is that this inspired him to write *Píslarsaga* as a counterblast, but why date her text 'Vor 1660' when it is undated in the manuscript? This is presumably deduced from the position of the *kæruskjal* relative to other entries in MS Reykjavík Þjóðskjalasafn AC/1 (previously ÍB 79 4to), but this can only give the approximate date of transcription, not of composition. This has to be earlier if it inspired the first part of *Píslarsaga*, dated as finished 25th May 1659 (p. 119). It would incidentally be helpful to the reader here and elsewhere to have the manuscript source indicated in a headnote, rather than having to search through Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson's section *Um varðveislu og útgáfu frumheimilda* at the back of the book (pp. 423–31).

The text of *Píslarsaga* begins on page 59, faced by a facsimile of the opening page of the manuscript. Given its beautiful legibility it is not surprising to find few significant differences between the text here and that of Sigfús Blöndal, with the major exception that the record of the trial condemning the two Jóns, and the assessment of their property and of damages to be paid to séra Jón, are here removed from the main text and printed later (pp. 205–28) from MS Reykjavík Þjóðskjalasafn Thott 2110 4to II. Since the latter is evidently the original court record, signed by both sheriffs and two jurors, this decision is unimpeachable, but the assertion (p. 421) that the transcripts in *Píslarsaga* can scarcely have been part of séra Jón's original text is debatable. He certainly transcribed the report of the aborted court meeting in April 1657 (pp. 143–47), and the record of the condemnation of the two Jóns must have seemed to him a relevant part of his evidence against Þuríður. He would have had easier access to the records than séra Jón Sigurðsson eighty years later; indeed, it seems to me possible that the notarised copy, in the same hand as the court record but signed by only two of the original four witnesses, which is now MS Copenhagen Royal Library NKS 1947 4to, may have been made for séra Jón and could have been incorporated rather than copied into his original manuscript. The two signatories named in the *Píslarsaga* text are those who signed NKS 1947 4to.

Although Blöndal's text and the present edition may be expected to be very similar, allowing for the updating of spelling conventions since 1914, it comes as something of a surprise to realise that most of the very limited notes on the text are

either taken directly or paraphrased from Blöndal, without notice until page 187, where the unexplained reference '(SB)' appears for the first of half a dozen times. Most of the notes are translations of Latin phrases or indications of obvious omissions from the manuscript. A conspicuous exception is page 74 note 8, where Matthías Viðar boasts of having standardised the various spellings *stæstu*, *stæðstu* and *stærstu*, thus fulfilling his basic editorial policy. I have found only two notes glossing seventeenth century Icelandic usage, page 83 note 13 *mak* and page 150 note 4 *hnár*, both of which can be found in the standard Icelandic dictionary. No note is however given on séra Jón's regular use of *líkindi* to mean 'evidence', which is not in the dictionary; there is a discussion of this on page 387, but without any note referring the reader to this passage. Nor is there any comment on séra Jón's use of *fátækur* not only in the normal sense of 'lacking wealth' but also in the wider English sense of 'poor': *mín fátæk kvinna* pp. 69, 79, 100 etc., where poverty does not seem to be relevant.

On page 144 a note on the date of the Ordinance against using church premises for lay courts would be useful, and a note is surely wanted on page 167 to explain the 'shells' which should not have been so quickly burned with the parchment and wrappings. These shells are mentioned nowhere else, but were presumably found in the search of Kirkjuból for evidence against the Jóns and were burned as a precaution, along with the suspicious pieces of parchment found (p. 72). I suggest a connection with the folktale of white wizard séra Snorri á Húsafelli, whose wife warns him of imminent magical attacks. When he asks if she knows magic she denies it, but says *En mér hefur verið kennt að fleyta skeljum* 'But I have been taught to float shells' (Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* III. Nýtt safn, Reykjavík, 1958, p. 564). What exactly this means we do not know, because she refuses to tell her husband.

On page 171 *þeir sem því neita, skilst mér að trölldómslistir verði að því meinlæti sem kallast og heitir komdu ekki við mig* receives the defeatist footnote *Hér hefur einhver brenglun átt sér stað í textanum* 'Here there is some confusion in the text'. The minor anacoluthon in the sentence is no more than common in a style more oral than literary, so it must be the final phrase which has defeated the editor. I suggest that séra Jón is using *meinlæti* in the obsolete sense of 'cancer or canker' and *komdu ekki við mig* as a translation of *noli me tangere* in its standard seventeenth century sense, glossed in the OED as 'an eroding ulceration attacking the face'. Thus séra Jón is saying that for those who refuse [to prosecute witches], the magic arts will become a canker attacking them in the most conspicuous way.

