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AT SMYRJA KONUNG TIL VELDIS: ROYAL LEGITIMATION
IN SNORRI STURLUSON'S *MAGNÚSS SAGA ERLINGSSONAR*

By KEVIN J. WANNER

FEW EVENTS OF THE NORWEGIAN MIDDLE AGES have generated as much discussion among historians as the mid-twelfth century coronation of Magnús Erlingsson (Steen 1949–51, 2; for a bibliography of studies on the coronation and related topics up to the mid-1970s, see Helle 1974, 68–69). This event was revolutionary in several respects: it was the first coronation of any Scandinavian monarch; it was the first time a Norwegian was made king whose father was not king before him (or for whom this claim was not at least made); Norway's churchmen had never before demanded, let alone received, such substantial concessions from the crown; and, finally, it helped to establish primogeniture and legitimate birth as privileged criteria in matters of royal succession in Norway. And yet, for all its importance, this event is poorly chronicled by contemporary sources. We are not even certain of the year in which it took place. (*Fagrskinna* places the coronation in September 1163, *Heimskringla* in the summer of 1164. For arguments favouring the former date, see Hertzberg 1905, 30–39; Nygaard Brekke 1960–61; Sandaaker 1998, 190, and the latter, Storm 1873, 200–03; Taranger 1928, 197–98; Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1982, 146–47.) Much of the discussion, then, about the coronation and its circumstances has revolved around attempts to determine just what happened, and when. In this effort, historians have had recourse to sources both documentary, in the form of letters and law-codes, and narrative. As is typical, the former type has been preferred as evidence to the latter, and in this case distrust of literary testimony has been compounded by the fact that none of the extant narrative sources is thought to have been written by a Norwegian.¹ For stories of Magnús's reign and coronation we depend on three Icelandic sources: a chronicle

¹ One Norwegian historian who might have covered this period, Theodoricus monachus, explicitly declines to do so in ch. 34 of his *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* because of its distasteful civil unrest (Storm 1880, 67). It is possible that the two other so-called Norwegian synoptics, the Latin *Historia Norwegiae* (1178–1220?) and the vernacular *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum* (c.1190) extended to this period, but the endings of both are lost. In addition to the foreign sources listed, there are several Icelandic bishops'

of Norway's kings, *Fagrskinna* (c.1220–25), a more extensive collection of kings' sagas, *Heimskringla* (c.1225–35), and the monk Karl Jónsson's saga (c.1185–early 1200s) of Sverrir Sigurðarson, the usurper who killed Magnús and in 1184 assumed his position; and one Danish, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (c.1210–20).

Given the need for historical reconstruction that has driven scholarship on this event, it is not surprising that more energy has been put into assessing the accuracy of the narrative accounts than into discerning the authorial interests that informed their selection and ordering of material. Of those who have addressed this question, most have focused on *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* in *Heimskringla*, mainly owing to its attribution to an author about whom relatively much is known, the Icelandic chieftain, lawspeaker and poet Snorri Sturluson (1178/79–1241). Even in this case, however, there has been little agreement as to its author's perspective on Magnús's coronation. Indeed, the two most recent considerations of this question arrive at contradictory results. Ólafía Einarsdóttir, comparing the descriptions of the coronation in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna*, concludes that

disse repræsenterer to indbyrdes fjendtlige grene af det norske kongehus i det 12. årh. Snorri holder på Sigurd Jórsalafaris slægt, medens det træder tydeligt frem i beretningen i *Fagrskinna*, at den er talerør for . . . Sverres efterkommere på den norske trone (1982, 134).

these represent two mutually hostile branches of the Norwegian royal house in the twelfth century. Snorri backs Sigurðr Jórsalafari's family [to whom Magnús Erlingsson had a maternal connection], while it comes forth clearly in the account in *Fagrskinna*, that it is a mouthpiece for . . . Sverrir's successors on the Norwegian throne.

Conversely, Odd Sandaaker finds that *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, along with other texts produced by or for Sverrir's dynasty, express an identical perspective on the event:

sagas and annals, and English chronicles that provide limited information on Magnús's coronation (Ólafía Einarsdóttir 1982, 136–46). The nationality of the author of *Fagrskinna* has been the subject of some controversy. Although it has been established that this text was produced in the court milieu of Hákon Hákonarson, and possibly commissioned by this king (Indrebø 1917, 273–77), most have assumed that its author was Icelandic. Alfred Jakobsen (1970, 93–98, 123–24), however, has argued vigorously for Norwegian authorship. He has been challenged by Bjarni Einarsson (1984, cxxvi–cxxx). Although this question is unresolved, I will follow the majority view and assume Icelandic authorship of *Fagrskinna*.

Alt må mynna ut i den konklusjonen at omtalen av kroninga og det som gjekk føreåt, i alle dei fire eksisterande kjeldene: Sverresoga, kongebrevet frå 1202 (?), *Fagrskinna* og *Heimskringla*, går attende på kongeleg inspirasjon. Alle samstavar dei i sak, ånd og tendens (1998, 192).

Everything points to the conclusion that discussions of the coronation and that which preceded it in all of the four existing sources—*Sverris saga*, the king's letter from 1202 (?), *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*—go back to royal inspiration. All of them agree in content, spirit and bias.

Whereas, then, Ólafía Einarsdóttir contrasts Snorri's advocacy with *Fagrskinna*'s opposition to the legitimacy of Magnús's coronation, Sandaaker argues that both, through equally critical portrayals of this event, promote Sverrir's and his successors' interests.

It is my purpose in this paper to reopen the question of the perspective of these texts on Magnús Erlingsson's coronation and its impact on northern politics, as well as to consider the extent to which they reflect the positions and interests of their producers as opposed to royal consumers (that *Fagrskinna* was written for the Norwegian court is fairly uncontroversial; the question of potential audiences for *Heimskringla* is discussed below). While my chief interest is in Snorri Sturluson's perspective on this event, this subject is most efficiently explored by comparing *Heimskringla*'s account with that of *Fagrskinna*, Snorri's most probable and proximate source for Magnús's reign (Sigurður Nordal 1953, 211; Ólafur Halldórsson 1979, 131). In my view, Sandaaker's reading of these texts is more accurate than Ólafía Einarsdóttir's, and yet insufficiently nuanced. As I intend to show, a comparison of the relevant material in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* reveals that while both adopt a similarly negative attitude toward Magnús Erlingsson's coronation, they differ in the extent to which this attitude translates into a general judgment on the practice of royal consecration, and in how closely they mirror the views held by the Norwegian king and court at the time of their writing. More precisely, I will demonstrate that Snorri, far from simply parroting contemporary royal opinion in his account of Magnús's coronation and surrounding events, was addressing and promoting interests of his own as a cultural producer, certainly of poetry and perhaps also of prose, for the Norwegian court. My analysis will proceed in several stages: first, I will describe what is known of the historical context in which the coronation occurred and salient facts about the election and legitimation of kings in medieval Norway; second, I will compare the accounts in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* of this event and the negotiations preceding it; third, I will seek to explain Snorri's departure from contemporary royalist ideology by examining his practice and interests as a political and

cultural actor in the joint Norwegian/Icelandic social sphere of the early thirteenth century; finally, I will look at one additional episode from *Heimskringla* that provides further support for my conclusions.

In 1152 the papal legate Nicholas Breakspear, later Pope Hadrian IV, visited Norway for the purpose of establishing an archdiocese (for discussions of this event and the papal motives that lay behind it, see Helle 1974, 45–53; Johnsen 1967, 3–4). The country at this time was ruled by three kings, the brothers Ingi, Eysteinn and Sigurðr Haraldssynir. While such an arrangement was not uncommon in Norway, where kingship was traditionally treated as an estate which all heirs through the paternal line from Haraldr hárfagri, the ninth-century king credited with first unifying the land, were entitled to claim, it was rarely conducive to peace. In this instance, however, it proved of benefit to the legate’s mission: in hopes of securing episcopal support for his faction, each of the three kings endorsed the foundation of the archdiocese and granted concessions designed to further the Gregorian ideals of a self-governing and politically influential Church in Norway. Although these privileges existed more in theory than in practice for the duration of the brothers’ reigns, it was not long before the Church had the chance to reassert its claims. Within a decade of the establishment of the archiepiscopal see of Niðaróss in 1152/53 all three royal brothers were dead, and Hákon herðibreiðr Sigurðarson emerged as their sole heir (these events are recounted in *Morkinskinna* ch. 85: Finnur Jónsson 1928–32, 154–62, *Fagrskinna* chs 99–102: Bjarni Einarsson 1984, 332–41, and chs 26–32 of Snorri’s *Haraldssona saga* and the whole of his *Hákonar saga herðibreiðs*: Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 337–72). When Ingi’s surviving supporters proved unwilling, however, to bow to Hákon—who, aside from being the bastard offspring of King Sigurðr’s dalliance with a farmhand, had little support among Norway’s cultured élite—the most powerful of them, Erlingr Ormsson, nicknamed *skakki*, ‘crick-neck’, arranged in 1161 to have his five-year-old son Magnús elected king (*Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* ch. 1, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 373–74).

This action was unprecedented. As Knut Gjerset writes, Ingi’s faction ‘by this choice . . . set aside all rules of succession. Magnús . . . was not a king’s son, and his connection with royalty came through his mother Kristín, a daughter of Sigurðr Jórsalafari (r. 1103–30), and this, according to laws said to have been instituted by King and Saint Óláfr Haraldsson (r. 1015–30), gave him no claim to the throne (on Norway’s traditional laws of succession, see Taranger 1934–36, 291). And yet there were other models and sources of legitimacy to which a royal

aspirant could appeal. Indeed, within the wider European context, Norway's laws of monarchical succession were by the mid-twelfth century an oddity: elsewhere primogeniture was the rule, and maternal descent was much less of a bar to kingship than illegitimate birth. Both of these standards of succession were championed by the Church, which had instituted as common practice in major European 'states' the crowning and anointing of kings by clerical agents, acts that confirmed both the God-given nature of the royal office and a particular occupant's right to hold it. Given the standards and practices it promoted, the Church was an obvious and, it turned out, willing ally for Erlingr in his efforts to fortify his son's rule. In either September 1163 or the summer of 1164, the young Magnús was anointed and crowned king of all Norway by Eysteinn Erlendsson, second Archbishop at Niðaróss.

The Archbishop's services did not come cheap, however. Magnús and his father granted a host of concessions that, if implemented, would revolutionise not just the role of the Church in Norwegian politics, but the Norwegian monarchy itself. At the ceremony Magnús and Erlingr are said to have taken an oath, of which a Latin version survives (printed, along with a Norwegian translation, in Kolsrud 1937–40, 465–66), in which they pledged to obey Rome, uphold the privileges granted to Norway's archdiocese at its founding in 1152/53, concede the Church's absolute authority in spiritual matters, limit demands upon the clergy to what was expressly permitted by canon law and uphold God's laws in their country. Then there is the so-called *Magnus Erlingssons privilegiebrev*, a letter written in the king's name at some time between 1163 and 1176, in which Magnús and his successors are named vassals of St Óláfr, from whom they are to hold the kingdom as a perpetual fief. (For texts and translations, see Vandvik 1962, 7–22. Most now believe this document to have been written by Archbishop Eysteinn: see Helle 1974, 65–66; Kolsrud 1937–40, 462–64; Taranger 1922; Vandvik 1962, 34–44. For a discussion of this concession, its precedents and significance, see Koht 1934–36, 81–109.) The *brev* further stipulates that upon a king's death his crown is to be placed upon Óláfr's shrine in Christ Church in Niðaróss, where it will remain until a successor is chosen and crowned by the archbishop.

In addition to these new ceremonial functions, contemporary law-codes indicate that Norwegian churchmen were to be given a greater say in the electoral process itself: no longer to be acclaimed serially by local *þings*, kings were now to be chosen by a national, representative assembly composed of Norway's archbishop and five bishops, and twelve men

selected by each from his own diocese (Keyser and Munch 1846–95, I 3–4, IV 31–32). Ideally, this assembly was to guide the transfer of an undivided crown to the king’s oldest legitimate son. In the event, however, that the candidate was afflicted by *illska eða úvizka*, ‘wickedness or lack of wisdom’ (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 398, note 1), the new king was to be chosen from among the disqualified heir’s full brothers; if he had none, or if none were deemed suitable, the assembly was to select that man, relation of the king or not, who seemed to them *at bazt hæfi bæði guðs réttar at gæta ok lands laga*, ‘best fitted to guard both God’s laws and the laws of the land’ (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 398, note 1). The final decision was to be reached by a majority vote of the assembly, so long as the bishops were part of that majority (Keyser and Munch 1846–95, I 3–4). The flood of innovations contained in these documents and laws amply demonstrates the extent to which the Church strove to exploit the opportunity provided by Magnús’s coronation to articulate and realise in practice the ideology of ‘monarchy by the grace of God’ in Norway (Magnús was the first king to employ the formula *Magnus Dei gratia rex Norvegie* or to adopt the title *Noregs konungr*; see Taranger 1934–36, 302–03).

Having surveyed the circumstances and consequences of Magnús’s coronation, I now turn to Snorri Sturluson’s view of this event. Like Ólafía Einarsdóttir and Sandaaker, I consider the best procedure is to compare Snorri’s account with that found in *Fagrskinna*, his most likely source for these events. Observing how Snorri followed or altered the material from this source (or, alternatively, agreed with or differed from it in his use of a shared model) will highlight the ways in which the narrative he crafted served his interests as a political actor and cultural producer. It must be admitted, however, that differences between the accounts of the coronation itself in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* reveal little, mainly because the latter’s is so slight: *Vígsla Magnúss konungs var gør ok var hann þá sjau vetra gamall*, ‘King Magnús’s coronation was carried out and he was then seven years old’ (ch. 109, in Bjarni Einarsson 1984, 351). Snorri’s account in ch. 22 of *Magnúss saga* is not much longer, though it does add several noteworthy details (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 397–98):

Magnús tók þá konungsvígslu af Eysteini erkibyskupi, ok þar váru at vígslunni aðrir fimm byskupar ok légátinn ok fjölði kennimanna. Erlingr skakki ok með honum tólf lendir menn sóru lagaeiða með konungi. Ok þann dag, er vígslan var, hafði konungr ok Erlingr í boði sínu erkibyskup ok légátinn ok alla byskupa, ok var sú veizla in vegsamligsta. Gáfu þeir feðgar þar margar stórgjafir. Þá var Magnús konungr átta vetra. Þrjá vetr hafði hann þá konungr verit.

Magnús then received royal consecration from Archbishop Eysteinn, and at the consecration there were five other bishops and the legate and many clerics. Erlingr skakki and with him twelve landed-men swore legal oaths along with the king. And on the day of the consecration, the king and Erlingr entertained the Archbishop and the legate and all the bishops, and that feast was most glorious. Father and son gave many great gifts there. King Magnús was then eight years old. He had then been king for three years.²

Among Snorri's notable additions are mention of the oaths, thought to correspond to the Latin document described above, and his emphasis on the predominance of churchmen at the ceremony and feast. This is as near as either *Heimskringla* or *Fagrskinna* comes to alluding to the concessions granted to the Church during and after the coronation. What both texts do describe in detail, however, are the negotiations that preceded this event. More precisely, both recount a lengthy debate between Erlingr skakki and Archbishop Eysteinn that occurred before the coronation.

The occasion for this conversation in each text is the Archbishop's attempt to increase Church revenue in his home district of Prándheimr. In ch. 16 of *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 390–91) and ch. 108 of *Fagrskinna* (Bjarni Einarsson 1984, 349), Eysteinn is said to have arranged matters so that fines to the Church would be paid in pure silver coin, rather than the more ordinary mixed copper and silver. In this way the archdiocese stood to double its penitential income. Erlingr uses the unrest generated by this measure as a pretext to approach the Archbishop with demands of his own. To compare Snorri's perspective on the ensuing negotiations with that of *Fagrskinna*, I here translate the dialogue from both texts in columns (line numbers, marked F for *Fagrskinna* and H for *Heimskringla*, will be used to refer back to material from these selections), arranged so that sections corresponding roughly in content appear across from one another (ES = Erlingr skakki; EE = Eysteinn Erlendsson):³

² The presence of the legate Stephanus of Orvieto is not explained by Snorri or *Fagrskinna*. Scholars have speculated that the legate, having come from England in 1163, was visiting Norway to garner support for Pope Alexander III, who was battling the anti-pope Victor IV, or to set up an archdiocese in Sweden (Helle 1974, 59). According to ch. 60 of *Sverris saga* (Indrebø 1920, 67), it was the legate who consecrated Magnús, but most scholars agree that the archbishop must have performed the ceremony.

³ Translations throughout the paper are my own, though I have benefited greatly from the assistance and suggestions of Anthony Faulkes and Alison Finlay. I have also consulted Finlay's recent translation of *Fagrskinna* (2004,

Fagrskinna (ch. 108)

Heimskringla (*Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*, ch. 21)

- ES: Is it true, lord, what men say, that you have increased the value of fines due to you from farmers in the north of the country? 3
- EE: It is indeed true that the farmers have permitted me to increase the value of my fines. They have done this of their own free will, and with no compulsion, thus increasing God's glory and the wealth of our foundation. 6 9
- ES: Lord, you must be knowledgeable about the law code of the people of Trøndelag. Now in everything which is added to that, you will be wanting to break the laws of King Óláfr helgi. 3
- ES: Is that the law, lord, of King Óláfr helgi, or have you taken this matter rather further than what is written in the law-book? 12
- EE: His laws will not be broken by an increase in his rights . . . 6
- EE: The holy king Óláfr will have established the laws in such a way that he got the consent and agreement of the people, but it is not found in his laws that it is forbidden to increase God's rights. 15 18
- ES: If you want to increase your rights, then you will be willing to support us in increasing the rights of the king to the same extent. 21 24
- EE: You have already increased the name and power of your son enough. And if I have unlawfully taken dues at an increased standard from the people of Trøndelag, I consider it to be a greater violation of the law that he is king over the land who is not a king's son. For that there is neither law nor precedent in this country. 27 30 33
- . . . It is a violation of the laws that he whom the laws prescribe is not king over Norway. 9

282–83) and Lee M. Hollander's translation of *Heimskringla* (1964, 805–07). An ellipsis in the translation indicates not removal of text, but that the speech of the current speaker is continued further down. The full texts of the dialogues, including the text between direct speech, are given in the original language in the Appendix.

12 ES: That was not done much against your will when Magnús was chosen as king, and all assented to this, the bishops as well as the other people of the country. 36
ES: When Magnús was chosen as king over the realm of Norway, it was done with your knowledge and consent as well as that of other bishops in this country.

EE: I do not want to oppose Magnús being king, if you are certain that it does not seem to the people of Trøndelag that their laws have been violated by someone being king who is not a king's son. 18
But I expect that all will not be in agreement, if any who have genuine claims come and demand the land and power. 21
24

ES: Since, lord, it is not written in all law-books that he who is not a king's son may not be a king . . . 27

EE: You then promised, Erlingr, that if we agreed with you that Magnús should be chosen as king, you would support God's rights in all respects with all your power. 39
42

ES: I accept that I have promised to keep God's law and the law of the land with all of my strength and the king's. Now I see a better policy than that each of us should accuse the other of breaking promises: rather let us hold to all our agreements. You support King Magnús in his rule, as you have promised, and I shall support your power in all profitable things. 45
48
51

. . . and if it was with the consent of you and the other bishops that Magnús was chosen as king over all the land, you can support him and his rule by making it God's law that he be king. If you were willing to anoint and crown him and consecrate him as king, then it cannot be denied, because that is the law of both God and men, and he and I shall give you full support in every undertaking that you wish to have backing for. 30
33
36
39

ES (cont.): If Magnús has not been chosen as king in accordance with ancient custom in this country, then you by your power can give him a crown, as God's law provides for anointing a king to power. And while I am not a king or descended from a line of kings, most kings in our memory did not know as well as I about the laws or constitution of the land. And King Magnús's mother is the legitimate daughter of a king and queen. Magnús is also a princess's son and son of a lawfully wedded 54
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63
66

wife. And if you will give him royal consecration, then no one can later legally depose him. William the Bastard 69 was not a king's son, and he was consecrated and crowned king over England, and since then the kingship has remained 72 in his family in England, and all have been crowned. Sveinn Úlfsson in Denmark was not a king's son, and yet he 75 was crowned king there, and since then his sons and one after another of his kinsmen crowned king. Now there is an 78 archdiocese in this country. That is a great glory and honour for our land. Let us now add further to its advantages, let 81 us have a crowned king no less than Englishmen and Danes.

Both conversations end with the Archbishop assenting to Erlingr's proposition.

Before discussing ways in which the accounts of this conversation in *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* differ, I wish to emphasise one crucial way in which they are alike. Neither text embraces the central claim made by the speakers: that Magnús was appointed king by God's grace. Rather than confirming that the plan to affirm the youth's right to the kingship realises God's eternal will, both texts represent the negotiations as, as Sandaaker puts it, *ei rask og lurvut kjøpsláing mellom partane*, 'a rapid and shabby haggling between the parties' (1998, 192). This is an observation with which Ólafía Einarsdóttir half agrees (1982, 135):

Fagrskinnas redegørelse for omstændighederne, hvorunder alliancen mellem Erling og Øystein kom i stand, er ikke flatterende for nogen af parterne.

Fagrskinna's account of the circumstances out of which the alliance between Erlingr and Eysteinn arose is not flattering for either party.

While to extend this observation to *Heimskringla* would contradict her thesis that Snorri supported the advent of royal consecration, it applies equally well to the debate as represented in either text. And yet, however apt these characterisations are, it seems to me necessary to modify them somewhat by taking into account the significant differences in how each text expresses the judgment shared by both on Erlingr's and Eysteinn's negotiations. By comparing key sections of the texts, I will show that

Snorri goes further than *Fagrskinna* to construct a negative and sceptical portrait of this conversation, thereby casting greater suspicion on the validity of clerical legitimation of Norwegian monarchs.

At first glance, Snorri's extended opening exchange seems more subtle than what is found in *Fagrskinna*. Whereas the latter starts with an accusation, Snorri begins with a question. And yet in terms of content the opening salvo in *Heimskringla* is no less pointed or condemnatory than that of *Fagrskinna*; in both, Erlingr accuses the Archbishop of unlawfully increasing fines in his district, while Eysteinn accuses the regent of unlawfully elevating his son to the throne. Snorri's expansion of the dialogue also allows him to focus earlier and greater attention on the specific wrongdoings of the Archbishop, who is forced to offer two more rationalisations than he does in *Fagrskinna* (F6–7) for his violations of St Óláfr's laws, neither of them very convincing (H5–10, 15–20). Furthermore, by having Erlingr and Eysteinn circle one another before levelling their accusations, Snorri establishes an atmosphere of collusion and play-acting between the disputants.

More substantial differences in content emerge in each party's response to the other's accusations. In *Fagrskinna* the rebuttals are, like the opening charges, blunt, direct and, as a result, more effective; Eysteinn straightforwardly insists that Óláfr's laws have not been broken in seeking to increase the saint's rights, while Erlingr answers that the law-books are not consistent in forbidding the election of a king who is not a king's son (F6–7, 25–27). The more drawn-out responses that Snorri gives—such as Eysteinn's argument that he, like St Óláfr, only got what he could from the farmers, or Erlingr's insistence that his personal qualities qualify him for leadership more than most kings, that Magnús is a queen's son, and that everyone else is consecrating, so why shouldn't we? (H7–10, 59–83)—seem more like rationalisations and rhetoric than sincere or convincing defences of innocence. There are, furthermore, a number of instances in Snorri's text in which both interlocutors, while artfully qualifying their statements and employing the subjunctive mood, admit to having violated ancient law or custom. Such admissions are altogether absent from *Fagrskinna*, in which all transgressions are firmly and consistently denied (compare, for example, F6–7 with H25–27, and F25–27 with H54–56). Here again, the tone Snorri sets is more conspiratorial than confrontational; rather than combatants convinced of their own righteousness, the pair emerge as accomplices, complicit in guilt, yet ready to turn the situation to their mutual advantage.

Snorri also differs from *Fagrskinna* in the motives he assigns to each party. In *Fagrskinna*, there are signs that Eysteinn and Erlingr's desire to secure Magnús's grip on the throne derives from a concern for Norway's welfare. Snorri, however, removes any hint of disinterestedness, excising, for example, the passage in which Eysteinn speaks of the need to guard against any heirs of dead kings who might appear and disrupt the peace of the realm (F22–24). In its place, Snorri has the Archbishop remind Erlingr of his promise to support God's laws and rights with all his power when the bishops assented to his son's election (H39–43), something *Fagrskinna* has Erlingr offer without prompting (F37–39). Additionally, whereas *Fagrskinna* has Erlingr state that by consecrating Magnús the Archbishop can *styrkja hann ok hans ríki*, 'support him and his rule' (F31–32), Snorri substitutes *ef þér vilið gefa honum konungsvígslu, þá má engi hann taka síðan af konungdóminum at réttu*, 'if you will give him royal consecration, then no one can later legally depose him' (H67–69), thereby keeping the emphasis on maintenance of Magnús's personal power. Nowhere in the dialogue which Snorri provides for Erlingr does concern for the greater good of Norway emerge.

Another important contrast lies in the extent to which Snorri stresses the special role played by clerical agents in the selection of the new monarch. This is an emphasis already observed in Snorri's account of the coronation itself. In *Fagrskinna*, Erlingr responds to the initial challenge to the legitimacy of his son's rule by declaring,

Eigi var þat gort mjök í móti yðru ráði, er Magnús var tekinn til konungs, ok játtuðu því allir, svá byskupar sem annat landsfólk.

That was not done much against your will when Magnús was chosen as king, and all assented to this, the bishops as well as the other people of the country (F12–15).

Here Snorri removes the reference to *landsfólk*, making Magnús's election an act of Erlingr in collusion with the Church, not one in which non-aristocratic laymen, those who composed the local assemblies at which kings were traditionally elected, had participated (H34–38). A similar difference is found between the two versions of Erlingr's closing speech. In *Fagrskinna*, he is at pains to underscore the ways in which canon and secular law can work together to fortify Magnús's authority, appealing to Eysteinn to join with him so that *bæði guðs lög ok manna*, 'the laws of both God and men', will support his son (F36–37). In his greatly expanded version of this monologue, Snorri emphasises the radical break between the old, secular foundations of royal legitimacy and

the new, clerical ones (Ciklamini 1981, 284). Here, Erlingr is less concerned with using God's law to supplement the secular than with substituting the former for the latter. As Snorri has him state, even *ef Magnús er eigi svá til konungs tekinn sem forn siðr er til hér í landi*, 'if Magnús has not been chosen as king in accordance with ancient custom in this country', the Archbishop can *gefa honum kórónu, sem guðs lög eru til at smyrja konung til veldis*, 'give him a crown, as God's law provides for anointing a king to power', and thereby supply him with a source of legitimacy capable of compensating for the absence of support in Norway's secular laws (H54–57).