Pages 199–327 are devoted to transcriptions of court records, letters, extracts from bishops' 'visitation books' and records of the Alþingi, in the capable hands of Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson and his assistant Jón Torfason. To have all these, especially those not previously printed, assembled in this way and so clearly presented would be sufficient in itself to justify this new edition of *Písarsaga*. The whole of the final court case against the two Jóns is given (pp. 215–24) in facsimile of Thott 2110 4to II, which sufficiently indicates the difficulty of Þórður Ingi's task, and other facsimiles are also included. The section of material on the case of séra Árni Loftsson is amusing but irrelevant.

Pages 329–41 give more background information on some of the public figures who feature in *Píslarsaga* than can be found in Nordal's edition, and pages 343–419 present a curiously constructed essay by Matthías Viðar on *Galdur og geðveiki* 'Witchcraft and insanity'. The most useful parts of this are the evidence he draws together of the Latin works to which séra Jón makes specific reference, and of contemporary and especially Icelandic theological attitudes to witchcraft. In discussing séra Páll Björnsson's *Kennimark kölska* (1674) he shows confusion about the development of his position from abstract theology to 'primitive terror of witchcraft' by dating the latter to the illnesses of his family 'in the years 1660–1670' (p. 409). In fact the first serious illness of his wife began in the winter of 1668 and led to the conviction and burning of two 'witches' in 1669; her second illness and that of her sons caused two more burnings in 1675 and another two in 1678. On Erlendur Ormsson, Matthías Viðar would not have repeated old errors (p. 364) if he had read my article (*Saga-Book* XXIV:5 (1997), 293–310), although that would not have saved him from a silly misreading on page 367. Séra Sigurður í Ögurþingum asserts, not that Jón eldri was burned because of Erlendur's accusations, but that Þuríður, daughter of Jón who was burned, fled the district because of Erlendur's accusations of witchcraft.

Matthías Viðar's 'Conclusion' (pp. 417–19) is that nothing should be concluded, either on séra Jón's mental condition or on the relationship between madness and witchcraft in general. In this he is undoubtedly wise, but he could have reached it more briefly. Þórður Ingi's section *Um varðveislun og útgáfu frumheimilda* (pp. 423–31) is valuable and is followed by a summary list of manuscripts and a reliable index of personal names, but there is no bibliography of printed sources or index of place-names or of illustrations, all of which would have been useful.

All in all, this is an edition I shall enjoy using (the print is a pleasure to the eye and printing errors appear to be very largely confined to the editorial material) and shall value for the background material presented. But I think it would have been more useful to both students and the general reader if Matthías Viðar Sæmundsson had put more care and scholarship into notes on the text and expended less time on his rambling editorial essays.

RUTH C. ELLISON

THE OLD NORSE POETIC TRANSLATIONS OF THOMAS PERCY: A NEW EDITION AND COMMENTARY. Edited by MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS. *Making the Middle Ages 4. Brepols*. Turnhout, 2001. xiv + 290 pp.

This book is chiefly an edition of Percy's *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry Translated from the Icelandic Language* (1763), a volume whose title wonderfully indicates the oblique and scrupulous ways in which cultural discoveries sometimes announce themselves. This specimen of the antique made a modest impact in its time, subsequently became a major part of the history of Icelandic studies in Britain, and can now be seen as crucial in the broad history of eighteenth-century fascination with bardic otherness.

Percy made his name with *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and *Northern Antiquities* (1770), but had earlier planned a volume to compete with Macpherson's Ossianic *Fragments* (1760) or at least to appeal to the taste that Macpherson had created or divined. He began translating from Old Icelandic in the autumn of 1760, but for various reasons (fascinatingly detailed by Clunies Ross in her Introduction and in notes to individual poems) the project was not completed for three years. William Shenstone, Percy's not entirely helpful mentor, querulously asked why he had 'suppressed the *Runick Fragments &c*' and allowed Macpherson to steal a march with his second volume, *Fingal*. Shenstone was anxious lest Percy miss the tide of fashion: 'why will you suffer the Publick to be *cloyed* with the kind of writing, ere you avail yourself of their *Appetite*? I cannot say whether you should *now* defer the publication, or publish directly' (p. 2). Evidently his faith in the project was not very deeply rooted, but Percy went on taking his advice, sometimes with unfortunate results.

Percy's five 'pieces' are 'The Incantation of Hervor' (now known as 'The Waking of Angantýr') from *Hervarar saga*, 'The Dying Ode of Regner Lodbrog' (*Krákumál*), 'The Ransome of Egill the Scald' (*Hqfuðlausn*), 'The Funeral Song of Hacon' (*Hákonarmál*), and 'The Complaint of Harold', a poem attributed to Haraldr harðráði and, as Clunies Ross explains, 'widely understood as a love poem in the eighteenth century' (p. 3). It is to this poem that Percy seems to refer in his Preface when noting that 'we are not to suppose that the northern bards never addressed themselves to the softer passions', blaming 'professed antiquarians' for the spread of the supposition (p. 44). His comment points to another link with Ossian, namely that it became important to readers and cultural commentators in the 1760s and onwards to enquire whether 'primitive' texts offered lessons in courtesy and civilisation as well as loyalty and bravery. In his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763) Hugh Blair distinguished at length between 'Gothic' (i.e. Scandinavian) and Celtic poetry, stressing that the former 'breathe[d] a most ferocious spirit' and was 'wild, harsh and irregular', while the latter showed 'tenderness and . . . delicacy of sentiment' and 'an amazing degree of regularity and art'. The implication was that Ossianic texts were available to the late eighteenth century as cultural models, the 'northern' texts not. This is one of the ideas that Percy was up against in his Preface to *Five Pieces*, which reflects Paul Henri Mallet's argument that chivalry originated in northern Europe before passing to the south. Mallet's *Introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc* (1755) was of course commissioned by the Danish court. Another supposition Percy had to counter was that 'primitive' poetry must be simple. Here Percy and Blair were on the same and correct side of the argument, and the 'bold and swelling figures'—as Percy described skaldic kennings—provided ample evidence.

But the bloodthirsty reputation of northern poetry prevailed, not least because Percy failed to correct Ole Worm's notorious misunderstanding of a kenning in *Krákumál* (in his Latin version in *Literatura Runica*, 1636) which had warriors drinking beer out 'of the skulls of our enemies' (Percy's version) instead of drinking horns: an image whose literary influence lasted at least until Byron. Perhaps more tellingly Percy followed another mistranslation of Worm's, even though he had in front of him Bartholin's 1689 correction. Percy writes: 'The

pleasure of that day [when ‘helmets were shattered’] was like having a fair virgin placed beside one in the bed’; all that’s missing is the word ‘not’. Of course, even in its correct version the image is striking and scarcely chivalric, but the omission of ‘not’—one of many cases in which the suffix *-at* was not understood—adds an extra degree of phallic machismo.

As well as the *Five Pieces*, this volume includes the few passages of skaldic verse Percy translated from *Heimskringla*, surviving in MS Bodley Percy c. 7 and here published for the first time. Clunies Ross argues that these, along with *Hákonarmál* (‘The Epicedium of Haco’), were among his earliest attempts at translating Icelandic material, probably dating from the autumn of 1760. They form an interesting supplement to *Five Pieces*, as do two short passages translated from ‘The Battle of Brunanburh’, preserved in the same manuscript. Perhaps more interesting in a broader view is Percy’s translation of *Darraðarljóð* (two draft versions, here published in full for the first time), which makes an excellent contrast with Thomas Gray’s influential version, ‘The Fatal Sisters’ (written 1761; published 1768). It appears that Percy did not intend to add this to the *Five Pieces* and that he probably had not read Gray’s version when he wrote his own, which is based largely on Bartholin’s Latin text. Clunies Ross unapologetically prefers Percy’s ‘more exact’ and ‘spirited, readable’ version to Gray’s essay in gothic sublimity. A single example: Percy’s version of the final stanza has a solemn simplicity:

Let us ride on horses  
Bearing forth on high  
Naked swords  
From this place.

Gray’s is typically bolstered with poetic echoes and archaisms:

Sisters, hence with spurs of speed:  
Each her thund’ring faulchion wield;  
Each bestride her sable steed.  
Hurry, hurry to the field.