In the final analysis, two major differences emerge between Snorri's report of the conversation of Erlingr skakki and Archbishop Eysteinn and that in *Fagrskinna*. First, by stressing the Church's appropriation of the election of Norwegian kings from the laity, and by representing coronation as a replacement of rather than complement to ancient laws and procedures of succession, Snorri more strongly emphasises the radical nature of the changes ushered in by this negotiation. Second, while both texts cast a sceptical eye on the introduction of royal consecration into Norway, Snorri reveals in starker terms the worldly interests motivating those who engineered this change, the Archbishop as much as the regent. Both are in Snorri's account more cunning, self-interested and indifferent to violations of law and custom. As a result of these differences, Snorri goes beyond *Fagrskinna* in his depiction of royal consecration as something other than what its official ideology would wish to represent it as; rather than a faithful realisation of divine will, Snorri represents the introduction of this ritual as an entirely human deed, inspired by human interests (economic and political) and effected through human means (negotiation, renegotiation and, finally, a deal).

Given that Snorri, when compared to his nearest contemporary chronicler and probable source for this event, intensified the critical perspective on Magnús's coronation, what might have been his motivation? One way to begin to answer this question is to consider the potential audience for his account as well as that of *Fagrskinna*. Scholars are generally agreed that the latter text was written for, and perhaps even commissioned by, King Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–63) and his court (Indrebø 1917, 273–77; Jakobsen 1970, 89; Bagge 1991, 19, 143). Given that Hákon was the grandson of King Sverrir, who in the 1180s was received in Norway as illegitimate son of Sigurðr munnr, killed Erlingr and Magnús and seized the throne, it is not hard to see why *Fagrskinna's*

demystifying perspective on events leading up to Magnús's coronation would have appealed to this young king. While the same observation could apply equally to Snorri's representation of this event, opinions as to the intended or primary audience for *Heimskringla* are more mixed than for *Fagrskinna*. On the one hand, there are those who believe that Snorri's chief aim in producing this text was to write history for his fellow Icelanders and/or posterity; in *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, Diana Whaley argues for 'the probability that he was writing for an Icelandic audience', noting the lack of 'any evidence that he was working for a patron', and insisting that 'in the end everything—or nearly everything—points to the probability that Snorri's first duty was to historical tradition as laid out in his sources' (1991, 123, 143). Similarly, Sverre Bagge has averred that

though it is not unreasonable to see some connection between the composition of *Heimskringla* and Snorri's contact with Norway, this work seems relatively unaffected by ideological bias, and may, despite its late date, be considered one of the best examples of the 'heroic' and 'objective' tradition in storytelling and saga writing. This is no doubt a consequence of its Icelandic origin (1991, 204).

On the other hand, some critics who have identified ideological purposes beneath the narratives of *Heimskringla* envision a contemporary, foreign and royal audience for this text; for example, Heinz Klingenberg has argued that a thinly veiled undercurrent of praise for Hákon's regent Jarl Skúli Bárðarson runs through parts of *Heimskringla* (1998, 85–94; see also Sandaaker 1988, 192). As I have argued elsewhere, I think that it is generally incorrect to regard Snorri as a detached and objective historian in a modern, academic mould rather than, as he appears in thirteenth-century saga accounts, a thoroughly engaged political actor, or to underestimate the degree to which his 1218–20 visit to Norway spurred his literary activity, or the extent to which his chief products, the *Edda* as well as *Heimskringla*, were meant for elite Norwegian consumption (Wanner 2003, 8–10, 232–42, 389–93). Recognising, however, the paucity of evidence for *Heimskringla*'s dissemination or reception, I will not insist on Snorri's intention to reach a foreign and/or royal audience with this text, but will instead seek to situate his and *Fagrskinna*'s accounts of Magnús's coronation among other texts that offer an opinion on this event or on the introduction of royal consecration into Norway. Still, it is worth observing that if Snorri did not produce his account of the 1163/64 coronation with Norway's contemporary king and court at least partially in mind, he and it are anomalies, in that all

other extant versions were with little doubt produced either by or for Hákon Hákonarson or one of his predecessors in Sverrir's line.

Certainly, the one thing that all of these kings and texts agreed on was the illegitimacy of Magnús's reign. And yet all also seem to have recognised the advantages inherent in the idea of there being a single king whose authority was founded in God's unchanging will. Though continental precedent suggested that confirmation of divine election ought to be ritually delivered by one of God's agents on earth, one could, of course, attempt to exploit this ideology without the full cooperation of the Church. Sverrir, the first of his restored line and usurper of Norway's first consecrated king, sought to do just this. While in ch. 10 of *Sverris saga* it is claimed that during his uprising Sverrir was anointed in a dream by the Hebrew prophet Samuel, and in ch. 123 he is said to have compelled several of Norway's bishops to perform a makeshift coronation in 1194, both the Norwegian and Roman Church regarded him as an unlawful king (Indrebø 1920, 9–11, 130–31). Eventually, all five of Norway's bishops joined their archbishop in exile, and Sverrir died in 1202 under a papal ban (see Bagge 1996, 74–80). Still, none of this stopped Sverrir from employing the clerical ideology, if in decidedly pro-monarchical fashion. Two texts produced under his supervision, *Sverris saga* and *En tale mot biskopene*, 'A Speech against the Bishops', give clear expression to the idea of kingship as an office filled by God; in these texts, however, divine election is manifested not through any agency or act of the Church, but dynastic succession alone. Nowhere are Sverrir's claims to independence from clerical authority more baldly stated than in the words he is reported in ch. 38 of his saga to have spoken over Erlingr skakki's grave:

Allda-scripti er mikit orðit sem þer megut sia, oc er undarliga orðit. Er ein maðr er nu fyrir .iii. ein fyrir konung. Oc einn fyrir Jarl, einn fyrir erkibyscup, oc em ec sa (Indrebø 1920, 42; Erlingr received the title of jarl from Valdamarr I of Denmark from whom he received the province of Vík as fief in the late 1160s).

Times have much changed, as you can see, and it has turned out extraordinarily, when one man now stands in the place of three: one for the king, and one for the jarl, one for the archbishop, and I am that one.

But if Sverrir was determined to fight the Church to the bitter end, his successors were to adopt a more accommodating approach. A spirit of reconciliation first emerges in a letter (c.1202) from Sverrir's son Hákon (r. 1202–04) to the Norwegian archbishop in exile, in which the origins of his father's troubles with the Church are traced to the negotiations of Erlingr skakki and Eysteinn in 1163/64. As the letter states:

Nú vil ek at allir menn viti skil á því at ek gef upp alla þessa deild ok þrættu er verit hefir millum konungdómsins ok biskupsdóms . . . , þá er jarlinn hóf deilu við Eystein erkibiskup um heilagrar kirkju frjálsi (Sandaaker 1998, 181; Sandaaker's emphasis).

Now I want all men to understand that I give up completely this dispute and quarrel that has gone on between the kingdom and bishopric . . . , [which started] when the jarl began a dispute with Archbishop Eysteinn over the freedom of holy Church.

By casting Erlingr as scapegoat for the tension between bishops and kings, this document seeks to absolve both the archbishop and Sverrir of guilt, and so open the way for a partnership between the Church and ruling dynasty (Sandaaker 1998, 181–82). By and large, the ploy worked: the bishops returned home and, while no election was ever held according to the rules of 1163/64, subsequent kings, including Hákon Hákonarson, did not advocate a return to old electoral procedures, but continued to promote the idea of kingship as a God-given office, and to seek episcopal support in their contentious bids for the throne.

Fagrskinna seems to me clearly to join in the conciliatory tone introduced into the dealings of Norway's monarchy and Church by Hákon Sverrisson's 1202 letter and cultivated by his successors. While still representing Magnús's reign as illegal, this text avoids in its account of Erlingr's and Eysteinn's negotiations undue denigration of the archbishop, whose dialogue amounts to little beyond denials of wrongdoing and expressions of concern for the security of the kingship and realm. More generally, *Fagrskinna*, while certainly royalist in its sympathies, employs, as Bagge notes, 'the ecclesiastical schema of the *rex iustus/iniquus*' in evaluating the reigns of kings (1991, 142). This is in contrast to *Heimskringla*, in which, Bagge further observes, 'there is little trace . . . of the ecclesiastical and monarchical idea of the king holding an office on God's behalf' (1991, 131). Or, as Aron Gurevich puts it more generally (1971, 45):

Providence, according to Snorri, is not in the least the foundation of the march of history . . . The idea of destiny in [his] kings' sagas has little in common with the theory of world-governance by the Creator's supreme will.

As these scholars and others (for example von See 1991, 358–60) have observed, Snorri evaluates kings according to genealogical claims, charismatic qualities, success in war and accommodation to the will of local assemblies. He favours, in short, standards of legitimacy and right rule that predate and, at least conceptually, remain independent of the influence of clerical ideals or agents.

Unlike the author of *Fagrskinna*, then, Snorri champions a more conservative model of royal legitimacy than that promoted by the contemporary Norwegian king and court. Indeed, in many ways Snorri's text reflects not so much the ideology of the current king as that of three decades past, of Sverrir at the apogee of his conflict with the Church. While nothing in *Heimskringla* matches the vitriol of the condemnations of the clergy in *En tale mot biskopene*, there are a number of striking correspondences of phrase, tone and opinion between Snorri's *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar* and *Sverris saga* that suggest that those responsible for these texts were of like mind when it came to the negotiations of 1163/64. For instance, two passages from ch. 112 of *Sverris saga* closely match sections of Snorri's account of the negotiations. In the first, which may be compared with the words that Snorri places in Eysteinn's mouth at H29–33, it is said that Magnús

eigi var at rettu til tekinn. fyrir því at all dri fyr hafði verit i Noregi síþan cristni com at sa væri konungr. er eigi var konungs son. oc eigi helldr i heiðni. þat er oc firir-boðit i lanz-laugom þeim er hin helgi Olafr konungr setti (Indrebø 1920, 119).

was not rightly elected, because never before had it occurred in Norway after Christianity arrived, nor in heathen [times] either, that he became king who was not a king's son. It is also forbidden in the laws of the land instituted by King Óláfr helgi.

The second passage, which relates Sverrir's speech to a contemporary Church leader, is nearly identical to H21–24, for which *Fagrskinna* has no equivalent:

ef þu erkibyscup villt miclo auca rett þin þa vil ec at þu leggir leyvi þar a at ek auca iafn-miclo konungs-rettin (Indrebø 1920, 119).

if you, Archbishop, want greatly to increase your rights then I wish you to permit me to increase the king's rights to the same extent.

Furthermore, Sverrir (as depicted in his saga) and Snorri seem equally wary of assigning God or religion too direct a role in northern politics. In continuing his speech at Erlingr's grave, Sverrir openly mocks the idea that one's salvation could be decided by one's choice of sides in a civil conflict:

Eysteinn erkibyscup oc margir aðrir . . . hafa iafnan sagt at allir þeir menn er berþiz með Magnusi konungi. oc verþi land hans. oc letiz með því. at salur þeira manna allra væri fyr i Paradiso. en bloðit væri callt a iorðunne Nu megum ver allir fagna her sva margra manna heilagleic sem her muno helgir hava orðit ef þetta er sva sem erkibyscup hefir sagt . . . En ef sva illa er sem mer segir hugrum. at um þat se at leica at brostit hafi þa hin fogro heitin sem þeim var heitit.

þa muno þeir ørit lengi gollit þeira lygi. oc allir þeir er því truðu. oc þat er mitt rað at scripta a aþra lund til. biðia fyrir þeim er fram ero farnir af þesom heimi oc biðia til guðs at Erlingi Jarli se fyrir-gefnar allar þær synþir er hann gerði meðan hann var i þesa heims lifi . . . oc biðia fyrir allra manna salum þeira er latiz hafa i þeso hino rangliga vandræði bæði nu oc fyr. biðia þes guð at hann fyrir-gefi þeim allar synþir oc biargi salum þeira (Indrebø 1920, 42–44).

Archbishop Eysteinn and many others . . . have always said that all those men who fought with King Magnús and defended his land, and died doing so, that all of their souls would be in paradise before their blood was cold upon the earth. Now we can all rejoice here at the sanctity of so many men who will have become saints here if it is as the archbishop has said . . . But if things are as bad as I suspect, that it is a question of the fair promises which were made to them having been broken, then they, and all who believed this, will have paid for long enough for their lie. And it is my advice to act in a different manner. Pray for those who have departed from this world and pray to God that Jarl Erlingr may be forgiven all the sins which he committed while alive on earth . . . and pray for the souls of all those men who have died in these wrongful troubles both now and earlier. Pray God that he forgive them all their sins and save their souls.

Finally and most importantly, Snorri and *Sverris saga* share a willingness to assign specific blame to the archbishop. As the latter has Sverrir state:

Erlingr Jarl scylldi legia orlof til at erkibyscup færi fram þeim olaugum ollum sem hann mætti við coma bøndr með sino riki. oc litz mer sva sem þat myndi hvartki gert vera at gvðs laugum ne manna her i landi (Indrebø 1920, 119).

Jarl Erlingr was to grant permission that the archbishop might carry out all the injustice that he could do against the farmers within his power. And it seems to me that that was done according to neither God's law nor the law of men in this land.

Like the texts produced in Sverrir's name, then, Snorri's seems to have been largely unconcerned about alienating the Norwegian church, an attitude at odds with the interests of subsequent kings in Sverrir's line, whose desire to harness the authorising power of ecclesiastical ideology led them to adopt, in texts and in practice, a more accommodating (though never wholly subservient) posture when dealing with the local archdiocese.

This last observation calls for a reformulation of the question with which I began this section of the paper: namely, what led Snorri in his account of Magnús Erlingsson's coronation and related events to resurrect a stance towards the archiepiscopacy and its legitimation of Norwegian royalty that was so out of sympathy with current royal interests? In what is known of Snorri's biography, there are signs that he had

little reason to support, and indeed did not support, the intrusion of ecclesiastical influences or Gregorian ideals into northern politics. In the first place, Snorri came into his political and social maturity at a time when Icelandic chieftains (*goðar*) were being forced to make an unaccustomed choice between the pursuit of secular and religious authority. In 1190, Archbishop Eiríkr Ívarsson of Norway sent a letter to Iceland forbidding the ordination of *goðar* (Jón Sigurðsson 1857, 291). Prior to this directive, nearly every notable *goði* since Iceland's conversion to Christianity (c.1000) had also been a priest or bishop; after it, there is no record of any being ordained (Jón Jóhannesson 1974, 190). Snorri was eleven when this directive arrived in Iceland, and so was part of the first generation of chieftains' sons for whom the possibility of joint religious and secular rule was not open. More tellingly, in 1209 Snorri was one of several *goðar* to raid the farm of Hólar, where one of Iceland's two bishops had his seat. This assault was precipitated by resistance by the *goðar* to Bishop Guðmundr Árason's energetic promotion of such familiar Gregorian principles as clerical exemption from the authority of secular law courts (this event is narrated in chs 24–27 of *Íslendinga saga*, in Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 251–57).

While this domestic episode illustrates a negative response by Snorri to an assertion of clerical authority in his native political sphere, it was, I believe, his interactions with members of the Norwegian élite prior to the time when he is thought to have produced *Heimskringla* that had the most direct impact on his treatment of royal coronation in that work. To support this claim, I will consider three related issues: first, as background to Snorri's experiences and expectations in dealing with members of Norway's courts, the traditional role of Icelandic cultural producers in the Norwegian court in pagan and early Christian times, as well as the benefits and rewards associated with it; second, evidence for Snorri's aspirations to emulate that role and reap its profits; and, third, whether and to what extent Snorri may have perceived the introduction of the practice of coronation of Norwegian monarchs as a threat to his potential to do this. In examining these issues, I will argue that Snorri had one very personal reason to seek to discredit the conferral of royal legitimacy by Norway's archbishops: simply put, he would have regarded them as his competitors.

It is well known that throughout the Middle Ages Icelanders were the dominant producers of several of the most significant art-forms native to Scandinavia (see Sigurður Nordal 1990, 190–92; Schier 1975; and the papers collected in Clunies Ross 2000). Alongside sagas, the most

important form taken by the cultural activity of Icelanders for much of this period was the composition and recitation of skaldic verse. Although this art-form emerged in the courts of ninth-century Norway, Icelanders soon monopolised the role of court poet. Indeed, after the mid-900s, there are no certain records of any Norwegian *hirðskáld* (Frank 1978, 23; Kuhn 1983, 284–85; Turville-Petre 1953, 43). More than entertainment, skaldic verse was a valued commodity in interactions between inhabitants of these regions. For visiting Icelanders, who had little in the way of social connections, material resources or martial assistance to offer the politically, economically and militarily dominant Norwegians, skaldic verse was a means of gaining favour and access. As Óskar Halldórsson writes, Icelanders *gerðu höfðingjalofið að útflutningsvöru sem hallardyr konunga opnuðust fyrir*, ‘made the praise of chieftains into an export commodity before which kings’ hall-doors opened’ (1979, 94). On the other side of this exchange, Norwegian kings stood to gain several benefits from their reception of skaldic verse: before the introduction of literacy, it was the primary means of recording history; owing to its highly intricate form and diction, it served as a source of prestige and distinction for those who were able to accept it as well as those who produced it (for arguments that skaldic verse acted and perhaps even arose as a tool for generating distinction among a political and social élite, see Fidjestøl 1997; Lindow 1975; Ström 1981, 443–46); and, perhaps most crucially, skaldic poetry celebrated as well as preserved the memory of a king’s noble deeds and charismatic qualities.

Although neither can be regarded as duplicating fully the functions of the other, there are significant parallels in the contributions made by skaldic praise and royal consecration, and more generally by skalds and bishops, to the construction and maintenance of royal legitimacy and authority. Neither skalds and their poems nor bishops and their rites effectively conferred royal status: in pagan as well as Christian times, blood and election were the deciding factors. What the recitation of skaldic tributes and the ceremony of anointing and crowning did provide were ritualised expressions and thus confirmations of their subjects’ suitability for the royal role. Both skalds’ and bishops’ competence to pronounce on the character and legitimacy of a royal aspirant or current monarch were grounded in their claims to speak for or with divine power. To the pagan skald and his audience, poetic skill was a gift from the chief god Óðinn, who had wrested it in the form of a potent mead from the gods’ enemies, the *jötnar* or giants (the myth of the origins of the poetic mead and Óðinn’s acquisition of it is best known from Snorri’s

Skáldskaparmál chs 657–58, in Faulkes 1998, I 3–5; see also stt. 104–10, 140–41 of the eddic poem *Hávamál*, in Neckel 1983, 33–34, 40). Numerous kennings in the skaldic corpus allude to this myth by referring to Óðinn as the possessor or bestower of the poetic mead and the skill it symbolised (see Meissner 1921, 129; Kreutzer 1974, 112–17). While it would be going too far to insist that skaldic encomia offered a stamp of divine approbation equivalent to that later supplied by episcopal consecration, the claim made by and for pagan skalds that their art was a product of Odinic inspiration, a gift from the god of kings and warriors as well as poets, would have lent their pronouncements an air of truth, and given them unique authority as counsellors, confidants and commemorators.

In light of skalds' claim to divine inspiration, it might seem as if the Conversion would have quickly and decisively deprived them of their authority and functions, but this did not happen. While the sagas indicate that the missionary kings Óláfr Tryggvason (r. 995–1000) and Óláfr Haraldsson at first resisted accepting skalds into their service, they relented in cases where poets were willing to convert and/or restrict their references in kennings to the pagan gods (see ch. 83 of Snorri's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and ch. 43 of his *Óláfs saga helga*, in Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51, I 330–32 and II 54–56; on reduction in the use of pagan mythological kennings following the Conversion, see Frank 1978, 67). The continued employment of skalds by Christian kings was partly due to practical necessity; until the twelfth century, when standards of literacy and court clerical staffs in Norway developed to something like the level at which they existed in Europe, there was no one else to fill the skalds' combination of memorialising, diplomatic and advisory roles. Skalds moreover continued to provide ideological services after the Conversion, managing in several ways to compensate for the loss of their status as mouthpieces of pagan divinity. In the first place, they began to make use of the new mythology to construct kennings in praise of patrons. For example, Arnórr jarlaskáld offered this verse in praise of King Haraldr harðráði c.1067 (quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 52, in Faulkes 1998, I 78):

Bœnir hefi ek fyrir beini
bragna falls við snjallan
Gríkja vörð ok Garða;
gjøf launak svá jöfri.

I lift prayers for the causer of men's falling [in battle] to the wise guardian of Greeks and Russians. Thus I repay the prince for his gift (Faulkes 1987, 127).

Alongside such appeals to Christ and use of Christian kennings, there was a gradual reintroduction of pagan mythological elements into the poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, suggesting that even if, as Jan de Vries puts it, *Namen wie Odín oder Týr waren jetzt nur eine blasse Erinnerung an eine längst überwundene Zeit*, ‘names such as Óðinn and Týr were now only a pale reminder of a long since outdated time’ (1967, 12), Christian patrons continued to find satisfaction in being compared to figures of pagan myth and legend. By the 1100s skalds had begun to respond directly to the loss of the claim of pagan poetry to transcendent origin by effecting a substitution of divine patron, of the Christian God for Óðinn. Prominent twelfth-century compositions that invoke the Father or the Trinity as source of inspiration are Einarr Skúlason’s tribute to St Óláfr, *Geisli*, the *Harmsól* of Canon Gamli of the monastery at Pykkvibær and the anonymous *Leiðarvísan* (on this trend and these examples, see Klingenberg 1986, 667–68; Guðrún Nordal 2001, 89–90). Finally, by the early thirteenth century the application of euhemeristic theory to Óðinn may have permitted certain skalds to think of him as, if no longer a divine, then essentially a superhuman originator of their art. This seems to be part of the strategy of Snorri when he historicises Óðinn as a king who carried the art of poetry with him as he migrated into the North from Troy (*Ynglinga saga* ch. 6; Bjarni Aðalbarnarson 1941–51, I 17), a city where, according to the Prologue of his *Edda*, the *hofðingjar hafa verit um fram aðra menn þá er verit hafa í veröldu um alla manndómliga hluti*, ‘chieftains have excelled other men who have been in the world in respect to all human qualities’ (Prologue ch. 4, in Faulkes 1982, 4).

There were several ways, then, in which skalds down to Snorri’s time continued to claim a prestigious origin for their compositions and lend authority to their poetic pronouncements. Furthermore, there can be little doubt both that Snorri was aware of the traditional avenues for advancement open to Icelandic poets in the court of Norway and that he sought to exploit these in his own practice. In the early 1220s, the exchange of poetic composition for material and social capital between itinerant Icelandic poets and foreign kings formed a significant literary motif in Icelandic sagas and *þættir*, or ‘short stories’. John Lindow has suggested the label of ‘poet’s travel pattern’ for those tales in which an Icelandic protagonist ‘relies on verbal skill to obtain, maintain, or regain a favoured position with the monarch’ (2000, 219). Though *Heimskringla* is not usually considered to contain discrete *þættir*, Snorri’s compilation is nevertheless full of tales in which skalds serve and counsel, and are

heeded and rewarded by, kings of Norway and other countries. As for Snorri's ambition to fill the skald's role, evidence for this emerges early in his political career. The first Norwegian whom Snorri is known to have praised in poetry was none other than Sverrir, to whom he sent a tribute most likely in 1202, the year of the king's death. (Evidence for Snorri's composition for Sverrir is found in *Skáldatal*, a list of skalds and patrons preserved in the Uppsala manuscript of Snorri's *Edda* and the *Kringla* manuscript of *Heimskringla*. Nothing of the poem itself survives; on the possible nature of and motivations for Snorri's poetry for Sverrir, see Guðrún Nordal 1992, 54.) While there is no record of Snorri having composed for Sverrir's two immediate successors, the short-lived Hákon Sverrisson and Guttormr Sigurðarson (both d. 1204), he did send poetry to King Ingi Bárðarson (r. 1204–17) and his half-brother Jarl Hákon galinn (his poetry for both is attested in *Skáldatal* and for the latter in ch. 34 of *Íslendinga saga*, in Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 269). Only one response to this poetry has been recorded, but it was a positive one. According to *Íslendinga saga*, written by Snorri's nephew Sturla Þórðarson, Jarl Hákon repaid Snorri's gesture with *sverð ok skjöld ok brynju*, 'sword and shield and mailcoat'; it is also told that

Jarlinn ritaði til Snorra, at hann skyldi fara útan, ok lézt til hans gera mundu miklar sæmðir. Ok mjök var þat í skapi Snorra. En jarlinn andaðist í þann tíma, ok brá þat útanferð hans um nökkurra vetra sakir (Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 269).

The Jarl wrote to Snorri that he should travel abroad [to Norway], and said he would show great honour to him. And that was much to Snorri's liking. But the Jarl died at that time, and that delayed his journey abroad for some years.

Unfortunately for Snorri, this was becoming a pattern: Jarl Hákon died in 1214, and his brother the king not long after, in 1217. By the time Snorri made his first trip to Norway in the autumn of 1218, his hosts were the recently elected, fourteen-year-old Hákon Hákonarson and his regent, Jarl Skúli Bárðarson, half-brother of the late King Ingi.

Snorri spent two years in Norway, primarily in the company of Skúli. During this time, he presented poetry to Skúli and Kristín Nikuláss-dóttir, widow of Hákon galinn, receiving in return gifts and friendship from both (Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 271–72, 278). And while our sources do not state that Snorri offered poetry to Hákon during his visit, it is difficult to believe that, having panegyricised a jarl and a lady, he would have neglected to do the same for the king. Near the end of his trip Snorri helped dissuade Hákon and Skúli from invading Iceland, with which Norway was embroiled in a violent trade dispute, by pledging to

work to bring the island under royal control; in return for his cooperation, he was given the title of *lendr maðr*, the highest in the *hirð* (see ch. 38 of *Íslendinga saga*, in Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 277–78, and ch. 59 of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, in Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1887, 52, both by Sturla Þórðarson). Upon returning home, however, Snorri did little to promote the king's interests, and seems, in fact, to have worked to keep Hákon and Skúli's favour mostly through cultural production. Around 1222–23, Snorri completed *Háttatal*, the longest and most ambitious skaldic praise-poem surviving, for both the king and jarl. This poem was the seed of Snorri's *Edda*, a treatise on poetry and mythology that was probably finished by 1225 (see Wessén 1940), about the time when he is believed to have begun work on *Heimskringla*.