Given the taste for ‘Gothick’ in the 1760s and later, it is not surprising that Gray’s poem was an enormous success.

This edition is rich in scholarly annotation and argument, a landmark in its field. Clunies Ross writes with sympathy as well as knowledge and gives us a convincing account of Percy’s procedures and decisions. His reputation as an editor has lately taken a battering at the hands of cultural historians who dwell on his ‘fabrications’ in *Reliques* and contrast Joseph Ritson’s more sceptical methods (and, not coincidentally, his more palatable liberal politics). Clunies Ross’s work is, in this context, an endearing and careful act of restitution. It is a pity, then, that the quality of reproduction of Percy’s text is not as good as it might be. Pages are based on photocopies and have an ugly black gutter that occasionally impinges on the text (e.g. pp. 76, 78, 82, 112, 146). Two pages (213, 217) of the final section of Percy’s volume (‘The Icelandic Originals of the Preceding Poems’) have patches that are difficult to read owing to the faintness of the copy and the small italic font. This may not be wholly the fault of the present edition if the Fisher Library’s copy

of *Five Pieces* is as badly printed as the one in the British Library, but it should have been possible to get a more legible and graceful reproduction. This is a blot on an otherwise extremely well produced volume.

MICHAEL BARON

VIKING AMERICA: THE FIRST MILLENNIUM. By GERALDINE BARNES. *D. S. Brewer*. Cambridge, 2001.

In his 1850 poem *The American Legend*, the antiquarian and traveller Bayard Taylor registers vividly the romance of the old North for a growing number of nineteenth-century North American enthusiasts:

Around thy cradle, rocked by wintry waves,  
The Pilgrim Fathers sang their pious staves,  
While like an echo, wandering dim and vast  
Down the snow-laden forests of the Past,  
The Norseman's hail through bearded lips rang out,  
Frothy with mead, at every wassail-bout.

Here was a more distant, robust and colourful national 'Past' to challenge the comfortably established legacies of, first, Christopher Columbus, and later, the 'Mayflower' travellers and their descendants. That Taylor's poem received its first public performance at a meeting of Harvard University's Phi Beta Kappa Society signals the extent to which the myths and realities of Viking-Age Vínland had begun to exercise a hold on the imaginations of the eastern seaboard intelligentsia, following the publication of C. C. Rafn's field-commanding *Antiquitates Americanæ* (Copenhagen, 1837). This pioneering and hugely influential volume not only made available for the first time texts and translations of what soon became known as the Vínland sagas, but also encouraged cult archaeologists to head off into the countryside in search of the medieval runes and ruins which the Vikings had allegedly left behind them eight centuries earlier. In no time the 'discovery' of the Fall River skeleton, the Newport Tower, the Dighton Rock inscriptions, and many similar sites and artifacts appeared to offer an alternative narrative of national origins which linked the New World to an old Northern culture marked by buccaneering adventurism, democratic accountability and soaring literary accomplishment. One early reviewer of *Antiquitates Americanæ* in the *Dublin Review* noted with relish that the folio 'will probably lead the way to many novels and romances, in which the bold heroism and gallantry of the Norse adventurers will be portrayed in their most dramatic and poetic light'. How right he was, as the cultural trickle-down effect of Rafn's volume gathered pace. Some managed disdainfully to resist the spell; a few sought to retain scholarly balance and scruple; many others simply lay back and thought of Vínland.

Such, in the barest outline, is the subject matter of Geraldine Barnes's enterprising study of literary constructions of the idea of Vínland over a thousand years. In five crisply written and richly documented chapters—and also in the framing Introduction and Epilogue—the reader is offered just those millennial perspectives