Plainly, Snorri had for some time before, during and after his visit to Norway, cast himself in the time-honoured role of the Icelander bearing poetic gifts, for which he hoped to be rewarded with goods as well as access and influence. All things considered, he had some success. And yet, if we look at individual responses to Snorri's poetry, a telling pattern emerges. Snorri composed for six Norwegian notables: the kings Sverrir, Ingi and Hákon, the jarls Hákon galinn and Skúli and the lady Kristín. Of these six, only the three least powerful, all, that is, but the kings, are known to have responded. While differences in rank may be enough to explain this pattern—having attained the pinnacle of Norwegian society, kings may have seen little to be gained from doing business with Icelandic poets vying for attention and largesse—it is also necessary to consider the factors that made a nobleman into a king during this period. Aside from Kristín, all of those whom Snorri praised were at one time or another candidates for the crown, but only some succeeded. What did those who attained the throne possess that the others lacked? One key factor was the support of Norway's ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Of course, things were not as clear-cut as this statement suggests; each of the nobles under discussion had unique and complex relations with the contemporary Church. Sverrir, as we know, seized the throne in defiance of Norway's bishops; since, however, he was probably dead when Snorri's tribute arrived, perhaps even before it was composed (Guðrún Nordal 1992, 54), it seems best to leave him out of consideration of responses to Snorri's poetry. Then there is Jarl Skúli, who, as legitimate heir of King Ingi, initially enjoyed archiepiscopal backing in his bid for the crown, but was also among the most enthusiastic consumers of Snorri's verse (see his extravagant response to Snorri's gift of a *drápa* in ch. 38 of

Íslendinga saga; Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, I 278). Ultimately, however, Archbishop Guttormr, bowing to the depth of Hákon's support among advocates of Sverrir's dynasty, gave his stamp of approval to the young monarch. This occurred in the summer of 1218, mere months before Snorri arrived in Norway (Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1887, 40–44). The last two contenders, King Ingi and Jarl Hákon galinn, fit our pattern rather neatly: Ingi was chosen as king over his older half-brother Hákon largely because of his legitimate birth and the support of Norway's archbishop (Koht 1924, 432). Whatever the particulars of each case, therefore, a basic division holds true: those who responded to Snorri's laudatory poems were those whose aspirations to the throne had been thwarted by lack of episcopal support, while those who did not had reached that goal with the endorsement of the archbishop. In sum, it seems that Norway's kings were no longer investing in skaldic verse as a source of legitimacy and prestige in part because they had access to a more potent source of both in the sanction of God, as manifested through the approval of Norway's highest Church official.

We have, then, in Snorri a cultural producer who, after decades of seeking royal recognition of his poetic talents, was faced with a radical disjunction between what he knew (or thought he knew) of the traditional, reciprocal relations of Icelandic skalds and Norwegian monarchs, and a reality in which the place and functions of the skald had been largely usurped by the Church and its agents. Without the patronage of Norway's most powerful consumer, Snorri's poetic capital had lost much of its market value, its capacity for conversion into material wealth, social prestige and political influence. Snorri's response to this devaluation of his cultural capacities was to funnel his talents into new forms of cultural production designed to resuscitate the old. *Heimskringla* was one such product (the *Edda*, a work aimed at reinvigorating the production and consumption of skaldic verse, ought to be viewed as Snorri's first and principal attempt to reignite patrons' interest in more traditional forms of cultural production; see Wanner 2003, 389–93). While *Heimskringla*, like *Fagrskinna* and other kings' sagas, may have reflected royal interests as a means of seeking favour, Snorri also used it to further his own interests as an Icelandic poet, seeking to persuade his audience of the worth of the skaldic art over and against the legitimising strategies offered by the Church. Accordingly, it is a text in which ecclesiastical ideology is absent, and the relations of kings and skalds are highlighted. Snorri employs the climax of *Heimskringla* to the same purpose, using the potent if outdated propaganda of King Sverrir to

paint Magnús's coronation as the result of cynical collusion between a law-breaking, self-serving politician and a no less crooked archbishop. More than merely illicit, this ceremony was in the end also ineffective, providing scant protection against the uprising in which both Magnús and his dynastic ambitions met their end. Finally, there is documentary evidence suggesting that, as early as 1220–22, Hákon Hákonarson was making arrangements for his own coronation, and, perhaps to further this aim, had granted minting privileges to the current archbishop.⁴ If Snorri had these recent developments in mind when constructing his account of the negotiations of 1163/64 and their outcome, the moral it would have held for Hákon is clear: previous rulers of Norway had traded privileges and favours with the Church in return for legitimacy and a crown, and look where it had got them.

In closing, I will review an episode from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla* that in my view supplies further evidence of Snorri's aversion to the imposition of episcopal authority on the Norwegian monarchy and his preference for traditional measures of royal legitimacy. As usual, this is a story not invented by Snorri, but one that he relates in telling ways. The earliest known saga of Óláfr Tryggvason, during whose reign both Iceland and Norway were largely converted to Christianity, was written c.1190 by Oddr Snorrason of the monastery at Þingeyrar.⁵ In ch. 33, Oddr relates an episode in which Óláfr, busy converting his pagan countrymen, is visited by a one-eyed old man who regales him into the night with tales *af orrostvm ok fornvm atbvrðvm*,

⁴ This document is reproduced in Keyser and Munch 1846–95, I 446. Though it is undated, scholars have concluded that the document and the privileges it grants most likely date to the early 1220s, a period when Hákon and Jarl Skúli were embroiled in an ongoing struggle to define their spheres of power, and one leading up to the 1223 assembly at which Hákon, with the aid of the Norwegian archbishop, firmly established his right to and hold upon the throne of Norway (see Steen 1949–51, 42–43; Helle 1974, 107). In the event, Hákon did not actually receive royal consecration until 1247, from Cardinal William of Sabina (*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* ch. 257, in Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1887, 252).

⁵ Oddr's original Latin text is lost, but his work survives in a nearly contemporary Norse translation in several manuscript versions (see Finnur Jónsson 1932, iii–viii; Jónas Kristjánsson 1988, 157–59). Snorri would likely have had access to versions in both languages but, as Anthony Faulkes (1993, 69–72) has forcefully argued, there are good reasons to doubt that he would have been able to read the Latin text. While Finnur Jónsson, editor of Oddr's saga

‘of battles and ancient events’ (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 131). Óláfr enjoys the stories, but after being advised by a bishop to go to bed, turns in. In the morning, the king asks for his guest, who cannot be found. Upon learning that the man, complaining of the poor fare offered at the king’s table, had given his head cook some portions of meat to serve, Óláfr orders him:

gef engum manne þat. ok er hvndr var til látin do hann þegar. síþan var þat brent ok eptir þat voro tíðer ok iii. messor (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 134).

‘Give that to no man.’ And when a dog was given some it died at once. [The meat] was then burned, and after that services and three masses were [said].

Oddr’s account closes with this speech by Óláfr:

Miok hefir guð leyst oss af miklom haska. en aðsett er at fiandin hefir brvgðiz ilike Oðens. ok villdi blekia oss. fyrst at taka vokv fra oss um tíðer . . . en síðan at fera oss þetta diofvliga éitr. at þat fengi oss bana hormvligan ok eigum ver þetta miok guðe at þacka. byscvp sannaðe þat ok kvazt þat hugr vm segia þa er gestrinn melti við hann lengst vm kveldit (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 136).

‘God has rescued us from great danger, and it is clear that the devil has assumed the form of Óðinn, and was trying to deceive us, first to make us sleepy during the services . . . and afterwards to bring us this devilish poison, so that it might cause us a miserable death. And for this we have God much to thank.’ The bishop agreed with that and declared that this was what had occurred to him when the guest talked with him [the king] through most of the night.

This identification of the visitor with Óðinn/the devil would not have surprised the saga’s audience, who would have both recognised him by his trademark features, and been prepared for some sort of demonic mischief by Oddr’s statement at the head of the episode that *avfvndaðe . . . ovinr allz manz kyns*, ‘the enemy of all mankind had resented’ Óláfr’s successful missionary activity (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 131).

While the essentials of this story are carried over into ch. 64 of Snorri’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the choices Snorri makes in adapting it serve a coherent purpose. First, there is nothing to correspond to Oddr’s

(1932, xxii), as well as Theodore Andersson, its recent translator, consider the more expansive manuscript AM 310, 4to (A) to be closer to Oddr’s original, and Finnur argues that Snorri must have used a manuscript earlier than either, I here quote from Stockholm 19, 4to (S), which in the case of Óláfr’s encounter with Óðinn has the more detailed text. The text of S is printed below that of A in Finnur Jónsson’s edition, and is the basis of P. A. Munch’s 1853 edition.

prefatory statement on the devil and his snares. Snorri elaborates, however, on the scope and quality of the visitor's tales (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 312–13):

Kunni sá maðr segja af öllum löndum . . . Þótti konungi gaman mikit at ræðum hans ok spurði hann margra hluta, en gestrinn fekk órlausn til allra spurninga, ok sat konungr lengi um kveldit.

That man could speak of all lands . . . The king got great pleasure from his conversation and asked him many things, and the guest gave an answer to all of [his] questions, and the king sat up long into the night.

As for the exasperated bishop, Snorri has him interrupt the talk of Óláfr and Óðinn not once, but twice. After Óláfr interviews his cook and his guest's identity has dawned on him, Snorri has the king react somewhat differently (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 314):

Þá segir konungr, at þá vist alla skyldi ónýta, segir, at þetta myndi engi maðr verit hafa ok þar myndi verit hafa Óðinn, sá er heiðnir menn höfðu lengi á trúat, sagði, at Óðinn skyldi þá engu áleiðis koma at svíkja þá.

Then the king says that all of that food should be thrown away, saying that this must have been no man and that it must have been Óðinn, whom heathen men had long believed in, [and] said that Óðinn would not succeed in deceiving them in any way.

Here there is no mention of the poison or unfortunate dog, and so no indication that the king or his men were ever in danger of physical harm (Gurevich 1971, 48).

Snorri's text also has far fewer religious elements than Oddr's saga: missing from Snorri's version are Óláfr's repeated thanks to God, the masses and the bishop's self-congratulatory coda. Most importantly, Snorri's text, alone of existing variants of this story, omits the explicit equation of Óðinn and the devil. All that remains is the bishop, who, in his inept attempts to chase off the king's visitor, comes off as somewhat ridiculous. In Snorri's text, the encounter between Óðinn and Óláfr is no longer a clash of religions in which God proves stronger than paganism and the devil, but a competition for the king's attention in which Óðinn proves more engaging. As Gurevich writes of this episode (1971, 48):

From Snorri's point of view Óðin is hardly a god, and people having the true faith do not worship him, but it is more interesting to talk with him than with a clergyman.

Snorri believed, however, not only that Óláfr would be better entertained listening to Óðinn, but also that it would benefit the king to attend to what the pagan deity had to say, or, more precisely, what

he represented. For Snorri, Óðinn is not the devil in disguise, but the embodiment of the history and culture of the king's ancestors and people as preserved and communicated through the medium of skaldic verse. That Snorri considered the lore that Óðinn imparts to Óláfr not merely fascinating but salutary emerges from another choice of phrase: rather than *orrostvm ok fornvm atbvrðvm*, Snorri has Óðinn relate tales *frá konungum eða qðrum fornum tíðendum*, 'about kings or other old events' (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 313).⁶ Óðinn is someone who, like the skalds he inspired in pagan times, can inform the king about himself. Here Snorri's message to Norway's king seems to have been: it's all very well to adopt the true faith once it comes along, so long as you remember where you came from and, more importantly, those who can remind you.

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⁶The reading *fra forn konungum oc orrustum þeira* appears in the A manuscript of Oddr's saga (Finnur Jónsson 1932, 132), and so Snorri's text here combines elements that eventually appear in A and S.

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APPENDIX

Cited below are the full texts of the dialogues, including the text between the passages of direct speech.

Fagrskinna ch.108 (Bjarni Einarsson 1984, 350):

Pá mælti Erlingr skakki: 'Herra,' sagði hann, 'kunnigt mun yðr vera um lögskrá Þrœnda. Nú þat allt, er þar er á lagt, munuð þér vilja brjóta lög ens helga Óláfs konungs.' Erkibyskup svarar: 'Eigi eru þá brotin lög hans í því, at aukinn er réttir hans. Hitt er lagabrot, at eigi er sá konungr yfir Noregi, sem í lögum stendr.' Erlingr svarar: 'Eigi var þat gort mjök í móti yðru ráði, er Magnús var tekinn til konungs, ok játtuðu því allir, svá byskupar sem annat landsfólk.' Erkibyskup svarar: 'Eigi vil ek því í móti mæla, at Magnús megi konungr vera, ef þú veizt, at eigi þykkir Þrœndum vera raskat í því sínum lögum, at sá sé konungr, er eigi er konungs sonr. En því vættir mik, at eigi verði allir á eitt sáttir, ef nokkurir koma, þeir er sannir eru, ok beiðask lands ok ríkis.' Erlingr segir: 'Með því, herra, at eigi er ritat í öllum lögþókum, at sá skuli (eigi) konungr vera, er eigi er konungs sonr, ok væri þat at yðru ráði ok annarra byskupa, at Magnús væri til konungs tekinn yfir allt landit, þá meguð þér svá styrkja hann ok hans ríki, at þat sé guðs lög, at hann sé konungr. Vildið þér smyrja hann ok kóróna ok gefa hönnum konungs vígslu, þá má eigi því neita, því at eru bæði guðs lög ok manna, en hann ok ek skal veita yðr fullan styrk til allrar framkvæmdar, er þér vilið kraft hafa.' Erkibyskup hugsaði þetta mál ok talaði við Erling, þar til er þat var allt ráðit ok var sá fundr lagðr um sumarit í Björgvin.

Heimskringla (Magnúss saga Erlingssonar, ch. 21; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, III 395–97):

Ok eitt sinn var þat í ræðum þeira, at Erlingr spurði: 'Er þat með sannendum, herra, er menn segja, at þér hafið aukit auralag um sakeyri yðarn við bæendr norðr í landit?' Erkibyskup svarar: 'Þat er víst satt, at bæendr hafa mér þat veitt at auka auralag um sakeyri minn. Hafa þeir þat gort at sjálfræði sínu, en með engum pyndingum, aukit í því guðs dýrð ok auðæfi staðar várs.' Erlingr segir: 'Hvært eru þat lög, herra, ins helga Óláfs konungs eða hafið ér tekit nokkuru frekara þetta mál en svá sem ritit er í lögþókinni?' Erkibyskup segir: 'Svá mun inn heilagi Óláfr konungr löginn hafa sett sem hann fekk þá jáorð ok samþykki alþýðu til, en ekki finnsk þat í hans lögum, at bannat sé at auka guðs rétt.' Erlingr svarar: 'Vilið þér auka yðarn rétt, þá manuð þér styrkja vilja oss til þess, at vér aukim jafnmiklu konungs réttinn.' Erkibyskup segir: 'Aukit hefir þú nú áðr með gnógu nafn ok ríki sonar þíns. En ef ek hefi aflaga tekit auralöginn af þeim Þrœndum, þá ætla ek stœrra bera hin lagabrotin, er sá er konungr yfir landi, er eigi er konungs sonr. Eru þar hvártki til þess lög né dæmi hér í landi.' Erlingr segir: 'Þá er Magnús var til konungs tekinn yfir Noregsríki, var þat gort með yðarri vitand ok ráði ok svá annarra byskupa hér í landi.' Erkibyskup segir: 'Því

héztu þá, Erlingr, ef vér samþykkðim með þér, at Magnús væri til konungs tekinn, at þú skyldir styrkja guðs rétt í öllum stöðum með öllum krapti þínum.' 'Játi ek því,' segir Erlingr, 'at ek hefi heitit at halda guðs lög ok landsrétt með öllum mínum styrk ok konungs. Nú sé ek hér betra ráð til en hvárr okkarr kenni öðrum brigðmæli: Höldum heldr öll einkamál vár. Styrkið þér Magnús konung til ríkis, svá sem þér hafið heitit, en ek skal styrkja yðart ríki til allra farsælligra hluta.' Fór þá öll ræðan mjúkliga með þeim. Þá mælti Erlingr: 'Ef Magnús er eigi svá til konungs tekinn sem forn síðr er til hér í landi, þá meguð þér af yðru valdi gefa honum kórónu, sem guðs lög eru til at smyrja konung til veldis. En þótt ek sjá eigi konungr eða af konungaætt kominn, þá hafa þeir konungar nú verit flestir í váru minni, er eigi vissu jafnvel sem ek til laga eða landsréttar. En móðir Magnúss konungs er konungs dóttir ok dróttningar skilfengin. Magnús er ok dróttningar sonr ok eiginkonu sonr. En ef þér vilið gefa honum konungsvígslu, þá má engi hann taka síðan af konungdóminum at réttu. Eigi var Viljálmr bastardr konungs sonr, ok var hann vígðr ok kórónaðr til konungs yfir Englandi, ok hefir síðan haldizk konungdómr í hans ætt á Englandi ok allir verit kórónaðir. Eigi var Sveinn Úlfsson í Danmörk konungs sonr, ok var hann þó þar kórónaðr konungr ok síðan synir hans ok hverr eptir annan þeira frænda kórónaðr konungr. Nú er hér í landi erkistóll. Er þat mikill vegr ok tígn lands várs. Aukum vér nú enn með góðum hlutum, höfum konung kórónaðan eigi síðr en enskir menn eða Danir.' Síðan töludu þeir erkibyskup ok Erlingr um þetta mál optliga, ok fór allt sáttgjarnliga.

GOLDEN AGES AND FISHING GROUNDS:
THE EMERGENT PAST IN THE *ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR*

BY SLAVICA RANKOVIĆ

How golden is the golden age of the sagas?

CONSIDERING THE IMPORTANCE of the Settlement period to the *Íslendingasögur*, Gunnar Karlsson (2000, 50) remarks that ‘it has been argued convincingly that all ethnic groups find a golden age in their past if they need it in the present’. The ambience of the *Íslendingasögur*, like that of other stories about community origins, is permeated by nostalgia, yet their representation of the past escapes the determinism of the golden-age narrative framework. They lack the clear linear progression from initial bliss and innocence, followed by fatal hubris and descent into a dark age with the promise of a possible rebirth, that Anthony Smith (1986, 192) suggests is played out in all myths of ethnic origins. Taking his cue from Kenneth Minogue, Smith argues (191) that

these myths resemble the motif of the Sleeping Beauty, pricked by the external forces of evil and put to sleep until the nationalist dawn arrives to restore the community to its true self in a new ‘golden age’.

In the *Íslendingasögur* it is precisely the beauty of the Beauty that comes under scrutiny; rather than dwelling too much on external evil (designing kings of Norway and their henchmen), the sagas are instead focused on the handsome but already corrupted and inwardly scarred body of the Icelandic Commonwealth. Indeed, most of the *Íslendingasögur* cast a long yearning gaze at Iceland’s beginnings, the time when noble pioneers, unwilling to sacrifice their freedom to a tyrant, came to claim an uninhabited land, a little piece of paradise. On closer inspection, however, tyrants in the sagas are never simply tyrants, their victims are equally victims of their own characters, and even the ‘promised land’ is sometimes seen as a poor exchange for the old country, as a *Kaldbakr* ‘cold-backed mountain’ (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 1936, 22; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 15) or a fishing ground: *Í þá veiðistöð kem ek aldregi á gamals aldri* ‘I do not intend to spend my old age in that fishing camp’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 5; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V 2).

The *Íslendingasögur*, then, would qualify as a very strange kind of golden-age story, only in so far as they are, like any inquiry into the past, subject to the utopian desires of their authors and their audiences. As Smith explains (1986, 177):

Nostalgia is so often linked with utopia; our blueprints for the future are inevitably derived from our experiences of our pasts, and as we travel forward, we do so looking backwards to a past that seems knowable and intelligible and which alone can 'make sense' of a future that is forever neither.

The utopia, the comfort of a dream and wish-fulfilment, however, is not all the sagas offer. The past we encounter in them is an intricate blend of glory and misery, a fusion of the seeds of prosperity and destruction. If this suggests anything about the desires of the saga writers, it is their need not to escape the present (by either invoking the former vigour and unsullied magnificence of the 'Sleeping Beauty', or joining her in her slumber and dreaming of a 'new dawn'), but rather to understand it and derive hope from it. At the same time, these lively contradictions, the variety of perspectives on the past which compete against, or modulate one another in the sagas, have a profound aesthetic effect on the reader. It is the complex construction of the past in the sagas that the present study sets out to explore.

Pathways to the past in the Íslendingasögur

It was Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1953) who suggested that the Age of Settlement, as it appears in the sagas, is a construct of the Sturlung Age, or that perhaps there was dialogue between the two. This idea has since had a great impact on saga scholarship, shifting the emphasis from the sagas as more or less direct reflections of socio-historical conditions. Einar Ól. Sveinsson's recognition that the sagas reveal most about the time of their composition, and a relatively recent shift of interest from political to social history, have, as Bjarne Fidjestøl (1997, 250) notes, again given the sagas 'a chance to be counted sources of history', since they are 'a study of how a society operates without central power'. Thus the sagas have come to be considered as 'ethnographic documents' (Whaley 2000, 166; see also Byock 2001, 21), 'a medium of cultural memory' (Glauser 2000, 211), or as what the French Annales School identified as *longue durée* histories. As such, the sagas do not necessarily commit themselves to 'facts' about past events; rather, they are faithful to the impact that these events made on a community. They document 'coming to terms with the past' (Glauser 2000, 204), which is also coming to terms with the present.

This, of course, is only one way of approaching the past in the sagas. An alternative way, intimately related to it, stems from another idea of Einar Ól. Sveinsson's that is of much interest here, as it concerns the way the past is represented in the sagas. Einar (1953, 75) links the turbulent times, the 'shifting winds' of the Sturlung Age, with 'a kind of cold and sceptical power of observation' and 'a curious sobriety and realism' in the sagas. He says:

[The] Sturlung Age was anything but of a piece. Lies and virtues existed side by side, and wherever the vices seemed about to prevail absolutely, words or incidents could crop up to show the opposite. And in this changeable atmosphere grew the masterpieces of the age, the Sagas of Icelanders.

More recently, Torfi Tulinius (2000, 242, 261, 260) points to 'uncertain identities' and 'questioning of the ideological foundations of the social system' in thirteenth-century Iceland as factors contributing to the appeal of saga literature. Furthermore, Tulinius perceives these in more general terms—as traits both of a society in crisis (or transition) and of 'sophisticated fiction in the Western tradition'.

When the focus is thus seen to be on the historical and social circumstances of thirteenth-century Iceland, the picture that emerges is that of a society in turmoil generating a medium (*Íslendingasögur*) in which it tries to work itself out, exploring different pathways and leaving them visible. This, in turn, has an aesthetic effect. Torfi Tulinius argues this position very persuasively. The present paper will approach the issue from the other end; instead of asking what it is in the socio-historical circumstances that supports the representational complexity of the sagas, I seek to explore what it is in the literary texture of the sagas that brings the past forth so vividly.

I shall approach the question on two levels and, therefore, in two sections. The first deals with the explicit concern of saga authors with the veracity of the material related, as well as their engagement with a variety of authenticating devices which we tend to associate with historiography. By questioning and authenticating the material, the saga authors counter some of the reader's doubts even before they arise, or at least channel them away. Voicing concerns about veracity and authentication requires the saga authors to take a step back from the diegetic level of the narrative, and while my first section considers these instances, the second explores the ways the sagas achieve credibility on the diegetic plane itself. Thus the second section is concerned with the presentation of events, their complexity and ambiguity, the way that various perspectives, each valid in its own right, meet, compete, negotiate. The interplay of these

perspectives, the refusal to settle for definitive explanations, gives past events in the sagas the appearance of processes; they come across as animated and real. It is through this richness of both texture and framing, I shall argue, that a compelling past emerges from the sagas.

It is important to note at this point that the remarkable representational complexity and realism of the sagas is already to a certain extent facilitated by the very nature of their traditional medium and their distributed authorship.¹ As products of a network of authors (oral story-tellers, writers, scribes) and evolving through time, the *Íslendingasögur* escape the relative determinism characteristic of the agency of an individual author. This determinism is further diffused by their ‘traditional referentiality’ (Foley 1991,7), that is, the expansion of the immediate borders of the text at hand by the readers’/listeners’ knowledge of tradition. Furthermore, the general weakness in thirteenth-century Iceland of the social forces that control and channel art production (centralised state, Church), makes the sagas come across as little other than indexes of their own coming into being, preserving, meshing and contrasting the old and the new, the general and the more idiosyncratic perspectives on past events and characters. In so doing they fail to arouse in the recipient the feeling of being addressed and possibly manipulated by an all-encompassing organising authority. The non-linear dynamics of saga production are beyond the scope of the present study, however, and warrant separate discussion.

1. Realism of Authentication and Questioning

One important feature of epic, whether in verse, like *The Song of Roland*, *Beowulf*, *The Nibelungenlied*, or in prose, like the *Íslendingasögur*, is the prominence of narrative. As opposed to the lyric in which the speaking subject tends to loom large, the narrator of an epic is usually withdrawn, shrouded in the omniscience of third-person narration. It is only rarely that he emerges from under this shroud, and most commonly he does this in order to evade direct responsibility for the account and invoke the authority of the collective. This has profound consequences for the credibility of the account. Before considering this, however, let me briefly address the generic compatibility of the admittedly very diverse texts classed together here as ‘epic’.

¹ The ‘distributed author’ as the vital facet of the ‘emergent realism’ of the sagas is further discussed in Ranković 2005. The relation of these terms to the concepts of ‘emergence’ and ‘distributed representation’ as studied in the sciences of complexity (e.g. studies of neural networks, artificial intelligence, evolutionary computation) is also discussed there.

It is important to note that the verse/prose distinction is in itself a very dubious generic marker. As Aristotle (1996, 4) famously pointed out, ‘Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the form of verse they use’. (The verse of the former was epic poetry, and that of the latter was scientific tracts.) What J. B. Hainsworth (1991, 4) notes for the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, also applies here: these texts ‘are not attempts with varying success at the same form, but different forms of epic’. While *The Song of Roland*, *Beowulf*, *The Nibelungenlied* and the *Íslendingasögur* are each undoubtedly *sui generis* (the long history of epic inevitably results in a break up of the form into subgenres (Hainsworth 1991, 5)), at the same time they share much more with each other than they do with Shakespeare’s sonnets or Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex*. In broader generic terms, being concerned with narration, they all belong to the same group: epic. Moreover, they all exhibit ‘a certain idea of heroic action’ and are ‘artistic expressions of the survival myth of the nation’, which Hainsworth (1991, 10, 150) deems the most important qualities of epic. On the other hand, Carol Clover rightly points out that although the sagas deal with ‘generally “epic” subjects’, they still lack and sometimes ironise ‘a kind of heroic grandeur’ implied by ‘epic’ (1986, 10). It is questionable, however, whether this attitude warrants a separate generic label, and the alternative that Clover suggests (‘the long prose form’) is somewhat too general. Self-irony is not foreign to epic and could equally be perceived as an evolutionary development within the genre. As Jeremy Downes (1997, 17) notes: ‘the repudiation of past epics is in itself a traditional move, a *recursion* to those very epics’. Downes’s extensive study of the epic—from classical to modern and postcolonial—demonstrates a ‘gradual inclusion of different voices, and different forms of tradition’ (1997, 248) within this genre, thus revealing its remarkable robustness and vitality.

To return to our main argument, the evasion of responsibility for an account is a trait of oral epic, but it can also be detected in the literary ones mentioned. *The Song of Roland*, *Beowulf*, *The Nibelungenlied* and the *Íslendingasögur* are all traditional narratives produced at the interface of orality and literacy. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that some oral creative principles and traits should still be at play in these texts.² And,

² For a more thorough discussion of such features as collective production (copying as more than a mechanical affair; dictation to secretarial scribes), oral transmission of written texts (most of the audience is illiterate and is read to), and written texts being absorbed back into oral tradition and recycled, see, for example Ong 1982; Kellogg 1979; Doane 1991.

as we shall see, the evasion of responsibility is too useful a part of that inheritance to be dispensed with lightly.

Epic poets in oral societies do not consider themselves the authors of epic poems but rather ‘stewards of tradition’ (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 76) and even when they produce a new poem, they would sooner say they heard it from others than lay a claim to the authorship themselves. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1976, I 536), the nineteenth-century reformer of Serbian language, a famous collector of folk literature and a protégé of Jakob Grimm and J. W. Goethe, testifies to this:

Among the common folk no one thinks it any kind of mastery or glory to compose a new poem; and not only do they not seek the credit for it, but each (precisely the one who did compose it) denies this and says that he heard it from another (my translation).

This is not done out of some misguided sense of modesty, but because it is a powerful authenticating device on the one hand, while on the other it suggests the poem’s aesthetic merit. Since, generally, epic poets want to be taken seriously (after all, they are relating ‘a tale of the tribe’), they call upon the authority of the collective to assert the veracity of their account. In addition, as Radmila Pešić (1990, 13) points out, drawing on Bogatirev and Jakobson, ‘a statement that the song has been heard from another affirms its value’ (my translation). Only a worthwhile song survives the censure of the collective, so the statement that it has been passed on to the singer also acts as a kind of advertisement; the audience is led to anticipate some good entertainment.

The writers of literary epics adopt and employ the evasion of responsibility in much the same fashion as their oral counterparts. The creator of *Beowulf*, for example, begins by announcing that the story is going to be about *Gar-Dena* ‘the Spear-Danes’ and their princes whose heroic campaigns *we . . . gefrunon* ‘we have heard of’ (*Beowulf* 1950, 1; *Beowulf* 2002, 3). Similarly, describing the journey of Siegfried and his companions to Iceland, the narrator of *Das Nibelungenlied* informs us: *An dem zwelften morgen, sô wir hæren sagen, / heten si die winde verre dan getragen / gegen Isensteine in Prünhilde lant* ‘By the twelfth morning, so we are told, the winds have carried them far away to Isenstein in Brunhild’s land’ (*Das Nibelungenlied* 1948, 49; *The Nibelungenlied* 1969, 58). As the authenticating power of written sources grows stronger compared to oral tradition, the author (or scribe) of the Oxford manuscript of *La Chanson de Roland*, Tuoldus, verifies his account by also referring to written records, charters and letters: *Il est escrit es carters e es brefs* (*La Chanson de Roland* 1942, 49).

While in the examples cited above the emphasis is simply either on the narrators being told or hearing a story, or having read about the events they recount in certain unidentified historical records, the *Íslendingasögur* go a step further. There, instances in which the presence of the narrator is made known in order to affirm the veracity of an account are, though by no means common, far more frequent, elaborate and varied. More surprisingly, narrators do not always come across as unquestioning transmitters of ancient knowledge, but occasionally reflect on their material; a rudimentary critical consideration or even outright concern about the veracity of the story related is put forward. Occasionally they also supplement their material with contemporary knowledge or a later state of affairs in order to verify a past event. This greater variety of authenticating devices in the sagas is to an extent facilitated by their prose medium: the pressure for economy of expression that leads to stylisation is certainly stronger in poetry than in prose. At the same time, their use of prose cannot be the only explanation, since a comparable range of authenticating devices is also found in Serbian epic poetry. To my mind this points to an evolutionary trend within epic, but the question needs further elaboration and falls outside the scope of the present argument (see Ranković 2005). Here the interest primarily rests with the ways the sagas create a strong impression of objectivity, or as J. B. Hainsworth (1991, 143) calls it, ‘that verisimilitude that in poetry passes for truth’.

1.1 Affinities with Historiography

The twelfth century marked the beginning, and the thirteenth witnessed a flowering, of historiographical writing in Iceland, and according to Vésteinn Ólason (1998, 49), this development is ‘now widely regarded as representing the beginnings of saga-writing’. As noted earlier, the medium of the *Íslendingasögur*, like that of historiography, is prose, and objectivity becomes a poetic principle, a feature of style. The self-conscious concern of the sagas with history is, Vésteinn Ólason continues, detectable in their ‘secular perspective, . . . inclusion of skaldic stanzas, and a narrative style easily distinguishable from clerical prose’. But the reverse is also true, and Sturla Þórðarson’s version of *Landnámabók* bears witness to the influence the sagas exerted on this historical work. As Judith Jesch (1984, 296) notes:

It is likely that the origins (written as well as traditional) of *Ldn* go back to before the first *Íslendingasögur* were written. But as the Sagas of Icelanders became an important aspect of literary activity, the overlap in subject matter between them and *Ldn* led to rapprochement between the two genres.

Just how close together sagas and historiographical pieces come in representing past events can be glimpsed from the following excerpts from *Sturlubók* and *Laxdæla saga* respectively:

Auðr var þá á Katanesi, er hon spurði fall Þorsteins. Hon lét þá gera knorr í skógi á laun, en er hann var búinn, helt hon út í Orkneyjar; þar gipti hon Gró, dóttur Þorsteins rauðs; hon var móðir Grélaðar, er Þorfinnr hausakljúfr átti. (*Íslendingabók. Landnámabók* 1986, 136–38)

Aud was in Caithness when she learned of Thorstein's death; she had a ship built secretly in a forest, and when it was ready she sailed away to Orkney. There she married off Groa, daughter of Thorstein the Red. Groa was mother of Grelod who married Thorfinn the Skull-Splitter. (*The Book of Settlements* 1972, 51)

Unnr djúpúðga var á Katanesi, er Þorsteinn fell, sonr hennar; ok er hon frá þat, at Þorsteinn var látinn, en faðir hennar andaðr, þá þóttisk hon þar enga uppreist fá mundu. Eptir þat lætr hon gera knorr í skógi á laun; ok er skipit var algort, þá bjó hon skipit ok hafði auð fjár. Hon hafði brott með sér allt frændlið sitt, þat er á lífi var, ok þykkjask menn varla dæmi til finna, at einn kvenmaðr hafi komizk í brott ór því líkum ófriði með jafnmiklu fé ok foruneyti; má af því marka, at hon var mikit afbragð annarra kvenna. Unnr hafði ok með sér marga þá menn, er mikils váru verðir ok stórættaðir. Maðr er nefndr Kollr, er einna var mest verðr af foruneyti Unnar; kom mest til þess ætt hans; hann var hersir at nafni. Sá maðr var ok í ferð með Unni, er Hqrðr hét; hann var enn stórættaðr maðr ok mikils verðr. Unnr heldr skipinu í Orkneyjar, þegar er hon var búin; þar dvalðisk hon litla hríð. Þar gipti hon Gró, dóttur Þorsteins rauðs; hon var móðir Greilaðar, er Þorfinnr jarl átti, sonr Torf-Einars jarls, sonar Rognvalds Mærajarls. (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 7–8)

Unn was at Caithness when her son Thorstein was killed. Upon learning that her son had been killed, and as her father had died as well, she felt her future prospects there were rather dim. She had a knorr built secretly in the forest. When it was finished, she made the ship ready and set out with substantial wealth. She took along all her kinsmen who were still alive, and people say it is hard to find another example of a woman managing to escape from such a hostile situation with as much wealth and as many followers. It shows what an outstanding woman Unn was.

Unn also took along with her many other people of note and of prominent families. One of the most respected of them was a man named Koll, not least because he came from a renowned family and was himself a hersir. Another man of both rank and distinction making the journey with Unn was named Hord.

Her preparations complete, Unn sailed to the Orkneys, where she stayed for a short while. There she arranged the marriage of Groa, Thorstein the Red's daughter. Groa was the mother of Grelod, who was married to Earl Thorfinn, the son of Earl Turf-Einar and grandson of Rognvald, Earl of More. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V 3–4)

The italicised passages are those where the saga is more elaborate than *Sturlubók*. The saga includes Auðr/Unnr's motivation for leaving Caithness and the people she took along. In terms of the journey and the chronology of the events that took place as well as in phrasing, however, the two accounts overlap nearly completely. The question of which sagas or parts of sagas (oral or written) inspired the sketches we find in *Landnámabók*, and which developed as literary elaborations of these sketches, may well amount to the chicken and egg quandary,³ and is not the object of this inquiry. What is of interest, however, is the ease with which the two genres seem to be able to flow into one another. Also telling is the fact that saga authors and historiographers, although 'hardly unaware of the formal differences between the two genres' (Jesch 1984, 283), still do not perceive these as being so vast as to prevent them from relying on each other's accounts. Some authors, of course, wrote texts of both kinds. Indeed, as I shall later argue, saga authors (or perhaps scribes who noticed the similarities between the accounts) call upon famous historiographers such as Ari Þorgilsson and Sturla Þórðarson to verify their claims. And, conversely, historiographers also call upon the authority of sagas. So, in his version of *Landnámabók*, Sturla notes: *þar var Þórðr gellir leiddr í, áðr hann tók mannvirðing, sem segir í sögu hans* 'Thord Gellir was led to the hills before he took over the chieftaincy, as is told in his saga' (*Íslendingabók. Landnámabók* 1986, 140; *The Book of Settlements* 1972, 52).

It is this close contact with the works which we today perceive as historiography that gives saga literature its distinct and peculiar documentary quality.

1.2 Genealogies and Ultimate Truths

Unlike most of the epics which tend to concentrate on one or a few particular events (the battle of Roncevaux in *The Song of Roland*, or the clash of Huns and Burgundians in *The Nibelungenlied*), the *Íslendingasögur* are, rather like medieval chronicles, concerned with the larger picture, with causes, effects and contexts. One of the defining features of the sagas is the extensive genealogies in the opening chapters, or chapters which introduce new characters. They trace the descent of heroes

³ Discussing Sturla's version of *Landnámabók*, Judith Jesch (1982–85, 8) notes: 'Which sagas were used by Sturla is to some extent uncertain, since it is not always possible to distinguish between a saga which was a source for *Ldn*, and one for which *Ldn* was a source.'

and heroines through one or more ancestors—kings or nobles in Norway, or prominent Icelandic settlers. Just how elaborate these genealogies can be, and how far into the past they can reach, becomes apparent in the following example, taken from the opening of *Eiríks saga rauða*:

Óláfr hét herkonungr, er kallaðr var Óláfr hvíti. Hann var sonr Ingjalds konungs Helgasonar, Ólafssonar, Guðrøðarsonar, Hálfðanarsonar hvítbeins Upplendinga-konungs. (*Eiríks saga rauða* 1935, 195)

There was a warrior king named Oleif who was called Oleif the White. He was the son of King Ingjald, the son of Helgi, son of Olaf, son of Gudrod, son of Halfdan White-leg, king of the people of Oppland. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 1)

But any reader who thinks the story will be about Óláfr hvíti is greatly mistaken, for he is killed within the next few sentences. Instead the journey to Iceland of his widow Auðr/Unnr in djúpúðga, who was *dóttir Ketils flatnefs, Bjarnarsonar bunu, ágæts manns ór Nóregi* ‘daughter of Ketil Flat-nose, son of Bjorn Buna, an excellent man from Norway’ (*Eiríks saga rauða* 1935, 195; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 1), is briefly recounted. Yet if one thinks the story will dwell on Auðr’s settlement one is mistaken once again, since it turns to Auðr’s bondsman Vífill, whom she freed upon her arrival in Iceland. Vífill is not the focus of the saga either; rather, the story settles around the fortunes and adventures (not least her voyage to America) of his granddaughter, Guðríðr. What today to an untrained eye may seem a long and somewhat arbitrary list of names must once have been full of meaningful references, each invoking its own exciting stories and thus providing a contextual anchor for the saga at hand. On the plane of the narrative itself, the genealogy also provides an important insight into character. If Guðríðr becomes a brave pioneer, a woman of faith and a grandmother to a bishop by the end of the saga, then there needs to be something in her roots to recommend her and to tie everything together. The saga author finds only an ancestral slave-grandfather, albeit an exceptional one who comes highly commended by no less a figure than the renowned matriarch, one of the first Icelandic settlers, Auðr in djúpúðga. Celebrated as this woman is, the saga author may perhaps have thought it appropriate to add a touch of glamour to this Icelandic connection by reminding the readers of her noble Norwegian father and her Viking-king husband. Genealogy thus becomes a powerful authenticating device, both in terms of content and form: on the one hand, it has its roots firmly set in ancient Scandinavian tradition, on the other, it is unmistakably evocative of biblical genealogies and, through both of these connections, of ultimate truths.

1.3 *Þat mæltu sumir . . . Svá segir Ari/Sturla*

After the demise of her husband, the hero Gunnarr, in whose downfall she has played a part, the hated Hallgerðr is mentioned on another occasion in *Njáls saga*. This time it is in connection with rumours about her relationship with the Norwegian scoundrel Hrappr. Though the author's opinion might perhaps be inferred later on, when one of the characters calls Hallgerðr *hornkerling eða púta* 'either a cast-off hag or a whore' (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 228; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, III 109), the author is careful with his direct judgment of the affair. He leaves the truth as an open question: *Þat mæltu sumir, at vingott væri með þeim Hallgerði ok hann [Hrappr] fíflði hana, en sumir mæltu því í móti* 'Some say that he [Hrappr] and Hallgerðr were friendly and that he had seduced her, but others denied this' (*Brennu-Njáls saga* 1954, 220; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, III 105). The affirmation and denial are left poised in the balance. The syntactic construction 'some people say this, while others say that' functions, Robert Kellogg notes (1991, 93–94), as a 'stylistic device designed to enhance the impression of a story's substance', and is a formulaic feature of the sagas.⁴ An expression, of course, becomes a formula only if it serves its purpose successfully, and the fact that this expression is so common in the *Íslendingasögur* must signal a genuine concern. Theodore M. Andersson notes (1966, 14):

It would . . . seem that the saga authors were accustomed to having conflicting traditions at hand and when they profess a lack of them, they are serious. They are informing the reader that the tradition goes no further, though it might reasonably have done so.

Whether or not the author of *Njáls saga* genuinely weighed the truth of this particular instance (the likelihood of Hallgerðr's alleged involvement with Hrappr) is both uncertain and immaterial to this inquiry. What is important, however, is the fact that he was trying to ensure 'the impression of a story's substance', making certain that the audience will trust him both here, and in other places too, where he might want to be more assertive.

In the sagas of Icelanders 'the people' whose collective authority is invoked and relied upon so often occasionally cease to be an anonymous

⁴ For a comprehensive survey of the appearance of the phrase *þat mæltu sumir* and its variations in the sagas, see Andersson 1966. See also Manhire's criticism (1974–77, 175) of the premise upon which Andersson's inference of spurious and genuine usages of this phrase is based: 'There is no reason why source-references should not be "genuine" and rhetorical at the same time'.

mass, and a concrete historical or scholarly figure emerges as an arbiter of truth. Thus, *Laxdæla saga* refers to Ari Þorgilsson: *svá segir Ari Þorgilsson inn fróði um líflát Þorsteins, at hann felli á Katanesi* ‘Thorstein . . . was killed at Caithness, according to Ari Thorgilson the Learned’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 7; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V 3). Or *Síðan andaðisk Snorri. Hann hafði þá sjau vetr ins sjaunda tigar. Þat var einum vetri eptir fall Óláfs konungs ins helga; svá sagði Ari prestr inn fróði* ‘Snorri then died, aged three score years and seven, one year after the fall of King Olaf the Saint, according to the priest Ari the Learned’ (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 226; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, V 118). While the present tense of the verb *segja* in the first example provides the reference to Ari with the sense of immediacy, the second one achieves a similar effect by providing a specific time reference: ‘one year after the fall of King Olaf the Saint’. In this last case, the surviving fragment of *Ævi Snorra goða* suggests the possibility of a historiographic source behind the author’s remark; as noted earlier, the two genres of historiography and saga often encroach upon one another. Similarly, the author of *Grettis saga* calls upon the authority of another distinguished historian, Sturla Þórðarson, in order to establish when he settled on Drangey island, and also when giving a final assessment of Grettir at the end of the saga (*Grettis saga* 1936, 226, 289; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 159, 191). Interestingly enough, the same saga author occasionally treats his hero as one of the ‘witnesses’, reporting his testimony, rather than offering it as a piece of dialogue, which serves to promote the documentary effect. In addition, the authority of the saga author is enhanced, since he places himself in a direct relationship to the source. Thus, after Grettir’s legendary encounter with the bear, we are informed that *Svá hefir Grettir sagt, at hann þóttisk þá aflraun mesta gort hafa, at halda dýrinu* ‘He [Grettir] said later that holding off that bear was his greatest feat of strength’ (*Grettis saga* 1936, 77; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 84). After the struggle with the undead Glámr, the hero’s testimony is called upon again: *svá hefir Grettir sagt sjálf, at þá eina sýn hafi hann sét svá, at honum brygði við* ‘Grettir himself has said that this [Glámr glaring up at the moon] was the only sight that ever unnerved him’ (*Grettis saga* 1936, 121; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 106). Whether or not the audience believed in the living dead, the form itself is there to give the material a documentary style.

Yet this does not mean that the author of *Grettis saga* in any way neglects the content of the story, or that he in any way counts on the

blind trust of his audience. On the contrary, he counts on the shrewdness of at least some of its members. This becomes apparent when one considers the way in which the men gathered at the Assembly interpret young Grettir's verses, just after everybody has learned about the death of Skeggi, a farmhand with whom Grettir has had a dispute regarding a missing food-bag. In Grettir's verse, the death of Skeggi is ascribed to a *hamartroll* 'cleft-dwelling troll/ogress' (*Grettis saga* 1936, 47; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 69). The men seriously consider the verse but are not inclined to believe it, since they 'know' that trolls do not attack in daylight. Their leader, Þorkell, goes a step further in his interpretation. He knows the language of poetry and he knows that the 'ogress' in Grettir's verse might equally well be an axe, and that the verses are actually his declaration of the killing. So he is interested not so much in the 'whodunit' of the story as in how the whole thing happened. He dismisses his men's interpretation with the following words: *Qnnur efni munu í vera, ok mun Grettir hafa drepit hann; eða hvat bar til? 'There is more to it [the verse] than that; Grettir must have killed him. So, how did it happen?' (Grettis saga 1936, 47; The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, II 70). But perception and interpretation are not limited to poetry and those initiated into its secret code; rather, they are exercised (with more or less success) on any story. Thus, after the burning of some Icelanders in Norway is ascribed to Grettir by the ill-wishers who only have circumstantial evidence upon which to build their case, Skapti the Lawspeaker makes the following comment:*

Víst er þetta illt verk, ef svá er, sem þetta er sagt; en jafnan er hálfsoð saga, ef einn segir, því at fleiri eru þess fúsari, at færa þangat, sem eigi berr betr, ef tvennt er til. Nú mun ek eigi leggja órskurð á, at Grettir sé sekr gorr um þetta at svá gøru. (*Grettis saga* 1936, 146)

Certainly this is an evil deed, if the account is correct. But one man only tells half a tale, and more people prefer the worse side of a story which has two versions. I shall not declare Grettir an outlaw for this deed under the present circumstances. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 119)

Presuming that this is Skapti's clever way of persuading the people gathered to be more favourably inclined to Grettir (or at least keep an open mind), one still has to acknowledge that in order for it to work, the assumptions regarding the credibility of the stories that underlie his argument have to be widely accepted. In as much as this passage recommends caution to anyone faced with just a single version of an account, and who is uneasy with their attraction to the more overt and lurid side of a story, it reads as a saga-writing manifesto.

Whether some of the references to Ari, Sturla and ‘some people’ were made by the original authors or were later additions by diligent scribes is not crucial to the present study. First, none of the original manuscripts survive, which means that every saga that we have now went through at least one redaction (and it is the redactions we mean when we say ‘the sagas of Icelanders’, not the lost originals whose contents forever remain in the realm of speculation). Therefore, the scribes are not to be discounted but rather taken to contribute to the whole notion of saga authorship. Second, in a highly traditional idiom such as that of the sagas, it seems unlikely that a scribe would introduce a novelty which would jar the sensibilities of his predecessors and his audience. Rather, it seems more plausible to imagine that he would have been in tune with established sensibilities, and that each time he added a reference himself, he would have striven to reinforce them.

1.4 Facts, Figures and ‘Evidence’

Another significant authentication strategy in the *Íslendingasögur* is the authors’ interest in facts and figures, in places and time-frames. This is taken even further when the narrator comments on customs, beliefs, religious or legal practices of the past as perceived. Thus the author of *Grettis saga* looks to the time of the Settlement with mild envy: *um rekann var ekki skilit, því at þeir vǫru svá nógir þá, at hværr hafði þat, er vildi* ‘No agreement was reached about harvesting the beach, because so much drifted in that everyone could take what he wanted’ (*Grettis saga* 1936, 23; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 58). Describing a feast that had a soothsayer as part of the entertainment, the author of *Vatnsdæla saga* informs us that *Þeir Ingjaldr efna þar seið eptir fornum sið, til þess at menn leitaði eptir forlögum sínum* ‘Ingjald and his men prepared a magic rite in the old heathen fashion, so that men could examine what the fates had in store for them’ (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 28–29; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 14). On another occasion, concerning a lawsuit at the Assembly that required a character to crawl under three arches of raised turf, we are told that this was done *sem þá var siðr eptir stórar afgörðir* ‘as was then the custom after serious offences’ (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 87; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 43). At the very beginning of the same saga, a character lectures his son on the customs of old chieftains so extensively that we are bound to sense the author’s own impulse to explain them to his audience who must have been (like the modern reader) in greater need of explanation than Ketill’s son could ever have been:

Þat var ríkra manna siðr, konunga eða jarla, várra jafningja, at þeir lágu í hernaði ok ofluðu sér fjár ok frama, ok skyldi þat fé eigi til arfs telja né sonr eptir fjoður taka, heldr skyldi þat fé í haug leggja hjá sjálfum höfðingjum. Nú þótt synir þeira tœki jarðir, máttu þeir eigi haldask í sínum kostum, þótt virðing felli til, nema þeir legði sik ok sína menn í hættu ok herskap, aflandi [sér] svá fjár ok frægðar, hverr eptir annan, ok stíga svá í fótspor frændum sínum. (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 5)

It was once the custom of powerful men, kings or earls—those who were our peers—that they went off raiding, and won riches and renown for themselves, and such wealth did not count as any legacy, nor did a son inherit it from his father; rather was the money to lie in the tomb alongside the chieftain himself. And even if the sons inherited the lands, they were unable to sustain their high status, if honour counted for anything, unless they put themselves and their men to risk and went into battle, thereby winning for themselves, each in his turn, wealth and renown—and so following in the footsteps of their kinsmen. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 2)

This concern with authenticity achieves sustained antiquarian intensity via the inclusion of archaeological detail. While *Laxdæla saga* relates certain place-names to Unnr in djúpúðga's exploration of Iceland in a manner typical of legends (as with the place where she loses her comb, which comes to be named Kambsnes), the laconic remark in *Grettis saga* about the fate of the spear we have just witnessed Grettir leaving in the body of one of his enemies sounds more plausible. We are informed that in Sturla Þórðarson's time this spear was found in the very field where the clash took place. Richard Perkins (1989, 243) emphasises the authenticating power of objects like this that are 'mentioned in a *ritöld* source as having a history in the *söguöld* and as still existing in the *ritöld*'. In fact, when the story of an object supposed to have played a part in the *söguöld* cannot be supported by its existence in the *ritöld*, saga authors go out of their way to supply a detailed explanation for such a state of affairs. Perkins draws the following conclusion (254):

This suggests that saga-audiences in the *ritöld* were actively interested in the whereabouts in their own times of some of the more valuable or lethal objects mentioned in the sagas. And perhaps they even expected such objects, or objects purporting to be them, to be available for inspection.

Indeed, the author of *Egils saga* thoroughly exploits this 'availability for inspection' of one of his chosen objects, as he actually gives details of the physical features of the 'evidence'. Describing Skalla-Grímr's search for a suitable rock on which to forge his iron, the author steps out of the immediate narrative frame in order to favour us with the following curiosity:

Liggr sá steinn þar enn ok mikit sindr hjá, ok sér þat á steininum, at hann er barðr ofan ok þat er brimsorfit grjótt ok ekki því grjóti glíkt qðru, er þar er, ok munu nú ekki meira hefja fjórir menn. (*Egils saga* 1933, 79)

That rock is still there with a pile of slag beside it, and its top is marked from being hammered upon. It has been worn by the waves and is different from the other rocks there; four men today could not lift it. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 67)

This passion for historical/archaeological detail, as well as the brisk and matter-of-fact narrative style, provide the reader with a sense of legitimacy and substance.

In this section I have examined the ways in which this sense of legitimacy and substance is achieved in the *Íslendingasögur*. By affirming, questioning or commenting on the veracity of their material, saga authors successfully manage to lower the reader's own investigative drive and thus achieve the impression of a disinterested account.

Reassuring the reader/listener in this way is one of the authentication techniques used in the *Íslendingasögur*. Another equally important technique has less to do with the form and is thus harder to identify within the main texture of the narrative. It is to do with the way events are represented and it is the theme of the next section.