which the volume's title promises. The first chapter, 'The Vínland Voyages in Saga Narrative', identifies in *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlendinga saga* many of the principal literary-cultural tensions to which reference is often made in the later chapters: paganism and Christianity, search and settlement, feminised *caritas* and *cupiditas*, epic and romance, oral and literary sources, and ethnic orthodoxies and alterities. The chapter establishes securely one of the book's principal themes: that literary constructions of Vínland have from the earliest times been shaped by a variety of vested authorial interests, whether dynastic, national, regional or sectarian. In Professor Barnes's pleasing phrase there was never any shortage of individuals with 'ideological barrows to push'. Chapter Two, 'Vínland in Nineteenth-Century History, Criticism, and Scholarship', deals with the role of Rafn's scholarly door-stopper in focusing, reconfiguring and transmitting medieval Vínland traditions in post-Jeffersonian America. The sense of affront felt by many as notions of a pre-Columbian Viking presence in America gained credence is well documented. However, we also note the contribution of Rafn's volume to the emergence of Old Norse as an acknowledged discipline in American higher education, a process driven by the belief that the medieval Icelandic Commonwealth embodied the very traditions of liberty and progress on which modern America based its constitution. Professor Barnes's colourful cast of characters includes the distinguished (George Marsh, Willard Fiske, Arthur Reeves), the dotty (Aaron Goodrich, John Shipley, J. P. MacLean), and the curmudgeonly, with Rasmus Anderson casting a long shadow from his Wisconsin base. Chapter Three, 'The Popular Legacy: Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Polemic', traces the dissemination process beyond the confines of the twenty or so universities in which Old Norse came to be taught by the end of the nineteenth century. We enter the heady world of (in James Phinney Baxter's phrase) 'Norsemaniacs': the frenzied, anti-Columbian, protestant zealot Marie Shipley, wife of John; Ole Bull, the Norwegian violinist, whose campaign for a Leifr Eiríksson memorial in Boston resulted in a bronze statue 'more or less resembling Ole Bull'; and the splendid Eben Norton Horsford, also of Boston, who bankrolled several lavish publications in pursuit of his twin theories: (i) that Leifr Eiríksson's landfall in North America had been at the bottom of his own garden; (ii) that, far from abandoning North America, the Norsemen stayed on and flourished in their colony of Norumbega, major features of which had now been identified and excavated—very near his own back garden. Small wonder that Norumbega soon became celebrated in poems, novels and musical interludes; guided tours of the hallowed sites were available; and Wellesley College opened its new Norumbega Hall. As Professor Barnes also notes, Kirsten Seaver has even suggested a plausible link between these late nineteenth-century exoticisms and the origins of the now (in)famous Vínland map. In her next two chapters Professor Barnes deals, respectively, with 'Vínland in British Literature to 1946' and 'Vínland in American Literature to 1926'. In the first of these, we see Vínlandian priorities edging away from R. M. Ballantyne's neo-colonialist, male rites of passage simplicities (*The Norsemen in the West*, 1872) towards Maurice Hewlett's more feminised *Gudrid the Fair* (1918), and on to Nevil Shute's deheroicised and demystified film script *Vinland the Good* (1946), 'a valediction to imperial Vínland narrative'. In the

American Literature chapter there is greater emphasis on poetry (Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell), some of it triggered by archaeological ‘finds’. So it was that the Fall River skeleton and the Newport Tower came together in Longfellow’s ‘The Skeleton in Armour’. With his Tegnérían imagination in overdrive, Longfellow tells of a Viking warrior who, having eloped with his Norwegian princess, was eventually shipwrecked off Rhode Island, where he built a tower in which he and his lady lived happily. Well might Samuel Laing complain of *Antiquitates Americanae* enthusiasts that ‘They are poets, not antiquaries’. Yet, as Sir Walter Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816) had already shown—and as Laing’s peppery Introduction to his 1844 *Heimskringla* translation frequently confirmed—such high-minded distinctions frequently dissolved on both sides of the Atlantic during the nineteenth century. Philology, archaeology and codicology often lay at the heart of literary creativity; the ideological wish was often father to the fraud, forgery or fiction. Professor Barnes’s discussion of such poems is consistently illuminating, its authority underlined on every page by deftly deployed evidence deriving from long-forgotten reviews, reports and correspondence. In ‘Epilogue: the Postcolonial Vínland’, which examines representative Vínland novels right up to the present day, there is worthwhile discussion of narrative responses to the indigene population of medieval Vínland. Attitudes developed from nineteenth-century condescension to modern post-colonial, environmentalist or consumerist guilt. With Joan Clark’s *Eiríksdóttir: A Tale of Dreams and Luck* (1994), in which the critique of sloth and excess in Edenic surroundings recalls topics which find expression in *Grænlandinga saga*, Professor Barnes senses that the story has come full circle.

A few minor typographical and citational blips notwithstanding, this consistently well-informed volume has been carefully seen through the press. It includes a full bibliography and a helpful index.

ANDREW WAWN



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