2. Realism of Uncertainty and Contradiction

The importance of the untidy, the unpolished and the contradictory to our sense of authenticity is emphasised by Erich Auerbach whose work, *Mimesis*, has become a classic on the representation of reality in Western literature. Auerbach in fact sees these qualities as factors which, in general, enable us to differentiate easily between the historical and the legendary within a narrative. To be sure, Auerbach recognises that the circumstances of writing a history (its discursive nature, the historian's necessary selectiveness, the effect of his/her own historical contingency and such; see also Hayden White 1978) often demand that a historiographer turn to legend for structure, and mean that, when it comes to detail, distinguishing between history and legend is very difficult. He believes, in a reductionist manner, that even this more detailed differentiation is possible and that the specialist can achieve it through a 'careful historical and philological training' (Auerbach 1953, 19). I shall not discuss this proposition, not simply because our faith in 'careful historical and philological training' is more limited these days, but more because Auerbach leaves it aside himself, concentrating instead on what is of interest to the present study too—the appearance and representation of reality. In this respect 'the

historical' (or realistic) and 'the legendary' (or non-realistic) become aesthetic categories rather than the markers of reliability, and as such, they are, Auerbach maintains (1953, 19), easily recognised:

Their structure is different. Even where the legendary does not immediately betray itself by elements of the miraculous, by the repetition of well-known standard motives, typical patterns and themes, through their neglect of clear details of time and place, and the like, it is generally recognizable by its composition. It runs far too smoothly. All cross-currents, all friction, all that is casual, secondary to the main events and themes, everything unresolved, truncated, and uncertain, which confuses the clear progress of the action and the simple orientation of the actors has disappeared.

It is important to emphasise that the 'historical' and the 'legendary' are treated here as modes of narration, not generic markers, and that legends and fantasies can be (and in the *Íslendingasögur* often are) treated in the 'historical' mode, and conversely, works intended as histories can be (and parts of *Landnámabók* are) treated in the 'legendary' mode. Lars Lönnroth (2002, 456) finds that dreams in the *Íslendingasögur* are 'extraordinarily complex and ambiguous' compared to those in the *Poetic Edda* or the *fornaldarsögur*, and notes that only in the *Íslendingasögur* are dreams related in skaldic verses. Since they are frequently exploited for their authenticating power in the sagas of Icelanders (Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 49) as well as in medieval Icelandic historiography (see Snorri's justification in the Prologue to *Heimskringla*), skaldic verses seem to corroborate the prophetic nature of dreams: whatever is related in them is bound to come to pass. John Lindow (1986, 246 and 280) too speaks of 'the fantastic' in the *Íslendingasögur* in terms of 'the verisimilitude of supernatural experience in saga literature' and 'the empirical supernatural', as opposed to the *fornaldarsögur* and romances where 'the marvellous seems taken for granted and the supernatural attaches rather to it than to reality'. In other words, in the way they are represented, the supernatural and the fantastic in the *Íslendingasögur* do not jeopardise, but rather complement the realism of the sagas.

So, what are the frictions, cross-currents, uncertainties and resistances to clear progression in the sagas' representation of the past that make it realistic? Let us trace them through the themes that every golden-age story has: how a community came to be and the setting in which this becoming is played out (see Smith 1986, in particular the sections entitled 'Poetic Spaces: the Uses of Landscape' and 'Golden Ages: the Uses of History'). In the context of the Settlement stories, we are exploring Haraldr hárfagri's tyranny as the reason for emigrating to Iceland and the images of the new land.

2.1 Generous Tyrants: Join, Fight or Flee?

If, with the whole corpus of the *Íslendingasögur* in mind, we note that in *Egils saga* it is the tyranny of Haraldr that triggers the colonisation of Iceland, it is for *Vatnsdæla* to problematise the issue of tyranny, for in this saga a hero moves to Iceland compelled by destiny and most unwillingly takes leave of his beloved lord. Haraldr is even presented as a dignified royal figure who, sensing that his retainer is about to leave him, makes this known and hints, partly aggrieved, partly irritated, that it is possible to leave with his blessing instead of stealing away, *sem nú tekr mjök at tíðkask* ‘which is very much the fashion nowadays’ (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 34; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 16). On a more detailed level though, both sagas are more intriguing as regards their attitudes to Haraldr. If the narrator of *Egils saga* openly comments that *af þessi áþján flýðu margir menn af landi á brott* ‘many people fled the country to escape this tyranny’ (*Egils saga* 1933, 12; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 36), he also lets other voices be heard, that contradict his opinion of the king and deny that fleeing is the optimal solution. For Sölvi klofi and Egill’s uncle Þórólfr, with their obdurate sense of honour, fleeing is a humiliating act and thus not an option. They differ greatly, however, in the way they see King Haraldr. Sölvi, the son of a defeated king, Húnþjófr, comes to seek help from another minor king and addresses him thus:

Munu þér inn sama kost fyrir höndum eiga, sem vér áttum, at verja fé yðvart ok frelsi ok kosta þar til allra þeira manna, er yðr er liðs at ván, . . . en at öðrum kosti munu þér vilja taka upp þat ráð, sem Naumdælir gerðu, at ganga með sjálfvilja í ánauð ok gerask þrælur Haralds. (*Egils saga* 1933, 8)

You will face the same choice we had: either to defend your property and freedom by staking all the men you can hope to muster . . . or to follow the course taken by the people of Naumdal who voluntarily entered servitude and became Harald’s slaves. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 35)

That Haraldr is an oppressor is taken for granted here, but not everyone in the saga sees joining his ranks as servitude and slavery. In fact, Egill’s uncle regards it as *allfýsiligt* ‘a very attractive proposition’, for Haraldr’s men

eru . . . haldnir miklu betr en allir aðrir í þessu landi. Er mér svá frá sagt konungi, at hann sé inn mildasti af fégjöfum við menn sína ok eigi síðr þess orr at gefa þeim framgang ok veita ríki þeim, er honum þykkja til þess fallnir. En mér spyrsk á þann veg til um alla þá, er bakverpask vilja við honum ok þýðask eigi hann með vináttu, sem allir verði ekki at manna; stökkva sumir af landi á brott, en sumir gerask leigumenn. (*Egils saga* 1933, 14–15)

live a much better life than anyone else in this country. And I'm told that the king is very generous to his men and no less liberal in granting advancement and power to people he thinks worthy of it. I've also heard about all the people who turn their backs on him and spurn his friendship, and they never become great men—some of them are forced to flee the country, and others are made his tenants. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 38)

The narrator's perspective, which foregrounds those who follow the third option—fleeing the country—has the benefit of hindsight and proves ultimately right, of course. People like Sǫlvi klofi never really stand a chance, and people like Þórólfr fall victim to the fickleness of a ruler's favours as well as to their own social ambition. Yet their choices are presented respectfully, as valid options. In the context of the famous lapidary saga style, the amount of space allotted to the speeches of Sǫlvi and Þórólfr, as well as the fact that their words are quoted, not merely summarised by the narrator, underlines the importance given to the stances of these two characters. And they are not just any characters: Þórólfr is the hero of the first thirty chapters of *Egils saga*, and Sǫlvi, although featuring very briefly in *Egils saga*, pops up now and again in Snorri's *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 104–06, 134, 138), on one occasion delivering a nearly identical speech.⁵ We are also told that *Sǫlvi var síðan víkingr mikill langa hríð ok gerði optiliga mikinn skaða á ríki Haralds konungs* 'for a long time Solvi continued as a powerful viking and often inflicted heavy damage in King Harald's realm' (*Heimskringla* 1941–51, I 106; *Heimskringla* 1995, 68). Nor does Sǫlvi ever get caught or killed. None of the king's other opponents in the saga can boast of such feats. It is tempting to conclude that a reader of or listener to *Egils saga*, if not familiar with Snorri's *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, would have known about Sǫlvi's exploits from oral tradition.

Rather than being subverted, slighted or patronised by the narrator, the stances of Sǫlvi and Þórólfr are treated with some admiration. Sǫlvi's brave words hark back to the concept of honour based on physical prowess and moral stamina, a theme much used by saga writers (even if they treated it with conscious archaism), while Þórólfr's social ambition

⁵ This is not surprising if *Egils saga* is indeed the work of Snorri Sturluson, as some scholars believe (see for example Nordal's introduction to *Egils saga* 1933, or more recently, Torfi H. Tulinius 2002). On its own, however, the passage in question is not enough to confirm this. On the one hand, Snorri would, of course, be capable of copying the speech from *Egils saga* even if he were not its author, and on the other, oral tradition too is capable of preserving such a speech.

is not necessarily perceived as negative, but is well established within Viking pragmatism and entrepreneurial ethics. Besides, balanced, diplomatic people in *Egils saga* such as Þórólfr's kinsman, Ólvir hnúfa, or Egill's friend Arinbjörn, seem to flourish in the service of a king, even when he comes to be called Eiríkr Blood-Axe. When such different perspectives are presented as legitimate, the narrator's own bias becomes modified, even blurred by these other points of view, and thus not oppressive. Whether the inclusion of these different yet valid perspectives is the result of a self-conscious decision on the part of the saga writer, or whether he simply left unmoulded and unpolished the accreted (and occasionally disparate) material from oral tradition, the effect is the same: the saga is surrounded with the aura of a document.

We encounter a similar array of perceptions of Haraldr and attitudes to the settlement of Iceland if we start from a text apparently at the opposite end of the scale—*Vatnsdæla saga*. While this saga may project the kindest view of Haraldr, it also includes the harshest. In the words of the hero's foster-brother, 'kings' (and the plural here is a euphemism because it is Haraldr whom the character has in mind) are paired with criminals (*illræðismenn*, 'evil-doers'):

ok ætla ek nú í sumar til Íslands og vit báðir bræðr, ok láta sér nú þat margir sóma, þótt gofgir sé; er mér sagt gott frá landakostum, at þar gangi fé sjálfala á vetrum, en fiskr í hverju vatni, skógar miklir, en frjálsir af ágangi konunga ok illræðismanna. (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 30–31)

I am off to Iceland this summer along with my brother, and many consider this no shame even though they are of noble birth. I have heard good things about the land—that livestock feed themselves during the winters, that there are fish in every river and lake, and great forests, and that men are free from the assaults of kings and criminals. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 15)

The hero, Ingimundr, is (we hear at some length) on friendly terms with the king, but it is important to note that soon after this, he follows his foster-brother's lead and sets off to Iceland.

With the whole saga corpus in mind, *Vatnsdæla* and *Egils saga* may represent two extremes in the spectrum of possible attitudes to Haraldr hárfagri, yet whatever we learn in either of them about the king and his impact on the colonisation of Iceland is still very intricate. In each of these sagas we see a strong figure dominating the Norwegian political scene: a unifier of the kingdom and an obstinate upstart; a source of opportunities and social advancement, and a despoiler of freedom and lives; a dignified ruler, a righteous man, and a paranoid tyrant, a man prone to flattery and easily manipulated. The opposites I have identified

here in what Auerbach would probably regard as ‘legendary mode’ are, of course, not presented so starkly in the two sagas. Rather, all these Haraldrs negotiate with or modulate one another. In addition, the Norwegian political scene itself is not, as we have seen, represented as being of a piece and, therefore, the reactions to Haraldr’s rise and the responses to the emigration to Iceland are layered.

The whole notion of tyranny as the reason for emigration is further cast into relief by the sagas that fall in between the two extremes discussed. An example is *Gísla saga*, in which king Haraldr is not even mentioned, but in which the hero lands himself in trouble for personal reasons, is outlawed from Norway and has to leave; or *Hrafnkels saga*, in which we are only informed in passing that the time when the hero’s father came to Iceland was that of Haraldr. In this case the narrator may have counted on his audience’s knowledge of Haraldr’s tyranny, but then again, writing after the end of the Commonwealth, he may have chosen not to make a big point of it: Iceland could hardly represent a tyrant-free safe-haven any longer. *Laxdæla saga* may begin with opposition to Haraldr, but it represents the emigration to Iceland as happening from the Viking colonies in Britain, with the fall of the Norse kings of York and Dublin suggesting the crumbling of the Viking dominions as an all-encompassing problem and thus shifting the focus from the narrow field of Haraldr’s tyranny in Norway.

2.2 Desolate Outcrops or Fields Dripping with Butter?

Hann [Skalla-Grímr] lét gera bæ á Álptanesi ok átti þar bú annat, lét þaðan sækja útróðra ok selveiðar ok eggver, er þá váru gnóg fong þau öll, svá rekavið at láta at sér flytja. Hvalkvámur váru þá ok miklar, ok skjóta mátti sem vildi; allt var þar þá kyrrt í veiðistöð, er þat var óvant manni. It þriðja bú átti hann við sjóinn á vestanverðum Mýrum; var þar enn betr komit at sitja fyrir rekum, ok þar lét hann hafa sæði ok kalla at Ökrum. Eyjar lágu þar út fyrir, er hvalr fannsk í, ok kölluðu þeir Hvalseyjar. Skalla-Grímr hafði ok menn sína uppi við laxárnar til veiða. (*Egils saga* 1933, 75)

He [Skallagrim] had a farmstead built on Alftanes and ran another farm there, and rowed out from it to catch fish and cull seals and gather eggs, all of which were there in great abundance. There was plenty of driftwood to take back to his farm. Whales beached there, too, in great numbers, and there was wildlife there for the taking at this hunting post; the animals were not used to man and would never flee. He owned a third farm by the sea on the western part of Myrar. This was an even better place to gather driftwood, and he planted crops there and named it Akrar (Fields). There were islands offshore called Hvalseyar (Whale islands), because whales congregated there. Skallagrim also sent his men upriver to catch salmon. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, I 66)

People like Skalla-Grímr go on to build a state of free farmers who meet as equals at their assemblies to resolve their differences and conflicts. If this were really all there was to it, then we would perhaps be dealing with a fairytale or an Arcadian idyll, not a saga. In the *Íslendingasögur*, a conflict (especially over a beached whale, or scarce driftwood) would indeed eventually be settled, but often not before it escalates into a full-blown disaster and not until lives are lost and the honour and ‘good will’ of people heavily tested. Images of Iceland, like the portraits of Haraldr discussed earlier, are anything but unified. They range from those of an Edenic land of the kind described in the quoted passage, to those of a hell-like place of tarnished hopes. Interestingly enough, we can already glimpse this range in *Landnámabók*. We encounter it condensed in the lively story about Flóki, the man who, as *Landnámabók* has it, gave Iceland its name. After losing (owing to some bad luck and his own failure to secure winter provisions) all his livestock in Iceland over the winter, a disappointed Flóki and his companions sail back to Norway:

Ok er menn spurðu af landinu, þá lét Flóki illa yfir, en Herjólfur sagði kost ok lóst af landinu, en Þórólfr kvað drjúpa smjör af hverju strái á landinu, því er þeir höfðu fundit; því var hann kallaðr Þórólfr smjör. (*Íslendingabók. Landnámabók* 1986, 38)

When they were asked about the new country Floki had nothing good to say of it, but Herjolf described its merits as well as its faults. Thorolf said that in the land they'd found, butter was dripping from every blade of grass. That's why people called him Thorolf Butter. (*The Book of Settlements* 1972, 18)

What is here anecdotally summed up, forced into three clear-cut attitudes to the land (two extreme opposites from Flóki and Þórólfr and a moderate view from Herjólfur) is in the sagas offered as a spectrum of attitudes which occasionally dissolve into one another.

On his arrival in Iceland, Qnundr, ancestor of Grettir the Strong, is offered some land by an already established wealthy man, Eiríkr snara, who tries to impress Qnundr with the vastness of the land that is still available. Qnundr's gaze, however, is fixed upon an imposing snowy mountain, and the emotion it inspires is immediately transposed into a verse of lament:

krøpp eru kaup, ef hreppik
Kaldbak, en ek læt akra.
(*Grettis saga* 1936, 22)

I have struck a harsh bargain, swapped
my fields for the cold-backed mountain.
(*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 58)

Önundr's verse curbs Eiríkr's enthusiasm and prompts him into a quiet admission: *Margr hefir svá mikils misst í Nóregi, at menn fá þess ekki bætr* 'Many people have lost so much in Norway that will never be made good' (*Grettis saga* 1936, 22; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, II 58). Indeed, the images of Iceland are psychological as much as geographical. The hero of *Vatnsdæla saga*, Ingimundr, feels forced to sell *áttjarðir mínar margar ok góðar, en fara í eyðibýggðir þær* 'my many fine ancestral lands and head off to that wilderness' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 29; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 14), which he has previously described as *eyðisker þetta* 'that desolate outcrop' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 27; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 13). Once there, however, he resolves to make the best of an unfavourable situation:

Nú mun eigi vera vistin jafnglöð sem í Nóregi, en eigi þarf nú at minnask á þat, því at margir góðir drengir eru hér enn saman komnir til gamans, ok gleðjumsk enn eptir tilföngum. (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 40)

Our home here may not be as cheery as the one in Norway, but we need not think about that because there are many good men assembled here for some fun, and so let us enjoy ourselves as far as our resources allow. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 19)

This acceptance modifies his perspective on the land. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the narrator's perspective, his own longing perhaps arising in times of depleted resources, becomes entangled with that of his characters:

ok má af því marka landskosti þá, er í þat mund váru, at fét gekk allt sjálfala úti. Þess er enn getit, at svín hurfu frá Ingimundi ok fundusk eigi fyrr en annat sumar at hausti, ok váru þá saman hundrað, þau váru stygg orðin . . . Ingimundr . . . kvað svá rétt at mæla, at tvau höfuð væri á hvívetna. (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 42–43)

The excellence of the land at this time can be judged from the fact that all the sheep fed themselves out of doors. It is also said that some pigs went missing from Ingimund's land and were not found until the autumn of the following year, and by that time there were a hundred of them in all; they had become wild . . . Ingimund . . . declared that it could truly be said that there were two heads on every one of them. (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 20)

Although this fertility has something uncanny about it, the narrator points out that *Ingimundr festi nú ynði í Vatnsdal* 'by now Ingimund felt comfortable in Vatnsdal' (*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 43; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 20). In confirmation of this, when Ingimundr goes back to Norway for some building timber and King Haraldr asks him about Iceland, we are told that *hann lét vel yfir* 'he spoke well of it'

(*Vatnsdæla saga* 1939, 44; *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, IV 21). As Ingimundr becomes more settled and prosperous, so the images of Iceland change and the extreme feelings recede.

The past in the *Íslendingasögur* is alluring and persuasive because of the open-endedness with which it emerges. The much-admired aura of the documentary that surrounds them is not achieved because disparate matter is blended tidily, but precisely because loose ends and contradictions are not resolved. The resulting richness of texture produces a persuasive account which may not be accurate, but which certainly agrees with our aesthetic expectations of what 'real' and 'natural' are supposed to feel like: multidimensional, unpremeditated, complex.

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GRETTISFÆRSLA: THE HANDING ON OF GRETTIR

BY KATE HESLOP

INTRODUCTION

THE OLD ICELANDIC POEM *Grettisfærsla* ('The Handing on of Grettir'), a composition of approximately 400 lines centred around a figure named Grettir, is mentioned in chapter 52 of *Grettis saga* (*Gr*).¹ The sole surviving text of the poem is appended to the text of that saga in AM 556 a 4to. Despite the current popularity of *Gr*, and the fact that a diplomatic edition of the surviving fragments of *Grettisfærsla* has existed since the early 1960s when Ólafur Halldórsson published his pioneering work on the sole manuscript (ÓH 1960), the poem has attracted no sustained scholarly attention.²

Grettisfærsla is of intrinsic interest, as it deals with topics such as sexuality which are relatively sparsely represented in the texts that have come down to us. It is true that sexual matters are alluded to (or more) elsewhere in Old Icelandic literature: most famous is perhaps *Bósa saga*'s description of Bósi's three sexual encounters (chs 7, 11 and 13: *Bósa saga* 2005, 16–21, 29–32, 35–39), but other episodes include the story of Hrútr and Unnr in *Njáls saga* (ch. 7: *ÍF* 12, 23–26), Grettir's rape of the servant woman at Reykir (*Grettis saga* ch. 75: *ÍF* 7, 238–41), the *tréníð* episodes in *Gísla saga* (ch. 2: *ÍF* 6, 6–11) and *Bjarnar saga* (ch. 17: *ÍF* 3, 154–56), the sexual banter in *Sneglu-Halla þátr* (*ÍF* 9, 263–95) and the account of a ritual involving a horse's phallus in *Vqlsa þátr* (Faulkes

¹ All quotations from *Grettisfærsla* and references to word-forms in it are given in the late thirteenth-century standard of spelling used in the Text. The title of the poem thus appears as *Grettisfærsla* throughout, including in quotations from *ÍF* 7 (which spells it *Grettisfærsla*).

² The only extensive discussion is in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000 (43–46); I have unfortunately been unable to access Helga Kress's unpublished 1997 paper on 'Grettir and the grotesque' (cited in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000, 44 n. 13). Other scholarly mentions are passing, and the majority repeat Ólafur's conclusions (Almqvist 1965–74, II 52; Hastrup 1986, 306; Örnólfur Thorsson 1994, 918; Jón Samsonarson 2002, 86–87, 230; Poole 2003, 27). Fittingly for a marginal work, these remarks are often confined to footnotes (Almqvist 1965–74, I 201 n. 58; Óskar Halldórsson 1977, 628 n. 3; Glauser 1996, 124 n. 28; Clunies Ross 1998, 69 n. 28; Perkins 1998–2001, 199 n. 5; Faulkes 2004, 181 n. 46).

1980, 49–61; see further below). A number of poetic sources also deal with sexuality, most but not all of them in a *níð* context, for example Hallfreðr's verses about Gríss (*Skj* B I, 160–61), the exchange of verses between Björn and Þórðr in *Bjarnar saga* (*Skj* B I, 207–09, 277–83), st. 1 of Einar Gilsson's *Selkolluvísur* (*Skj* B II, 434), much of *Lokasenna* (*NK* 96–110) and a handful of verses and fragments preserved in runic inscriptions from the Scandinavian mainland (Liestøl 1963, 23–25; Moltke 1975; Ólafur Halldórsson 2003). And of course confessional manuals in Iceland as in other countries specify in some detail which sexual acts are acceptable for Christians and which are not (see the discussion in Sverrir Tómasson 2005, 55–57). But *Grettisfærsla* differs from the other extant literary sources in some significant respects. Sex is a major, rather than a subsidiary theme, and the protagonist's indiscriminate sexuality is itself the focus, which sets it apart from *níð* verses, in which aggressor and victim are particular individuals and sexual domination is merely a means to an end (humiliation). Perhaps most importantly, *Grettisfærsla* is resolutely non-euphemistic, compared, for example, to *Bósa saga*, whose enthusiasm for euphemism leads Sverrir Tómasson (2005, 61–62) to compare it to the Old French *fabliau* *La Damoisele qui ne pooit oir parler de foutre*; it is also in stark contrast to the typically skaldic indirectness of *níð*. *Grettisfærsla*'s unvarnished language is one reason why it contains the first attestations of a number of words and meanings, as well as at least one hapax legomenon (*hörundamuður* 'penises' mouth, i.e. vagina', l. 242).³

The present study aims to bring this interesting poem to a wider audience by supplementing Ólafur's transcription with a normalised edition and English translation of the surviving parts of the poem.⁴ The comments

³ See the notes in the Text to *stre[ptun]* (l. 41), *moga* (l. 47), *búkhlaup* (l. 53), *breðum* (l. 153), *ylgja* (l. 159) and *hrak* (l. 241).

⁴ My indebtedness not only to Ólafur's transcription, but to his article as a whole (ÓH), is evident everywhere in my text, and I thank him for his kind encouragement of the present study. I also thank Margaret Clunies Ross and Valgerður Erna Þorvaldsdóttir for their help with specific points in the translation. Anthony Faulkes read the entire text and saved me from many errors, as well as making several valuable suggestions, and I am grateful to him for his contribution. Any remaining errors are my responsibility. Earlier versions of parts of the present study were presented to the University College London Scandinavian Studies Department seminar in 2003 and the University of Bergen/Cambridge University symposium 'Creating the Medieval Saga' in Bergen in 2005. I am grateful to Richard Perkins and Judy Quinn respectively for inviting me to speak, and to my audiences for their comments.

which follow are intended to provide the reader with orientation on the crucial issues for understanding this poorly preserved text.⁵ In particular, the relationship between poem and saga, believed by Ólafur to be one of mistaken identity, is reevaluated in the light of more recent research.

Transmission

The copy of *Gr* in AM 556 a 4to happens to be missing the leaf containing chapter 52, but the other medieval manuscripts of the saga (AM 152 fol., AM 551 4to and DG 10 fol.) recount in this chapter how the outlawed Grettir is captured by the disgruntled farmers of Ísafjörður, who want to end his thefts of food and clothing. They ambush Grettir with thirty men while he is sleeping in the woods and, after a struggle, tie him up. Having done this, they are at a loss. The local chieftain, Vermundr inn mjóvi, is away at the Alþingi, and someone needs to take charge of (*annask*) Grettir until Vermundr gets back and metes out justice. The farmers argue over which of them will do it: one is too busy with his farm work, another lives alone in an isolated spot, and a third states that *lízk mér heldr vandræði en virðing við honum at taka eða gera nokkut með honum, ok hann kemr aldri í mín hús inn* ‘it seems to me rather a trouble than an honour to receive him or to do anything with him, and he will never come into my house’ (*ÍF* 7, 168).⁶ Eventually all the farmers refuse to take Grettir on, and the saga adds: *Ok eptir þessu viðtali þeirra hafa kátir menn sett fræði þat, er Grettisfærsla hét, ok aukit þar í kátligum orðum til gamans mǫnnum* ‘And on this conversation of theirs convivial people based that lore that is called *Grettisfærsla*, and augmented it with jocular words for people’s enjoyment’ (*ÍF* 7, 168).⁷

⁵ A forthcoming article (Heslop forthcoming) will address the literary-historical and thematic issues Ólafur raises and discuss the poem’s place in medieval Icelandic culture in more depth.

⁶ Translation mine, as elsewhere unless stated otherwise.

⁷ The late seventeenth-century paper manuscript Holm papp. 6 4to, whose text of *Gr* probably descends from AM 556 a 4to (Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000, 43), has a variant wording: *og um allt umtal þeirra hefur Grettir innfærð kvæði það er Grettisfærsla heitir og aukit þar í kátligum orðum til gamans mǫnnum* ‘and about all their conversation Grettir cited that poem that is called *Grettisfærsla* and added to it jocular words for people’s enjoyment’ (311v, ll. 21–23). Here we are told that Grettir is himself the one responsible for the ‘jocular words’. It is impossible to know how far back in the chain of transmission this reading arose, and it is suspiciously typical of

It is not clear from this description what kind of composition *Grettisfærsla* is. Although its title conforms to the commonest pattern for medieval poem titles (personal name in the genitive case plus a generic marker, usually describing a speech act, compare *Óláfsdrápa*, *Buslubæn*, *Hávamál*), the *-færsla* element is otherwise unknown as a component of a poem title. *-færsla* as the second element of a compound has an active and transitive sense, and refers to the moving of the object denoted by the head: *taðfærsla*, dung-hauling, *beinafærsla*, the transfer of human remains when a church is relocated, *ómagafærsla*, the circulation of people needing support from farm to farm.⁸ The link between the narrative in ch. 52 and the poem seems to be the farmers' passing of the buck, which is implicitly compared to the moving, or *færsla*, of dependants, beggars and other incapable persons around the *hreppr*. This practice was the medieval Icelandic solution to the problem of poor-relief (Miller 1990, 19–20, 147–54), and words connected with it make up over one third of the 'noun + *færsla*' compounds in *ONP*. The structural similarity of the title *Grettisfærsla* to those poem titles in which the second element is a generic marker suggests that *-færsla* may instead or also denote a heterogeneity or 'movement' in the poem, from metre to metre, subject to subject or speaker to speaker.

The text of *Grettisfærsla* survives, barely, only in AM 556 a 4to, the manuscript which lacks ch. 52 of the saga, and this accident of preservation, resulting in a text without a context in AM 556 a 4to, and a context without a text in the other medieval manuscripts, has had considerable consequences for the reception of the poem (see below). AM 556 a 4to is an Icelandic vellum written by a single hand, probably between 1475 and 1500 (Hast 1960, 30–32, 82–86). In addition to the poem, which is on fols 52r–53r, AM 556 a 4to contains three sagas about Icelandic outlaws (*Grettis saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*) and the oldest, though incomplete, text of the mid to late fifteenth-century *riddarasaga* *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*; AM 556 b 4to, originally part of the same codex, is a collection of fourteenth-century *riddarasögur* (Kålund 1888–92, I 707). The text of *Gr* concludes near the top of fol. 52r, and *Grettisfærsla* is introduced as follows (AM 556 a 4to, 52r, ll. 8–11):

the tendency for notable names to be attached to unconventionally-attributed or anonymous poems, e.g. that of Óláfr helgi to the so-called *Liðsmannaflokkur* in extracts from Styrmir's saga of St Óláfr in Flateyjarbók.

⁸ See CV and *OGNS*. The fullest listing of *-færsla* (or, in the earlier spelling, *-færsla*) compounds is the *ONP* online word-list.

Lýkr hér sögu Grettis Ásmundarsonar á fræði því er Grettisfærsla heitir, ok Ísfirðingar gerðu, þá er þeir höfðu handtekit Gretti Ásmundarson, en margir hafa síðan við aukið mörgum kátligum orðum < E>r þetta upphaf á.

The saga of Grettir Ásmundarson ends here with that lore which is called *Grettisfærsla*, and [which] the people of Ísafjörður made when they had captured Grettir Ásmundarson, and many have since augmented with many jocular words. This is the beginning of it.

The opening words of the poem, *Karl nam at búa / beint má því . . .* ‘An old man began to farm, / that can be clearly . . .’, can still be made out. The remaining text on 52r, and everything on 52v and 53r, 99 lines of writing in all (ÓH 50), has been carefully scraped off at some point in the manuscript’s history, no doubt because of the poem’s obscenity. In more recent times the text suffered from attempts to make it more, rather than less, legible. In the mid-nineteenth century, 52r was treated with a liquid of some kind, perhaps tincture of gall (ÓH 50). The resulting dark stain is clearly visible in photographs and, as no positive results were reported at the time, it seems that the only effect of this procedure was to obliterate the few remaining traces of ink on this leaf. Guðbrandur Vigfússon, whose 1861 *Ný félagsrit* article ‘Um nokkrar Íslendingasögur’ appears to be the first published discussion of *Grettisfærsla*, managed to read the seven words quoted above and claimed to be able to make out three more, but from that point on could only read occasional letters (1861, 125–26). Rescue of some of *Grettisfærsla*’s *kátlig orð* for posterity awaited modern technology. In 1960 Ólafur Halldórsson published his article ‘Grettisfærsla’. With the help of UV photographs, he managed to read a good deal of the text (though 52r remained almost completely illegible, meaning that roughly 100 lines of the poem are permanently lost), and his article includes a diplomatic transcription. The text and translation presented below are based on this transcription, though digital images of the original UV photographs have also been examined.

Content

About 250 lines of the poem were legible in whole or in part under UV light. Some are end-rhymed (both masculine and feminine rhymes occur), some alliterative, some rhythmic alliterative prose, and some appear simply to be prose. Most lines have two stresses but the syllable count varies between four and eight or more syllables. There seem not to be stanza divisions. Rather, there are blocks of text of various lengths, marked off by changes in rhetoric (e.g. shift from third to first person) and/or subject matter.

After the formulaic introduction [ll. 1–3] there is, as mentioned in the previous section, an illegible passage corresponding to approximately 100 lines of verse. The first block of intelligible text [ll. 4–54] describes the practical skills of a being identified as ‘Grettir’, with a catalogue of farming and household tasks which has two occurrences of the refrain-like *margt/myklu kann Grettir (fleira) vel at vinna* ‘Grettir knows how to do many (more) things well’ [ll. 23 and 35]. This modulates via some more questionable chores (*vekja upp púka* ‘wake up demons’, *moga kellingu sjúka* ‘bang a sick old lady’) into a list of sexual exploits. The stress in this section [ll. 55–106] is less on Grettir’s acts, described by variations on the verbs *streða*, *serða* and *moga* (all meaning ‘to fuck’), than on their objects: an inventory of worthies, male and female, ranging from priests and farmers, through *djáknir kátir* ‘cheery deacons’, to the Pope, patriarchs and aristocrats; nor are animals left unmolested. The next section [ll. 107–26] begins *Pví færi ek þér Gretti* ‘For this reason I convey to you Grettir’, and consists, as far as we can now tell, of curses (such as *far þú nöktur í norður* ‘be off naked northwards’), addressed by the speaker (*ek*) to someone only identified as *þú* ‘you’, but who seems likely to be Grettir. The contrast with the third person narration earlier in the poem is striking, and it is unfortunate that this section is particularly difficult to read, as it seems likely that it adumbrated a scene of performance which could inform our interpretation of the better-preserved parts of the poem. The command *tak þú við* ‘you accept (it)’ (where the *þú* may be some other person) seems to conclude this section.

Next [ll. 127–39] comes a catalogue of pairs of beings, mainly animals, or of a being and an object, which belong together for reasons of maternity (*grís gyltu* ‘piglet to sow’) or dwelling-place (*skarfur í skeri* ‘cormorant on skerry’). It concludes *þat sé þér ok veri* ‘may that be for you and (your) husband’. Is the husband here Grettir, who was said in the previous section to ‘make pregnant both old and young’? Or will Grettir be like a child to this couple, as dear to them as piglet is to sow? Eight or so lines of which only occasional letters can be read is succeeded by another catalogue [ll. 149–70], this time a sequence of likenesses linked by *sem . . . eður* ‘like . . . or’. The objects likened are both animate and inanimate, from the natural environment (*sem sjór at sandi* ‘like sea to sand’, *sem kýr á bási* ‘like cow in stall’), the human world (*eður hland á kamri* ‘or piss in privy’, *eður eitur at illsku* ‘or poison to malice’) and myth (*sem Þór at Þrúðvangi* ‘like Þór to Þrúðvangr’). The assertion *flest kann guma* ‘of (all) men (he) knows/can do most’ concludes this section.

The name of Grettir is invoked again in an obscure context at the beginning the final part of the poem [ll. 172–247] where, as Ólafur observes, ‘it is difficult to see one’s way about as so much is missing’ (ÓH 58). Indeed, to speak of a final part is perhaps misleading, and it would be more accurate to say that the extremely fragmentary nature of the text from here on hampers attempts to make such divisions. Ólafur also found the unrhymed sections much more difficult to decipher in the manuscript (ÓH 56), and the final part seems to lack rhyme completely. Once again an *ek* ‘I’ and a *þú* ‘you’ feature, in contrast to the third-person catalogues earlier in the poem. Most of this last part of the poem seems to consist of threats and curses directed at ‘Grettir’. A section from *Griðamál* is quoted [ll. 190–95], sexual insults are hurled (*rassragur* ‘arse-fucked (or -fucking) one’, [*meður*] *þik er ergi* ‘lust is in you’, *sá er missti dáða* ‘which lost valour’), and the speaker casts a spell (*galdr gjöri* ‘I cast a spell’). Finally [ll. 248–54] there are what appear to be conventional concluding topoi: the speaker apologises for the poor quality of his verse (*hvern er segir [r]éttara, þarfleysu skrökvi* ‘everyone when he speaks what is more *truthful*, is making up idle talk’) and commends *vör allra* ‘us all’ to God.

The entire *Griðamál* formula occurs in both principal versions of *Grágás* (Konungsbók: Finsen 1852, I 205–07; Staðarhólsbók (two rather different texts): Finsen 1879, 405–06, 406–07), in ch. 33 of *Heiðarvíga saga* (ÍF 3, 312–13) and in ch. 72 of *Grettis saga* (ÍF 7, 232–33). *Grágás* Staðarhólsbók and the *Grettis saga* manuscripts AM 152 fol. and DG 10 fol. have abbreviated versions of the formula and are most distant from the *Grettisfærsla* version. Staðarhólsbók and AM 152 fol. have *víða* rather than superl. *víðast* in l. 190, and all three abbreviate the *valur flýgr* phrase in ll. 194–95: Staðarhólsbók omits *beinn*, while the two *Grettis saga* manuscripts omit the entire second clause, *ok standi honum beinn byr undir báða vængi*; Konungsbók diverges from other texts in its treatment of this phrase as well, having *stendr* and *byrr beinn* rather than *beinn byr*. The other relevant *Grettis saga* manuscript, AM 551 a 4to (AM 556 a 4to and the fragmentary ms. AM 571 4to do not contain ch. 72 of the saga), is most like *Grettisfærsla*, but at one point *Grettisfærsla* is closer to *Heiðarvíga saga* than to any *Grettis saga* manuscript (*eldar upp brenna* in l. 192, rather than *eldr brennr*). *Grettisfærsla*’s version of *Griðamál* is thus closer to the sagas than to the law-books, but as the *Grettis saga* manuscripts suggest, the formula was obviously susceptible to variation during manuscript transmission. It is also likely that the composer of *Grettisfærsla* adapted the formula to his poetic

purposes, as in several places the *Grettisfærsla* version disagrees with all other *Gridamál* texts in ways consistent with the rest of the poem. For example, the addition of *eður* at the beginning of ll. 192–94 makes them echo the beginnings of many lines in the previous section, and shortening of ll. 191 and 193 by omission of the word *menn* makes them a better match to the short lines elsewhere in the poem. The order of ll. 191–93 in *Grettisfærsla* also differs from that of all other texts of the formula, which have the sequence Christians: heathens: fire, though it is not immediately apparent what effect might have been intended by this. It is therefore difficult to draw any firm conclusions about textual relationships from this evidence.

Relationship between Grettisfærsla and Grettis saga

Ólafur Halldórsson, the first person to consider the relationship of *Grettisfærsla* to *Gr*, thought there was no evidence of an original link between the two. In his 1960 article, he argued that nothing in what remains of the poem recalls the conversation of the farmers as it is quoted in ch. 52, and that the ‘handing over’ or ‘conveying’ of Grettir suggested in the name *Grettisfærsla* does not take place; he also claimed that the poem’s characterisation of Grettir as an able worker and a sexual athlete has no counterpart in the saga; and that *Grettisfærsla* is quite unlike other poems preserved in connection with saga narratives. He therefore proposes that the saga’s ‘Grettisfærsla’ is not our poem, and the poem’s ‘Grettir’, not Grettir Ásmundarson. A much later text, whose main character happened to have the same name as the hero, had been attached to *Gr* and the poem’s name interpolated into the saga’s description of unrelated events.

Ólafur’s argument is based on a survival and an analogue. The survival is a children’s rhyme, or *pula*, recorded in several variant forms from rural Iceland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; Jónas Kristjánsson was Ólafur’s oral informant for one at that time unpublished version (see Jónas Kristjánsson 1981). The *pula* contains several echoes of *Grettisfærsla*, some exact (both have the phrase *margt kann Grettir vel at vinna*), some bowdlerised: Grettir ‘kisses’, ‘buys’, or ‘lulls to sleep’ maidens, cows, and so on. From references in this children’s rhyme to ‘Grettir’ being made from the ‘fifth leg’ of a sheep—material with no counterpart in the surviving part of *Grettisfærsla*—Ólafur concludes that the *pula*’s Grettir, and so also the hero of *Grettisfærsla*, is a phallic token rather than a human being. *Grettir* also appears in *pulur* of snake-*heiti* in some manuscripts of

Snorra Edda (*SnE* 1848–87, II 487, 570), and the metaphor snake = phallus is not a very great leap. Having deduced this, the obvious analogue is *Völsa þáttr*, another story of the adventures of a phallus. This narrative, recounted in *Flateyjarbók* as an example of the missionary successes of Óláfr helgi, tells how a heathen family in Sweden worship the magically preserved severed penis of a horse, the *völsi*. They play a game in which the *völsi* is passed around the family and each member has to extemporise a verse before he or she can pass it on. The folklore antecedents of *Völsa þáttr* were investigated by Andreas Heusler early last century (1903). Heusler concluded that the *þáttr* preserved the memory of a pagan fertility rite associated with harvest-time and involving the veneration, sometimes at a ceremonial meal, of the severed penis of a slaughtered animal. Other scholars compare this custom to a Faroese wedding-ritual, in which feasters pass an animal's tail, known as a *drunnur*, from hand to hand while speaking verses (see Coffey 1989 and references therein). Ólafur therefore suggests that the original performance context of *Grettisfærsla* was a harvest banquet, where the farm-workers are served *sauðarslátur*, the legs, head and entrails of a sheep, and pass its severed penis from hand to hand round the table while saying verses. Although none of the analogues state that the phallic token is driven out or executed at the end of the ceremony (the *völsi* ends up in the jaws of King Óláfr's dog, but we may reasonably suspect a Christian agenda here), Ólafur suggests this happens in *Grettisfærsla* on the basis of other medieval carnival practices and the curses in the last section of the poem. The connection of *Grettisfærsla* with *Grettis saga* is thus, Ólafur argues, a case of mistaken identity. Someone heard the poem's name mentioned without being familiar with its content, assumed it was about the Grettir of the saga, and 'absurd[ly]' (ÓH 72) linked the two. Almost everyone who discusses the poem accepts Ólafur's theory without comment, and it does indeed provide a neat and satisfying rationale for several aspects of *Grettisfærsla*: its shifts from narrative to dialogue—the former being the speakers' performances, the latter the moments of 'passing on'; phrases such as *haf þú þat en ek þagna* 'you have it (imperative) and I'll be quiet' (l. 123) and *leyni hvern þat sem sét* 'hide from everyone what (is) seen' (l. 210); and the curses and threats in the last section, which are in some details reminiscent of those in *Buslubæn* (in *Bósa saga*) and the eddic poem *Skírnismál*, as well as of those in *Gríðamál*.

The accident of preservation whereby only the poem is preserved in one manuscript and only the saga context in the others makes it possible to assume that none of the scribes realised the ‘absurdity’ of linking poem and saga. Ólafur’s denial of any connection between poem and saga (which, it should be noted, is less forceful in his afterword to the 1990 Icelandic reprint of his article) means that either the passage mentioning *Grettisfærsla* has been interpolated into ch. 52 in all surviving manuscripts of the saga, which is hardly likely, or all surviving *Gr* manuscripts descend from one in which a scribe interpolated the mention of the poem into ch. 52 (ÓH 71–72). The latter is not impossible, especially as the surviving vellums are closely related, but there is no evidence for it. Óskar Halldórsson (1977, 628 n. 3) has pointed to the ‘re-purposing’ of the Ísafjörður episode in the Möðruvallabók text of *Fóstbræðra saga* (ÍF 6, 122) where the narrative gives Þorbjörg digra pride of place instead of Grettir, and argued that *Grettisfærsla*’s composition *til gamans monnum* ‘for people’s enjoyment’ signals another context- and audience-driven reworking of this material. Similarity, rather than verbatim reproduction, is surely all we are licensed to expect by the saga’s statement that *eptir þessu viðtali þeira hafa kátir menn sett fræði þat* ‘convivial people based that lore on this conversation of theirs’.

And there undeniably are similarities. While the sexually explicit passages of the poem have no parallel in *Gr*—or in any other medieval Icelandic text for that matter—recent studies emphasise the saga’s occasional obscenity (Vésteinn Ólason 1993, 69; Glendinning 2002, 107), and Russell Poole (2003, 27) notes the presence of sexual (and possibly scatological) themes in its verses in particular. It is true that *Gr* does not present Grettir as an eager worker, but his relation to the world of work is crucial to his characterisation there (Hume 1974; Cook 1982–85). Grettir as a worker is typified by excess (baling so fast that eight men are needed to empty the buckets for him in ch. 17, rowing so hard that the oars snap in ch. 50) and wilful showing off; as Poole points out (2000, 404–06), he prefers extravagant feats of strength such as lifting rocks and swimming torrents to unglamorous jobs like blacksmith’s work, which he *nennti misjafnt* ‘could not always be bothered to do’ (ÍF 7, 173; Scudder 1997, 133). The chores in *Grettisfærsla* are certainly menial, but excess and display have their counterparts in the poem in the long list of tasks Grettir undertakes and in the (mock-?) adulatory exclamation *margt kann Grettir vel at vinna* ‘Grettir knows how to do many things well’.

As suggested above, the title of the poem does refer to the scene in ch. 52, albeit obliquely. It draws an analogy, pointed by the word *færsla*,

between the practice of circulating paupers around the farms of the *hreppr* and the farmers' evasion of their responsibility to *annask* Grettir—here *annask* must mean something like 'keep an eye on', but it could also be used of supporting paupers (*Sturlunga saga* 1946, II 89). Direct verbal echoes between saga and poem are admittedly few, though it should be borne in mind that only about two thirds of the poem can now be read. In addition to the names 'Kamb[ur]' and 'Þórunn', discussed in the notes to ll. 11 and 241 of the Text below, the truce formula, *Griðamál*, part of which is quoted in ll. 190–95, is also quoted in full in ch. 72 of the saga, as part of the trick Grettir plays on the farmers at the Hegranesþing, and the practice of *grið* is mentioned in ch. 52, though without quotation of the formula. After rescuing Grettir, Þorbjörg says to him: '*Þú skalt vinna eið . . . at gera engar óspekðir hér um Ísafjörð; engum skaltu hefna, þeim sem í atfór hafa verit at taka þik*' 'You shall swear an oath . . . to do no misdeeds here around Ísafjörður; you shall not take revenge on any of those who were in the expedition to capture you'. The quotation from *Griðamál* in the poem could be a dramatisation of this moment, though this part is so poorly preserved that it is impossible to be certain.

Orthography

The following brief discussion of the orthography of the manuscript concentrates on features which potentially have implications for dating. In general it may be said that the text of *Grettisfærsla* displays a mixture of earlier and later forms, as is typical of Icelandic manuscripts from this period (Hast 1960, 86).

Final *-t* and *-k* began to change to the fricatives *-ð* and *-g* in weakly stressed syllables in the course of the thirteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 2004, 19). This change is not much in evidence, with 22 examples of *at* as against seven of *ath* (i.e. *að*), and one of p.p.n. *sed* for *sét*; the later forms of *þat*, *ek*, *þik* and *ok* are completely absent. The merger of *-rl* and *-ll*, which begins in the thirteenth century but does not become widespread until the fourteenth (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xxx; Stefán Karlsson 2004, 21), is on the other hand well advanced, with three examples of *-ll* (*kellingu*, *ialla* and *kalla*, the last two in rhymes) as against only one of *-rl* (*iarl*). The sound change reflected orthographically by the replacement of *é* by *je* or *ie* first appears around 1200 but is not common until the fourteenth century (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xiv). In the *Grettisfærsla* text the older spellings dominate (*se* three times and *sed*, i.e. *sét*, once, as against a single occurrence each of *sie* and *fie*). Palatalisation of initial *g* and the replacement of *vá* by *vó* or *vo*, changes

which took place in the first half of the fourteenth century (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, 64–65; Stefán Karlsson 2004, 45, 50, 14; Hreinn Benediktsson 2002, 231), are both well advanced. There is one example of *sua* against five of *suo*, and single instances of *uor* (n. ‘spring’), *uor* (gen. of *vér* ‘we’) and *huorke*, but none of the corresponding older forms. The rounding of *-ve-* to *-vö-* post-consonantly, common by *c.*1400 (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1925, xiii) is completely absent (*huers*, *huergi* and twice *huern*).

The distribution of these features is consistent with what Hast (1960, 59–79, 85–87) reports for the *Harðar saga* portion of AM 556 a 4to (no palaeographic study of its *Gr* text exists). He concludes that no conclusion can be drawn from this evidence as to the date of the exemplar, as the manuscript for the most part exemplifies the stable orthography of the fifteenth century manuscript-writing industry, and any variations from this reflect the coexistence of conflicting norms rather than diachronic change (Hast 1960, 86). Ólafur rightly emphasises the few instances where later word forms are guaranteed by rhyme (*jalla*, l. 82, *meður*, l. 86, *kalla*, l. 91), as well as one case where a consonant group would seem to require an epenthetic *u* to be pronounceable (*bækur skruma*, l. 54). This is rather a scanty harvest, though this may well be due to the poem’s loose metre and poor preservation that make the criteria useful in dating skaldic poetry (Kuhn 1983, 261–62) difficult to apply. Few though they are, this type of example does bear on the date of composition of the poem, rather than that of the writing of the manuscript. However, these linguistic changes are not precisely datable. The most we can say is that they became widespread in the course of the fourteenth century (ÓH 67–68; Stefán Karlsson 2004). All that can be concluded from the manuscript orthography, then, is that some at least of *Grettisfærsla* probably dates from the fourteenth century; and that whatever the nature of the scribe’s exemplar, it did not lead him to deviate from the spelling system he used elsewhere in the manuscript.

Date

These signs of *Grettisfærsla*’s being a fourteenth-century composition are Ólafur’s strongest objection to seeing it as an original part of *Gr* (ÓH 67), as the standard dating of the saga is *c.*1300 (cf. Cook 1993, 242). The *terminus ante quem* of *Grettisfærsla* is the date of AM 556 a 4to, *c.*1500. The poem could therefore be anything up to one hundred years later than the saga. *Gr* has long been thought to be one of the latest *Íslendingasögur*, but how late is it exactly? Árni Magnússon (cited

in Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson 2000, 39 n. 2) observed that the compilers of Flateyjarbók did not insert material about Grettir, as opposed for example to Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld and Björn Hítðælakappi, into their text of *Óláfs saga helga*. This suggested to him that *Gr* could not have existed in written form when Flateyjarbók was being compiled c.1387–95, making *Gr* a fifteenth-century work. This dating fell out of fashion in the nineteenth century. Boer (1898) posited that the original version of the saga dated from the mid-thirteenth century, but had been revised and interpolated at least twice, by two or possibly three interpolators working in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Guðni Jónsson rejected these arguments (*ÍF* 7, xiii), and instead dated the entire saga to very late in the thirteenth century or early in the fourteenth (*ÍF* 7, lxviii–lxx). This date is supported by the old idea that Sturla Þórðarson, mentioned several times in *Gr*, is in fact its author (see Örnólfur Thorsson 1994, 907–08). The borrowing of Continental *Novelle* motifs in the *Spesar þáttr* has also been seen as characteristic of this period (Nordland 1953, 38).

But *Gr* has been steadily getting younger in more recent scholarship. In 1977 Óskar Halldórsson expressed a view that it dated from the mid-fourteenth century, though without enlarging on his reasons for thinking so (1977, 639 n. 25). Örnólfur Thorsson has argued that the saga's references to Sturla do not indicate his authorship, but are merely examples of the medieval fondness for *auctores* (1994, 915). Örnólfur points out that the medieval manuscripts of the saga all date from the fifteenth century and do not differ greatly from one another, suggesting a comparatively short period of scribal transmission, and that *Gr* contains many late loan-words not known from other sagas (1994, 918–24). Furthermore, he argues, what Kirsten Hastrup (1986) takes to be evidence of a sudden surge in popularity of the Grettir materials in the fifteenth century (the composition of the first cycle of *Grettisrímur* and occurrence in the historical record of Grettir as a personal name) is most economically explained by the hypothesis that this was the time of the composition of the saga. Örnólfur's arguments are rather persuasive and are supported by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson's (2000) exploration of the reception of the Grettir materials in medieval and post-medieval Iceland. Hubert Seelow (2005) concurs and adds that apparent borrowings from the later redaction of *Tristrams saga* in *Spesar þáttr* probably simply reflect the fact that the *Grettis saga* author knew this redaction of *Tristrams saga*. This would suggest, once again, a date for *Grettis saga* sometime in the fifteenth century. If we are

convinced of a fifteenth-century date for *Gr*, Ólafur's objection that *Grettisfærsla* dates from no earlier than the fourteenth century no longer carries much weight. Rather, both saga and poem would date from the late medieval surge of Grettir-related composition described by Hastrup and Guðvarður Már.

Conventions of the edition

1. The text is normalised to a late thirteenth-century standard.

2. *Grettisfærsla* has many illegible passages, of greatly varying length. Each illegible letter, as in Ólafur's transcription (ÓH 52–54), is indicated in the Text with a small nought 'o'. Illegible passages, whatever their length, are indicated in the Translation with a suspension '...'. . .

3. Abbreviations are mostly expanded silently in the Text. The interested reader should refer to Ólafur's transcription, where they are indicated with italics.

4. In a few places Ólafur suggests a possible alternative transcription to that given in his main text. In the present edition these alternatives are given in the notes.

5. Letters supplied in the Text for illegible letters in the ms. are indicated by square brackets, e.g. 'þ[at]'. Unless otherwise stated in the notes, the additional letters have been supplied by the present editor, and the number of letters supplied usually corresponds to the number of illegible letters in the ms.

6. Emendations, i.e. changes in the Text to letters which are legible in the ms., are indicated by italics, e.g. 'freti'. The ms. reading (from Ólafur's transcription) is given in the notes.

7. Supplied letters and emendations are signalled in the Translation by italicisation of the *entire word* concerned. Thus alerted, the reader can check the extent of the alteration in the Text. Explanatory words added in the Translation are enclosed within round brackets.

8. Letters added where nothing is missing in the ms. and editorial punctuation marks (kept to a minimum), and resulting capital and lower-case letters where these differ from the ms., are enclosed within angled brackets in the Text. Ms. punctus is sometimes silently taken as a comma, in line with its use in medieval mss, e.g. to mark line endings. Where ms. punctuation has been suppressed, this is indicated with an asterisk in the Text.

9. Where it is possible to make line breaks in the poem on the basis e.g. of end-rhyme or syntactic parallelism, this has been done. In less evidently metrical parts, line-divisions follow the ends of sentences, where these can be ascertained; very badly damaged sections are simply divided into lines of approximately equal length.

	GRETTISFÆRSLA	THE HANDING ON OF GRETTIR
	Karl nam at búa	An old man began to farm—
	beint má því [lýsa]	that can be clearly <i>proclaimed</i> —
3	. . . [í afdali] ⁹	<i>in a remote valley</i> . . .
		[rest of leaf illegible]
	oo hann ei 000	. . . he did not . . .
	latti Gretti ¹⁰ oala	dissuade Grettir . . .
6	v000000 oala	. . .
	ka0000 ooflá oar000	. . .
	oo verm ¹¹ freyddi ¹² oo	. . . warm river <i>frothed</i> . . .
9	er öllum tröllum oley<.>	which with/by/to/from all trolls ¹³ . . .
	<F>á þú þ[at] 00000	You take <i>that</i> . . .
	undir 00000 oo 000 Kamb[ur] ¹⁴	under . . . <i>Kambur</i>
12	00ann hann so0 draugum.	. . . he . . . with/by/to/from ghosts.

⁹The words in brackets are Guðbrandur Vigfússon's readings (1861, 126). Guðbrandur prints *lýsa* in italics, suggesting that the word was not clear, and presumably the same is true of *í afdali*.

¹⁰ Ms. 'Gǫ'.

¹¹ *Verm* f. 'warm river' is unattested, but cf. *verm(s)l* n. 'hot spring', and the river-name *Vermá* 'Warm River' (*ÍO* 'Verma') and lake-name **Vermir* 'Warmer' (Rygh 1897–1924, IV 97). This warm, frothing river is perhaps reminiscent of the description of Bósi's sexual encounter with the farmer's daughter: *allur beðurinn lék í einu lauðri undir henni* 'all the bedding was awash with foam under her' (*Bósa saga* 2005, 31).

¹² Ms. 'freiddi'. Spellings in which *i/i* is written for *y/ý* appear from about 1500, but are uncommon; see Stefán Karlsson (2004, 50).

¹³ *Er* could be 'is/which/when/that'. After the finite verb *freyddi*, 'which' or 'when' seem most likely. 'With/by/to/from' in the translation renders the dative case of *öllum tröllum*.

¹⁴ Ms. 'Kemb00'. The initial capital suggests this is a proper noun. It could be the farm *Kambr* (modern *Kambur*, a working farm until its abandonment in 1954), which lies in the Vestfirðir between Reykjarfjörður and Veidíleysa, approximately 40 kilometres east of where the action of ch. 52 takes place. According to ch. 12 of *Gr*, *Kambr* belonged to Þorgrímr hærkollr, Grettir's paternal grandfather. There is another case of possible confusion between 'e' and 'a' in line 233.

	⟨H⟩ann kann erja, ok korn oo 000000 at [berja], ¹⁵	He knows how to plough, and . . . <i>thresh</i> corn,
15	ok oo 000000i ok ha00000 ok 0000000	and . . . and . . . and . . .
18	ok haga vel plógi. ⟨H⟩ann kann at slá ok at raka ljá,	and manage a plough well. He knows how to mow and rake mown grass,
21	vera í hlaupi ok bera loo hrundum. ⟨M⟩argt kann Grettir vel at vinna.	run errands and bring . . . (to) women. ¹⁶ Grettir knows how to do many things well.
24	⟨H⟩ann kann malt mala meyjum leoo [g]jala 00000 0000 hripspala, ¹⁷	He knows how to grind malt, <i>sing</i> . . . (to) maidens . . . of basket-laths,
27	ok við [p]íkum dala. ⟨U⟩ppoo skal 00000 ⟨Á⟩su. ¹⁸ Enn kann [a]t ooola	and become dented against <i>girls</i> . up . . . shall . . . Ása. Moreover (he) knows how <i>to</i> . . .
30	stoo oo 000k, ⟨o⟩k svó mun strák bera, oa o veiði 00000 000 oo 0000 0000	. . . and thus will convey the rascal, . . . hunting/fishing . . .
33	við 0000fólki ¹⁹ [s]kjala, ⟨o⟩k ná í ²⁰ búsmala. Myklu kann ⟨G⟩rettir fleira* vel at vinna⟨:⟩	to <i>boast</i> with . . . folk, and to catch livestock. Grettir knows how to do many more things well:
36	hann greiðir festum	he gets ready ropes, ²¹

¹⁵ Conjecture suggested by Ólafur (ÓH 55). His transcription notes three illegible letters: perhaps 'berja'.

¹⁶ 'Hrund' appears in a *pula* of valkyrie-names (*Skm* 1998, I 115), and is a common base word in woman-kennings. In the *rímur* it is occasionally used on its own to mean 'woman', e.g. *Bósa rímur* VI, 4, VII, 54 (*Bósa rímur* 1974, 75, 90), and this is probably what is meant here. 'Hrund' is also an island-name (*Skm* 1998, I 97, II 480), and a variant of obscure meaning in *Haustlǫng* 11:2 (*Skm* 1998, I 32), but neither of these is likely to be relevant.

¹⁷ Two words in the ms. This compound is not attested elsewhere, but a number of similar compounds with second element *spölr* m. 'lath, bar' exist.

¹⁸ Ms. 'aasv' = *ásu*, perhaps an inflected form of the woman's name Ása. Another possibility is acc. pl. of *áss* 'god'.

¹⁹ There are many possibilities here: *bodsfólk* 'banquet-guests', *kven(n)fólk* 'women', *orkufólk* 'working people', *landsfólk* 'people of the land', etc., though the context may favour *kven(n)fólk*.

²⁰ The combination *ná* + prep. *í* is not otherwise attested in ON, but is common in mod. Icel. (Blöndal 'ná' 2).

²¹ Or perhaps 'he serves at betrothals', though *greiða* does not normally take the dative case. Ólafur therefore suggests this is a scribal error for *hann greiðir fyrir gestum* 'he tends guests' (ÓH 58).

	<o>k gefur hestum<:>	and feeds horses;
	drykk at blanda	to blend drink,
39	ooooo eld kynda,	. . . kindle fire, ²²
	<o>k ooooo ooonnda	and . . .
	<o>k stre[ptun] kúm skynda, ²³	and hasten out <i>last drops</i> from cows' udders,
42	lásu<m> ²⁴ at ²⁵ lúka,	to close locks,
	<o>k at lita dúka,	and to dye cloths,
	við eld at húka	to hunker by the fire
45	<o>k vekja upp púka,	and wake up demons,
	líta frei ²⁶ fjúka,	let fly with a <i>fart</i> ,
	<o>k moga ²⁷ kellingu sjúka,	and bang a sick old lady,
48	í kooeooi oounga oo ooooo	. . .
	<o>k við skeið at skotta, ²⁸	and move back and forth against the sheath,

²² Cf. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, 39 (NK 158):

Þú scalt, Hundingr, hveriom manni
fótlaug geta ok funa kynda,
hunda binda, hesta gæta,
gefa svínom soð, áðr sofa gangir.

'You shall, Hundingr, get the foot-bath for every man and light the fire, tie up the dogs, tend the horses, give the pigs swill, before you go to sleep.'

²³ Ólafur's transcription has 'stre ooo kum skynnda', but Louis-Jensen (2005), who proposes this conjecture, can see no gap between 'stre' and the following group of letters in the UV photographs. She accordingly suggests reading 'streptun'. According to Louis-Jensen *strept* n. and *streptun/streftun* f. 'milking to the last drop, stripping of milk', *streftir* f. pl. and *streftur* m. 'last drops' do not appear in dictionaries prior to Blöndal, though a vb. *strefta* 'strip' is attested in a word-list from c.1700. If her conjecture is correct, this would be another example of *Grettisfærsla*'s evidence for a word predating the next instance by several hundred years, thanks to its relatively uncommon subject-matter and straightforward style. Here, although the overt reference is to farm work, it seems possible that a sexual innuendo is intended (cf. also l. 49).

²⁴ The ms. has *lásu* (*láss* m. 'lock') (ÓH 54). Dat. *lasi* or *lášum* would be expected, but the final letter is (according to Ólafur) almost certainly a *u*; probably a nasal stroke is missing.

²⁵ Ólafur comments that in the manuscript this word 'looks like a' (ÓH 54).

²⁶ Ms. 'frede'.

²⁷ The meaning of the verb *moga* is obvious from the context; there is also a Faroese verb *mogga* with the same or a similar meaning, which must be the frequentative form (ÓH 58–59). *Moga* is unknown in mod. Icel. and very sparsely recorded in ON, though Ólafur Halldórsson (2003) has suggested it appears in one of the verses from the Bryggen runic corpus.

²⁸ The verb *skotta* is perhaps related to *skopta* and seems to mean 'to move back and forth' (intransitive) (*ÍO* '1. skotta'). Its other early attestations are in nautical contexts, where *at láta skip skotta við* is taken to mean 'to make the

	⟨o⟩k skafa potta,	and scrape pots,
51	brynna 000000 000000 00 00a [d]ulku[fl]a[r]	give water to <i>disguises</i>
	⟨b⟩æta búkhlaup ²⁹ guma,	cure men's diarrhoea,
54	ok á bækur skruma. 00 000 kendur 00000 0000 000000 flesta,	and prattle into books. . . . known most,
57	⟨o⟩k at moga presta, alla senn ok sýslumenn, streður hann 00000000 00000	and to bang priests, and bailiffs all at the same time, he fucks . . .
60	kváðu hann fara í eyjar, ⟨o⟩k serður meyjar, gjörir grepprekkjur, ³⁰	they said he went to islands, and fucks maidens, makes beds for men,
63	⟨o⟩k serður ekkjur, hvers manns konu, ok alla bónda sonu,	and fucks widows, every man's wife, and all farmers' sons,
66	til þess er hann sendur⟨:⟩ at serða búendur 000000 00000000 000	for this he is sent: to fuck farmers . . .
69	at hann streði prófasta, hirðmenn stóra, ⟨o⟩k gjörvalla hirðstjóra,	that he may screw provosts, great courtiers, and governors entirely,

ship move to and fro' (see ÓH 59 for a survey of the dictionary material). A *skeið* is a kind of warship (Jesch 2001, 123–26), so this meaning is possible here, assuming the presence of a verb like *lata* in the now illegible previous line. Given the context, however, it is more likely that *skeið* refers here to a domestic object: the possibilities are a sley (an implement, often sword-shaped, used by weavers to compact the weft), a sheath or scabbard, or possibly a thin piece of wood (ÍO '2. skeið'). In any case, it seems likely that the phrase is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, with *skeið* signifying either 'vagina' (sheath) or 'penis' (sley, stick).

²⁹ Ólafur discusses this word's cognates in other Gmc languages (ÓH 59). Its earliest attestation other than the present instance seems to be the late sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century *Lækningabók* of Oddur Oddsson á Reynivöllum; see the online corpus of ÓHá at <http://lexis.hi.is>.

³⁰ Lit. 'man-beds'. The ms. has 'grepp reckiur', but it is difficult to make sense of acc. sg. *grepp* (rather than dat. pl. *greppum* 'for men' or gen. sg./pl. *grepps/greppa* 'a man's/men's') if these words do not form a compound. For the sexual implications of *gjörir rekkju*, cf. the description of Þræll and Þír, who *rekkju gørdðu* 'made a bed, i.e. were married' (*Rígsþula* 11: Dronke 1997, 164, 221; also ÓH 60), and the hap. leg. *hórrekkja* (v.ll. 'horkona', 'hor ekkia') in *Borgarthings-Christenret*, glossed *kona su er liggr med manni a launungu* 'that woman who lies with a man secretly' (possibly merely a word-division error?) (*NGL* II 305).

72	000ngir 0000000 en mögar alla byskupa, núir hann snjóta,	. . . and bangs all bishops, he rubs knobs, ³¹
75	en serður ábóta, alla k000 0000 00000 þá ³² gjörir hann þunga,	and fucks abbots, all . . . he gets them pregnant,
78	hann streður konunga, því er hann vanur at moga* barúna ok hertoga,	he screws kings, and so he's used to banging barons and dukes,
81	streður hann greifa alla, bæði riddara ok jalla, ³³ en þá er sól er í austri,	he screws all counts both knights and earls, and when the sun's in the east,
84	serður hann abbadís at klaustri <—> stórt er hans reður <—> ok allar systurnar meður,	he fucks abbess in cloister — his dick is big— and all the sisters too,
87	streður hann kýr ok kálfa, <o>k k000 velooséra ³⁴ sjálfa, þat þikkir honum sómi,	he screws cows and calves, and . . . well . . . <i>reverends</i> themselves, it seems to him an honour,
90	at serða páfann at Rómi, bæði konur ok kalla, ³⁵ <o>k patriárka alla.	to fuck the pope at Rome, both women and men, and all patriarchs.
93	Serður hann djákna káta, <o>k 000 00000 streður hann þat er kvikt er flest,	He fucks cheery deacons, and . . . he screws most things that are alive,
96	<o>k sofend[ur] 000 000ptur hann gauða	and <i>sleepers</i> . . . him of yelps ³⁶

³¹ *Snjótr*, a rare word only otherwise attested in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, means 'snout', but here, as Ólafur suggests, presumably means 'penis' (ÓH 60).

³² Ms. 'þeim'. *Þeim gjörir hann þunga* could mean 'for them he gets (a woman) pregnant', taking *þunga* as f. acc. sg. of adj. *þungr* 'heavy, i.e. pregnant'. This meaning is not listed in dictionaries, but is conceivable in the light of *óléttur*, lit. 'un-light', and (mod. Icel. only) *þungaður*, both of which mean 'pregnant'. However, the repetition of this phrase in l. 100 with *þá* 'them' m. acc. pl. in place of *þeim* makes it more likely that *þeim* in the present line is a mistake for *þá* (m. acc. pl.); cf. the note to l. 100.

³³ The rhyme *alla: jalla* (i.e. *jarla*) reflects the merging of *rl* and *ll*, a process which began in the fourteenth century (Stefán Karlsson 2004, 21, 46). Cf. *kalla*, l. 91.

³⁴ Ms. 'sæna'; for the spelling with *æ*, cf. Guðmundur Andrésson's *Lexicon Islandicum* (1683) s.v. 'særa'. *Særa* (here normalised to *séra*) is a minor emendation of an otherwise puzzling word, and is contextually appropriate.

³⁵ I.e. *karla*; once again *rl* and *ll* rhyme with one another (see note to l. 82 above).

³⁶ The inf. of the verb *gauða* 'scold' (or perhaps gen. pl. of *gaud* f./n. 'coward') would fit better in the context, but both appear to be very late: the

	00000 00allo hinn ³⁷ 000	. . . that one . . .
	stendur hann við sæ[inn] ³⁸	he stands by <i>the</i> sea . . .
99	<o>k streður 0000 s00000.	and screws . . .
	Þá ³⁹ gjörir hann þunga,	He gets them pregnant,
	bæði gamla ok unga,	both old and young,
102	alla senn ok sýslumenn,	and bailiffs all at the same time,
	þat má kalla,	it can be said,
	at hann streði alla	that he screws all
105	0000000 snjalla,	valiant ⁴⁰ . . .
	<o>k 0000 000 sem 00 0000.	and . . . as . . .
	Því færi ek þér <G>retti,	For this reason I convey to you Grettir,
108	at hann 00000 gla0000 fresskettir,	because he . . . tomcats,
	fría ⁴¹ honum at þér,	I deliver (him/it) from him into your hands,
	at hann er þér skyldur	because he's related to you ⁴²
111	00 r000 00 000 0 000000	. . .
	börn er ⁴³ móðir 00 000000	children when mother . . .
	mun sú eiga ok a0000	she will possess and . . .
114	ok verð[a] þ000000 000000	and <i>become</i> . . .
	f00000 enn stog000000	. . .
	far þú nöktur í norður	be off naked northwards
117	meður níðings orðum	with the reputation of a scoundrel
	000000 000000.	. . .
	Ok vísa ⁴⁴ 00000 sé ykkur þat fast,	And (this) verse . . . let it be attached to you,
120	en 00agnand00 lauss falli	and . . . let it get free
	því 000 ekur 000gi á kau000	because . . . drives . . .
	0eig00000000 000 stroðin,	. . . fucked,
123	haf þú þat en ek þagna 0000	you have it (imperative) and I'll be quiet . . .

verb is eighteenth-century, and this meaning of the noun *gaud* seems first to appear in the seventeenth century (*ÍO, OHá*). *Gaud* f. 'bark, yelp', on the other hand, is mediævally attested, albeit sparsely (*ONP*).

³⁷ Or possibly *honum* 'to him' (*ÓH* 54).

³⁸ This line is particularly difficult to read in the ms. Possible alternative readings are: for *stendur*, 'steykur/-ar/-er'; for *við*, 'vm'; for *sæ[inn]*, 'sægnenn' (*ÓH* 54).

³⁹ *Þá* could be read *þeim* 'them' dat. pl. (*ÓH* 54), but it would have to be taken to mean 'for them'; but *þunga* here presumably agrees with the m. acc. pl. adjs *gamla* and *unga* in l. 101, indicating that the pregnant persons are male.

⁴⁰ The missing noun presumably agrees with *snjalla* 'valiant' (m. acc. pl.).

⁴¹ *Fría* could alternatively be the infinitive, 'to deliver . . .'.

⁴² *Skyldur*, here translated 'related', could alternatively mean 'under an obligation to'.

⁴³ *Er* could alternatively be the relative 'which'.

⁴⁴ *Vísa*, here translated 'verse', could alternatively be the imperative sg. of *vísa* 'to show'.

	Ok <F>reyr 000000000	And Freyr . . .
	en þú fretir 000 00 fyrir<,>	than that you should fart . . . because of it
126	tak þú við eo s00000ki	accept (imperative) . . .
	Ok þre000000li á hann<,> ⁴⁵	And . . . on him,
	ek skal [s]vó 00000yr sem 000000	I shall . . . like . . .
129	eður 000 bræður sem <K>ristur	or . . . to a monk as Christ
	000 þ0000pp00 lamb á,	. . . lamb to ewe,
	eður 00000 kýr kálf	or . . . cow to calf
132	kóngur eður k000 k00000	king or . . .,
	grís gyltu,	piglet to sow,
	eður graði hestur, ⁴⁶	or gelding to foal,
135	<F>reyr at forneskju,	Freyr to heathendom,
	eður fjándann 000 0000	or . . . the devil
	skarfur í skeri,	cormorant on skerry,
138	eður fyl meri:	or foal to mare:
	þat sé þér ok veri.	may that be for you and (your) husband.
	Sé svó hvór ykkar	Thus may each of you (two) be
141	sögu 000 00000 0000	(in) story . . .
	brenni flekk ⁴⁷ b000	would burn raked-out hay . . .
	eður b000000 0ll00 0000	or . . .
144	0000000 000000000	. . .
	eður sel000 kamo 00 ⁴⁸	or . . .
	óíuk000 fresti	. . . (to) delay
147	eður 000000 00 búa 000kit	or . . . to dwell . . .
	eður boði oeði er at goa00	or breaker . . . is to . . .
	sem sjór at sandi	like sea to sand
150	eður 0000000 höfði,	or . . . (to) head, ⁴⁹
	sem l0000 00 0000i	like . . .

⁴⁵ A comma or full stop is needed here because the order of the words *ek skal* shows they begin a new clause. *Á hann* could also mean ‘he/it possesses’ or ‘(I/he/it) possess(es) him/it’.

⁴⁶ Although *graður* is not recorded as a noun elsewhere, cf. *graddi* and *graðungur* (both meaning ‘bull’), and *graður* adj. ‘uncastrated’. The context suggests that both nouns refer to the same species of animal, making ‘(ungelded) foal’ the most likely translation of *graði*. Cf. *ÍO* ‘graður’.

⁴⁷ This meaning of *flekkur* seems not to appear elsewhere before the seventeenth century (*OHá, ÍO* ‘fleckur 1.’). In O. Icel. it normally means ‘fleck, spot, stain’.

⁴⁸ Possibly *sel[r at] kam[pi]* ‘seal to whiskers’, cf. mod. Icel. *kampselur* m. ‘bearded seal’.

⁴⁹ The context might suggest *höfði* ‘headland’, but the second noun in these lines is usually dat., here of *höfuð* ‘head’. Possibly [*hár at*] *höfði* ‘hair to head’, or [*hárit at*] *höfði*, since according to Ólafur’s transcription seven illegible letters precede *höfði*.

	eður lax at straumi,	or salmon to stream,
153	sem frost á breðum, ⁵⁰	like frost on glaciers,
	eður fjúk yfir heiðum,	or drifting snow(-storm) over heaths,
	sem örn á ⁵¹ björgum	like eagle on sea-cliffs
156	eður álfat at dúni,	or swan to down,
	sem kýr á bási	like cow in stall
	eður oyoítoo at 0000	or . . . to . . .
159	sem ylgja ⁵² á höfum	like swell on seas
	eður eoo doo oo ok000000a	or . . .
	sem 00000000	like . . .
162	eður 000 0000000000	or . . .
	sem 0000 í oo 00000000	like . . . in . . .
	eður hland á kamri,	or piss in privy,
165	eður eitur at illsku	or poison to malice
	0000000000000000	. . .
	sem draugur 00000000	like ghost . . .
168	eður kögur at þræði	or fringe to thread
	sem <Þ>ór at <Þ>rúðvangi, ⁵³	like Þórr to Þrúðvangr,
	eður 0000000	or . . .
171	flest kann guma.	of (all) men (he) knows/can do most. ⁵⁴
	G000000 eptir <G>retti,	. . . after Grettir,
	sem gras eptir at 000	like grass after . . .
174	sem þ000i 000000 0000000000 um 00um 000	like . . . about . . .
	svó [ok] rassragur sefi.	so <i>too</i> an arse-fucked (-fucking) one might soothe (him). ⁵⁵
	Ræða ⁵⁶ 00000000000000	. . .
177	0000000000000000	. . .
	á öllum 000	on all . . .
	sem glæp 000 öðrum,	like crime . . . with/by/to/from another,
180	stikna þú<,> innan vertu	may you be roasted, may you be inside

⁵⁰ The first attestation of the simplex *breði* as a common noun in ON (*ONP*). It occurs as the name of a slave in ch. 1 of *Völsunga saga* (1965, 1), possibly as a back-formation from *breðafönn* (Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 301). The common noun *breði* is frequent in mod. Icel. (*OHá*).

⁵¹ This word could also be read as *at* (*ÓH* 54).

⁵² The first attestation of *ylgja* f. in ON (*ONP*). It is fairly frequent in mod. Icel. (*OHá*).

⁵³ Unparalleled sg. form, cf. *Þrúðvangar* in *Skm* (1998, I 22) and *Þrúðheimr* in *Gyl* (1988, 5) and *Grimmismál* 4 (*NK* 58).

⁵⁴ Cf. *margt/myklu kann Grettir (fleira) vel at vinna*, ll. 23 and 35.

⁵⁵ The line could alternatively mean 'so too arse-fucked (-fucking) kinsman', taking *sefi* as the masc. noun 'relation, relative'.

⁵⁶ A number of possible homographs: nom. sg. of *ræða* f. 'speech, talk'; indeclinable adj. *ræða* 'on heat', of a sow; nom. sg. of *ræða* f. 'rod'; gen. pl. of *ræði* n. 'oar'; inf. of *ræða* 'to speak'.

234	[At] þér galdur gjöri svó sterk ⁰⁰⁰⁰ at þú veslisk at viti 00rengu 00000000000000	On you I cast a spell so <i>strong</i> . . . that you may grow weak in wit . . .
237	aldri heimtir þessi fé [f] ⁶⁸ föl[naða] stekki, <o>k leysir þik af 0000000 [meður] þik er ergi<,>	(so that you) may never get those flocks back into bare sheepfolds, ⁶⁹ and free yourself from . . . lust is <i>in</i> you,
240	fyrir k[vó]nir kyssti[r]<,> [en þ]á <Þ>órunni ⁷⁰ hrak ⁷¹ sk[al] matinn ⁷² h[a]fa 000 00 fyrir hörundamuður, ⁷³	previously (you) <i>kissed wives</i> , but when to Þórunn a coward <i>has to put</i> the food . . . before (it) the mouth of penises,

would fit here, and it is tempting to read *haml[a]* ‘to hinder, maim, cripple’ (cf. l. 11 and note).

⁶⁸ Ólafur’s transcription marks two illegible letters between *fé* and *föl[naða]*.

⁶⁹ Lit. ‘into ruined sheepfolds’, taken here as ‘sheepfolds in which the grass is dead and withered’ (*fölnat*; thanks to Valgerður Erna Þorvaldsdóttir for this suggestion). This is rather reminiscent of the *double entendre* of Hallfreðr’s *lausavísa* 17: *Þótt orþægir, ófríðr, eigi stöðul víðan (hírðandi nýtr hjarðar hjörvangs) ok kví langa* ‘though the scythe-shover, unlovely, has a wide milking-shed (the sword-plain’s keeper enjoys his livestock) and a long sheep-pen’ (text from *Skj B I* 161, translation from Whaley 1997, 245).

⁷⁰ Acc. or dat. of the woman’s name Þórunn, probably ‘lover of Þórr’ (Guðrún Kvaran and Sigurður Jónsson 1991, 544, 599). Its similarity to Þorbjörg (lit. ‘rescuer of Þórr’), the name of Grettir’s rescuer in ch. 52 of *Gr*, is unlikely to be accidental, considering the play on this name in the other verses associated with this episode (Grettir’s *Ævikviða* 5–7: *ÍF* 7, 171–72, *Skj B I* 287–88).

⁷¹ *Hrak* n. ‘rubbish; coward; worthless thing; difficulty, lack’ (Blöndal) is not attested elsewhere in ON, but Oddur Gottskálksson’s 1540 translation of the New Testament uses it to mean ‘refuse, rubbish’: *hrak þessarar veralldar* 1 Cor. IV:13 (*purgamenta huius mundi*). In Oddur’s translation of Antonius Corvinus (1546), *hrak* occurs in a doublet with *forsmán* ‘shame’. The earliest citation in *OHá* where *hrak* denotes a person would appear to be from Runólfur Jónsson’s *Grammaticæ Islandicæ rudimenta* (1651), where ‘Neutra, viros significantia, ut *hrak*’ glosses *gerpi*.

⁷² Ms. ‘maten’. The most likely candidate in the context is acc. sg. of *matr* m. ‘food’, with suffixed definite article. Confusion between long and short vowels, and between single and double final consonants, is very common in mss.

⁷³ According to Ólafur’s transcription there is a line break after ‘havr’ and an illegible letter before ‘vnnda’ at the start of the next line. *ONP* nonetheless lists this as the sole instance of *hørundamuðr*, lit. ‘mouth of fleshes’. As *hørund* means ‘penis’ in at least one ON source (see *Njáls saga* ch. 7: *ÍF* 12,

243	sá er missti dáða, muni ⁷⁴ oo 0000soot ok 000000 er 0000 00000	which lost valour, may . . . and . . . is . . .
246	eyraskeggi ferligu á bringu bróða slög ⁷⁵ groomn 000000skefl000000 ek geri 000 hvern	sandbanks-dweller (struck) blows mon- strously on little brother's chest . . . I make . . . everyone
249	er segir [r]éttara<,> þarfleysu ⁷⁶ skrökvi eður í hljóði lesi fyr [sik] ok heyri [os]s. Ok þat fær ley00 booga sk00.	when he speaks what is more <i>truthful</i> , is making up idle talk or let him read it over silently ⁷⁷ and let him hear <i>us</i> . And gets that . . .
252	Ok biði þess at 000 heim við öndu 0r0000 kóngnum krist[num] num 0000 at 000000 geymi svó guð vór allra.	And let him pray for this, that . . . world with soul . . . (with) <i>Christian</i> kings . . . that . . . God may also keep us all.

24; Mundal and Steinsland 1989; *ÍO* 'hörund'), the likeliest meaning of *hörundamuður* 'mouth of penises' is 'vagina'.

⁷⁴ Ms. 'munne'.

⁷⁵ Ms. 'eyra skegge ferlegu a bringu broda slaug'. As separate words *eyra* and *skeggi* could be 'ear' and 'beard' (dat.) respectively, but this makes little sense. *Eyraskoggi* 'sandbanks-dweller' can be compared to *eyja(r)skeggi* 'island-dweller', *hraunskoggi* 'lava-dweller', *Mostrarskegg(i)* 'person from Moster'. *Ferligu* is n. dat. sg. of the adj. *ferligr* 'monstrous', here perhaps used adverbially. *Bringu* is acc./dat. sg. of *bringa* f. 'chest'. *Bróða* could be gen. pl. of *broð* n. 'broth, fat', common in mod. Icel., but only attested mediievally in the poetic compound *broðgýgr* 'broth-ogress' (CV); gen. sg. of *bróði*, dim. of *bróðir* 'brother', is perhaps more likely in the context. *Slög* is taken here as pl. of *slag* n. 'blow', though ms. 'slaug' could also be *slaug* f. 'mockery', or possibly a spelling of *slóg*, 3rd pers. sg. past tense of *slá* 'to strike'. It seems that some kind of physical activity is being described, though its relationship either to *Grettir*'s sexual adventures or to the curses earlier in the poem is unclear. The *kviðlingar* in chapter 2 of *Gísla saga* (*ÍF* 6, 10–11; *Skj* B I 93, 96) have some similar features: the word *skeggi* (which Falk (2005) suggests means 'pubic hair'), fighting as a metaphor for sex, and location near water, albeit in *Gísla saga* a *hólmr* rather than an *eyrr*, and probably the result of the saga author's misunderstanding of the verse. However, despite this being one of the longer runs of clearly decipherable text in *Grettisfærsla*, it remains frustratingly difficult to get any really acceptable meaning out of it.

⁷⁶ Two words in ms.

⁷⁷ Or perhaps: in secret.

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STEFÁN KARLSSON

1928–2006

Stefán Karlsson was born at Belgsá in Fnjóskadalur in northern Iceland on 2nd December 1928. He was educated at the Grammar School in Akureyri and Copenhagen University, where he studied, among other things, Old Norse language and literature under Jón Helgason. He took his master's degree in 1961 with a thesis on the palaeography and language of medieval Icelandic documents. He also studied at the Universities in Reykjavík, Uppsala and Oslo, and from 1957 he worked at the Arnarnagæan Institute in Copenhagen where Jón Helgason was director, and edited *Íslandske originaldiplomer indtil 1450* (1963). One outcome of this work was that he came to recognise the handwriting of many medieval Icelandic scribes and discovered that many of the hands in early documents could be recognised in manuscripts of the sagas, and the palaeography of Icelandic manuscripts and the history of the Icelandic language became the central themes of his life's work. Though he published important studies on the dating and provenance of various Old Icelandic manuscripts, much of his work remains unpublished and much of his extraordinary knowledge of early scribes and their work will now be irrecoverable. But his very valuable survey of the history of the Icelandic language was published in his article 'Tungan' in 1989, and issued in English by the Viking Society as *The Icelandic Language* in 2004.

Stefán's principal work from the 1960s onwards has been on the four sagas of Bishop Guðmundr the Good, in which he became interested after working on an almost illegible document which turned out to be a palimpsest, the original text having been part of a manuscript from about 1400 of a saga of Guðmundr by Arngrímr Brandsson. The first volume was published in 1983, the second was nearly completed at the time of his death. Other important publications have been the introductions to *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops: Fragments of Eight Manuscripts* (1967) and the facsimile edition of *Nikulás saga* (1982).

In 1970 he returned to Iceland and took up a position at the Icelandic Manuscript Institute (later Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, now a part of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum), and in the following years he also taught courses in palaeography and history of the language at the University. He was deputy director of the Institute for a number of short periods, and then in 1994 became director on the retirement of Jónas Kristjánsson and at the same time Professor at the University.

He was awarded honorary doctorates at the University of Copenhagen in 1999 and at the University of Iceland in 2000.

One side of Stefán's work at the institutes in Copenhagen and Reykjavík was to help and guide other people engaged in editing texts or other kinds of research, reading and commenting on papers and theses or odd chapters from works in progress. He was a remarkably helpful person, unstintingly generous with his time. He was a mainstay at Árnastofnun, ever helpful in the deciphering of difficult readings in manuscripts. Helpfulness was natural to him, and colleagues and visitors to the Institute from all over the world have been the grateful beneficiaries of his encyclopaedic knowledge on a wide variety of problems concerning the study of manuscripts; he was ready at all times to respond to queries both verbal and by letter. Moreover, when asked or when he felt it necessary he often spent long periods of time, sometimes year on year, collaborating on editions of medieval Icelandic texts, notably *Árna saga* (published in 1972), *Elucidarius* (1989), *The Icelandic Homily Book* (1993) and *Íslenska teiknibókin* (still not yet published). On the other hand he always insisted on the highest standards in conducting such research and could be quite harsh in criticising what he regarded as silly ideas. He always insisted that those who looked to him for guidance should in all cases pay attention to what the sources actually say. But his unstinting readiness to help won him many friends, not only in Iceland and Denmark, but all over Europe and even further afield.

Stefán had so many of the qualities that make for fine scholarship: he was accurate, clear-minded and with a phenomenal memory, especially for styles of handwriting and the characteristics of individual scribes, and hardly anyone would dare to publish conclusions about Icelandic scribes before the Reformation without asking his opinion. He was a meticulous scholar, a specialist in the best sense of the word in his field, but lived in no ivory tower.

Stefán spent a good deal of time in Copenhagen, and also visited the Faeroes, Cornell University in the USA, and lectured in many Scandinavian Universities and some in other places and attended many conferences. He spoke all the Scandinavian languages, and was particularly fond of Faroese.

It would be wrong to say that Stefán put scholarship higher than everything else in life, for he never neglected human intercourse. He was always the life and soul of parties and gatherings of all kinds, always eager to take part in any celebration and drink his share. He was a very

generous host, and somehow he always managed to create a happy, civilised and warm atmosphere around himself, both at home and at work. He published many scholarly articles early on, but in the last twenty years confined his contributions almost entirely to Festschriften (apart from conference papers), since he had so many acquaintances and was always ready to pay honour wherever possible, often taking the initiative in proposing the presentation of Festschriften to scholars at some threshold in life. Many of his friends and relations were of a later generation than himself, and he remained always young in spirit, and often recalled his own childhood, returning in vacations to spend long periods in the haunts of his youth, sometimes camping in the woods near Akureyri.

Stefán died suddenly in Copenhagen on 2nd May 2006, where he was working at the Institute on the final stages of the second volume of *Guðmundar sögur*. His loss will be deeply felt, particularly by the innumerable friends and acquaintances whose research he has aided and contributed to in so many ways throughout the years.

G. M. G.

JOAN TURVILLE-PETRE (NÉE BLOMFIELD)

10 May 1911–9 March 2006

Joan Blomfield was a most determined woman. It was that determination that took her, as a student, to Somerville College, Oxford in 1929, from a family in Colchester who had no experience of university education, and at a time when not everyone saw the point of a girl going to university. She studied English, taking a particular interest in the early period of language and literature, together with Old Icelandic.

She was always a committed scholar, determined to gain a precise and accurate knowledge of these languages, and equally committed to pass on that love of precision and accuracy to her many students when she later became a Tutor and Fellow at Somerville. It was therefore appropriate, perhaps inevitable, that she met the man she was to marry quite literally over books. Gabriel Turville-Petre was already a leading Icelandic scholar at Christ Church, and they met while Joan was cataloguing the Icelandic library at Oxford. They married in 1943. With their identity of interests, the marriage was a close one; both of them were devoted to researching and teaching, travelling together all over Scandinavia and as far afield as Australia for two visits where they taught for a term.

Joan had begun to establish an academic reputation for herself before she married, and in 1938 published a study of the Old English epic *Beowulf*. It's still valuable today, as are quite a number of her later studies of Old and Middle English and Old Icelandic, among which are five contributions to *Saga-Book* and a translation (with introduction) of *Rauðúlfs þáttr* in the Payne Memorial Series. She had a gift for the penetrating insight, the accurate analysis. She continued to research in the midst of the other demanding duties of a College Fellow, the teaching, marking exams, the endless committee meetings to run the college. She did all this while looking after her husband Gabriel, as well as her first children, Thorlac and Merlin, but it took a lot of juggling. (It has been said that she was 'one of the pioneers in combining an academic career with marriage and a family'.) One applicant for a teaching post recalled her astonishment at being confronted at her interview by two pregnant dons, Joan and her good friend Dorothy Hodgkin; students remember coming to her class and seeing a baby asleep in the open drawer of a cupboard. Soon after the birth of her third son, Brendan, Joan decided reluctantly to resign her Fellowship, though she carried on teaching generations of students from many colleges, and she continued

her writing. She served as President of the Viking Society in 1976–78, and remained an active member throughout her life.

She nursed her husband devotedly through his long final illness but his death in 1978 was a terrible blow which knocked her sideways. She took some comfort from her teaching, and in order to occupy her mind she put together an edition of the Old English biblical poem *Exodus*, based on lecture notes left by her former teacher, J. R. R. Tolkien. She had no affection for this book, published in 1981, which was always associated with a miserable period in her life. How ironic that this little book is now so sought after by Tolkien fans!

Three years after Gabriel's death, Joan left the city where she had spent her entire adult life to begin again in the Norfolk town of Aylsham. Just days after she arrived, her youngest son, Brendan, died tragically in Oxford. The first years in Aylsham were inevitably very hard for her, but before long her determination started to show itself once again and she began to build a new life for herself. She developed a passion for Norfolk churches and visited many of them on her bike—cycling, perhaps not altogether safely, well into her 80s. She took up photography (something she hadn't done since she was a teenager), delivering excellent pictures of the Norfolk countryside to family and friends at Christmas and birthdays.

She never gave up her researches, and soon began examining medieval Norfolk documents, a frequent visitor to the Norfolk Record Office in Norwich until it inconveniently burnt down and she had to take the bus to Lowestoft. She published a number of studies on the origins of Norfolk place-names and personal names. Even in the last year of her life, when she'd lost the stamina and concentration to work, she hadn't lost the will, and was still planning to write up the research she'd done on the medieval village of Bradfield, a few miles from Aylsham.

Although she was not a gregarious woman, she took part in her local community without inviting intimacy. Few people at the Local History Society, where she was an active and respected member, had any idea of her background but valued her knowledge and learned input to their meetings greatly. She became a formidable contestant in the Women's Institute market; always coming away with the best produce. She took in washing for Aylsham Carers Trust and held Labour Party Meetings in her kitchen. Every day, until the last months, of her life she would walk to her favourite pub and to meet her friends for a pint of real ale.

In these years, she became a stalwart influence in the lives of her four grandchildren, and later, her two great-grandchildren. Though never a

typical homely mother or grandmother, and singularly unimpressed by passing fads, she cared deeply about integrity and showed to her family the same dedication to honesty and consistency as to her work. She leaves a great gap in the lives of many colleagues, students, friends and the people she saw each day in the town that grew to love her, but most of all in the lives of her two sons and their families.

T.T.-P. and D.T.-P.

REVIEWS

ATLANTIC CONNECTIONS AND ADAPTATIONS. ECONOMIES, ENVIRONMENTS AND SUBSISTENCE IN LANDS BORDERING THE NORTH ATLANTIC. Edited by RUPERT A. HOUSLEY and GERAINT COLES. *Oxbow Books*. Oxford, 2004. 271 pp. ISBN 1 84217 106 2.

This volume contains twenty-four papers, most of which were presented at the first joint meeting of the Association for Environmental Archaeology (AEA) and the North Atlantic Biocultural Organisation (NABO) held, under the same title as the volume, at Glasgow University in the spring of 2001. The contribution of environmental work to archaeological investigations in the North Atlantic has increased steadily over the past twenty years, not least as a result of the establishment of NABO—an umbrella organisation for researchers working in this area—which was, at the time of the conference, celebrating its tenth anniversary. The topics covered a wide range, the common theme being evidence of human impact. The volume is not a comprehensive whole, but rather a showcase of (for the most part) work in progress, with some areas better represented than others. Some papers are linked, in that they deal with different aspects of the same site or area.

The volume is divided into four sections which are also to some extent geographically arranged. The first, entitled 'Atlantic Mainland Scotland', contains seven papers. Davies et al. and Housley et al. apply a combination of palynological and palaeoclimatic data to challenge previous notions of land-use and the effect of climate at two sites in the northern Scottish highlands. Sharples et al. and Smith et al. deal with settlement in the Outer Hebrides. The first paper claims to give a complete survey of settlement in South Uist until c.1500 but, as it turns out, only covers the western side of the island, because of difficulty of access to the east. There is some indication that settlement of the island began in the east, which is now covered by peat, then moved to the machair in the west, where all the late Iron Age and early medieval settlements are located, until that area was abandoned in favour of the blacklands further inland at some time during the fourteenth century. The reason for the move is not pinned down, but climate or politics is suggested. This is a very thorough survey of settlement in the western half of the island, including plans, maps and a useful chart of radiocarbon dates showing the chronological span of the sites, but it remains to be put into a wider context. In their paper Smith et al. assess resource management in the whole of the Outer Hebrides from the Neolithic period onwards, on the basis of faunal and floral evidence from different archaeological investigations. This shows intensification and innovation in fishing and farming during the Norse period. These changes are well laid out in tables showing numbers of animal bones and plant species at different sites through time. A location map to go with the list of site names would have made the link with the previous paper more effective. The remaining three papers in this section are somewhat technical tests of methodologies. Peters et al. and Church et al. apply mineral magnetism, on the one hand to identify fuel source, on the other to test a model of site formation

processes. Campbell et al. present new methods of dating pottery on the basis of the charred contents, a welcome refinement on dating by archaeological context. They also demonstrate that content remains do not mirror diet: marine food, known from palaeoenvironmental material, was not prepared in or eaten from pots.

These results are corroborated by the negative results of analysis of the survival of fish oils on pottery sherds from Scatness in Shetland (Brown et al.)—possible explanations being poor survival of fish oils or a more general use of white rather than oily fish. An attempt to analyse the remains of butter on pottery from the same site was also inconclusive (Challinor).

These are two of eight papers which address the volume's second theme, 'The Scottish Northern Isles', seven of which deal with different aspects of Old Scatness and its environment, under investigation since 1995. The site lies close to Jarlshof in southern Shetland and is thought to be similar in nature. In view of the many questions about Norse settlement in the Northern Isles left unanswered or unclear after the Jarlshof investigations, much hope has been invested in Scatness. We get an overview of the project, the nature of the site and its chronological sequence (Dockrill et al.), and the results of a study of faunal and botanical remains which indicate agricultural intensification in the mid- to late Iron Age (Bond et al.). Work on fishbones is shedding new light on this resource, suggesting that a storable surplus of dried fish and/or oil was collected as early as the Iron Age (Nicholson). Until now fishing has been assumed to have begun in earnest during the Norse period. A study of field systems will differentiate between Bronze Age, Norse, medieval and post-medieval fields by exploring the relationship between field form and function (Turner et al.). This involves a study of size, shape, association with structural remains, and soil-based investigations. The final paper on Scatness describes the building of a wheelhouse—a Pictish multi-cellular building—based on one of those excavated, a project which produced information valuable from both an academic and a practical point of view (Malcolmsen et al.). Scatness has not produced much Norse material. The floor of a Norse building might suggest that this phase of the occupation has been largely destroyed by later developments. A final publication of this site is awaited with interest.

The only paper in this section not concerned with Scatness deals with the origin of settlement in Orkney, and suggests that it can be traced to France or Northern Spain through the genetic makeup of the vole, introduced to the area by humans (Thaw et al.).

The third theme, entitled 'Iceland', is addressed in four papers. Caseldine et al. review past work on the Holocene development of the Icelandic biota and assess its potential contribution for understanding the evolution of the Icelandic landscape. The conclusion is that all methods applied are problematic, and that more research is needed if they are to be used for palaeoclimatic reconstructions. The Hofstaðir site in northern Iceland and the surrounding area has been the subject of wide-ranging interdisciplinary investigations since 1992, which are reviewed here (Friðriksson et al.). Hofstaðir was first

investigated early in the twentieth century. It was originally of interest because of its name (*hof* = pagan temple), and then because of the size of its longhouse, and the fact that it is not one of the earliest settled farms in Iceland. By putting the site into a wider context and using a variety of written sources of different dates, the authors suggest that Hofstaðir was created in an area where leadership was needed among many even-sized holdings. The site is clearly special—the hall is exceptionally large although there are no other signs of wealth, and horned cattle skulls seem to have decorated the outside of the long-walls—but it is acknowledged that there are too many unknowns for any theories to be proved, and that more comparative material is needed. A study of animal bones (Tinsley) from the site shows half domestic fauna and half fish species during the earliest period. By the mid tenth century there is a noticeable increase in the number of fish and birds, whereas by the early eleventh century domestic mammals dominate and wild species (including fish) become less prominent. No conclusions are drawn from this.

The last section, entitled 'North Atlantic networks', contains three papers. A study of steatite objects attempts to throw light on trade networks (Foster et al.). Lack of homogeneity within a single quarry produces problems for scientific provenance studies, but morphological indicators look promising for distinguishing between goods from Norway and Shetland. While a thorough study of the material from Shetland and Iceland has been carried out, this has not yet been done in Norway, which means that a provenance study, for example for the Icelandic material, is not yet possible.

The papers in this volume give a good insight into the variety of research being carried out around the North Atlantic, though work presented as 'in progress' in 2001 is likely to have seemed somewhat out of date by the time of its publication in 2004.

GUÐRÚN SVEINBJARNARDÓTTIR

LAND, SEA AND HOME. Edited by JOHN HINES, ALAN LANE and MARK REDKNAP. *Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs 20. Maney*. Leeds, 2004. 482 pp. 156 black and white illustrations. ISBN 1 904350 25 9.

This book is a substantial volume about the Viking-Age world that derives from the proceedings of a conference—and is none the worse for that! The editors, from Cardiff University (Hines and Lane) and the National Museum of Wales (Redknap), in organising the Conference and then the ensuing volume, have put the needs of the subject first by bringing together twenty-seven articles from thirty-seven authors (including one of the editors), together with a short Introduction by Hines. Regrettably, in an RAE-dominated academic world, there will not be many Brownie points to be gained for this selfless task, and one worries for the future health of the constituent disciplines if the production of conference proceedings such as this is to be relegated to an also-ran activity. However, the three should receive the considerable thanks of their professional colleagues, as this is

both a major undertaking and overall a considerable contribution in the field of Viking studies.

Divided into three sections, the book covers 'Scandinavia and Northern Europe' (Denmark, Norway, the Baltic region, Russia, northern Germany and Frisia), 'The Atlantic Provinces' (not, as one might imagine, the region across to Greenland and Canada, but Ireland, Scotland and Wales, together with a singleton on Iceland) and 'England' (but including papers which look at wider aspects of Viking-Age Britain and Ireland as well as looking back to Denmark). Apart from the twenty-seven articles (totalling 466 pages), there is a comprehensive index spreading over fifteen pages and an introductory five-page section by Hines entitled 'At Home in the Viking Period'. The latter—as one might expect—attempts to bring the collection into a coherent whole with, firstly, a semantic discussion of the concept of 'home', and then reflections more generally on 'settlement archaeology'—by far the most significant sub-group of papers in the volume, essentially sixteen in all. The latter is hardly surprising since the Conference theme was 'Viking-period Settlement in Britain and Ireland' and it was organised under the auspices of the Society for Medieval Archaeology.

Those papers not on the settlement archaeology theme *per se* cover particular aspects of numismatics and hoards (three papers), artefact studies (four), and one each on place-names, history, law and sagas. Although Hines offers a half-apology for the lack of comprehensiveness, he is quite right to observe that 'that is the job for a text-book or a quite different style of synthetic overview'. However, this reviewer shares his regret at lacunae, 'not least a report on the important recent discoveries in Dublin': indeed, for a conference with 'Ireland' in the title, there is remarkably little about that island (essentially only two specialist papers by Sheehan and Swift).

Immediately after the Introduction is a short appreciation of Denis Coggins, who died as the volume was about to go to press, and whose contribution was to revisit the site of 'Simy Folds: Twenty Years On'. Similarly, Alan King has provided an invaluable short update and wider context on 'Post-Roman Architecture in the Craven Dales and the Dating Evidence' for his earlier work in the 1970s at Ribbleshead. But these old friends, together with Richard Hall's latest overview of *Jorvik*, are joined in this volume by several newer discoveries and younger scholars in England: for instance, Cabot, Davies and Hoggett on 'Sedgeford: Excavations of a Rural Settlement in Norfolk' and Rippon on '. . . The Development of a Coastal Landscape in North-West Somerset During the Late 1st Millennium A.D.'

The most substantial paper (52 pages long) is an overview by Abrams and Parsons on 'Place-names and the History of Scandinavian Settlement in England', surely destined to be one of the most cited articles in the volume, along with the equally weighty, if somewhat shorter (36 pp.), overview by one of the editors (Redknap) on 'Viking-age Settlement in Wales and the Evidence from Llanbedrgoch'. The two papers on Russia (Pushkina on 'Viking-age Pre-Urban Settlements in Russia and Finds of Artefacts of Scandinavian Character', and Makarov on 'Rural Settlement and Landscape Transformations

in Northern Russia A.D. 900–1300') will undoubtedly add significantly to the limited material in accessible outlets for scholars to use. Other papers which will also clearly feature on student reading lists for some time will be those by Risvaag and Christophersen on 'Early Medieval Coinage and Urban Development: A Norwegian Experience' (essentially a Trondheim-based study) and 'Viking Relations with Frisia in an Archaeological Perspective' tacked on to a study by Besteman of 'Two Viking Hoards from . . . the Netherlands'.

Other papers are clearly shorter versions, or detailed aspects, of larger studies produced as postgraduate theses, or published elsewhere. Ulriksen on 'Danish Coastal Landing Places . . .', Armbruster on 'Goldsmiths' Tools at Hedeby', Griffiths on 'Settlement and Acculturation in the Irish Sea Province', Barrett on '. . . Culture Contact in Viking-age Scotland', Wyatt on 'Narrative Functions of Landscape in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas', Hoff on 'Law and Landscape' and Cameron and Mould on 'Saxon Shoes, Viking Sheaths? Cultural Identity in Anglo-Scandinavian York' all fall into this category and give a wider audience summaries of their more substantial studies. Similarly, in time-honoured fashion, there are interim statements of current or recently completed archaeological projects on major sites of the period by Forster, Thomas and Dockrill on Old Scatness, Parker Pearson, Smith, Mulville and Brennand on Cille Pheadair and Sharples on Bornais. Each of these has a distinct value while more definitive studies are undertaken, but will inevitably have a limited shelf life.

Papers that build on, or extend, earlier published work include Müller-Wille and Tummuscheit on 'Viking-age Proto-Urban Centres and their Hinterlands . . . from the Baltic Area', Sheehan on 'Social and Economic Integration in Viking-age Ireland: The Evidence of the Hoards' and Higham on 'Viking-age Settlement in the North-western Countryside . . .'. Again, as statements of ongoing research directions, they are useful in supplementing the earlier work. However, works which appear to be written specifically for this volume include the analysis of 'Royal fleets in Viking Ireland: The Evidence of *Lebor na Cert* A.D. 1050–1150' by Swift, a survey of 'Timber Buildings without Earth-fast Footings in Viking-age Britain' by Gardner, and an overview from Britain and Ireland of 'Changing Weaving Styles and Fabric Types: the Scandinavian Influence' by Henry. It will be interesting to see if these will develop into major research directions in the future.

Overall, this volume, if somewhat unbalanced in terms of both geographical coverage and disciplinary scope, and inevitably showing the unevenness of treatment that necessarily accompanies a conference-derived publication, nevertheless does offer, as Hines claims, a picture of the 'diversity and dynamism that exists in this field of study at present'. It certainly contains several papers of enduring value, and in being produced within three years of the conference, is not necessarily too dated in a fast-moving world of archaeological discoveries. It is a valuable addition to the Monograph series of the Society for Medieval Archaeology and there will be many in the Viking

Society for Northern Research who will find it a valuable addition to their library.

CHRISTOPHER D. MORRIS

NORWEGIAN RUNES AND Runic INSCRIPTIONS. By TERJE SPURKLAND. Translated by BETSY VAN DER HOEK. *The Boydell Press*. Woodbridge, 2005. x + 206 pp. 42 black and white illustrations, 3 line illustrations. ISBN 1 84383 186 4.

This volume is a translation of the author's *I begynnelsen var fuþark* (Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2001). It is intended not for runology specialists, but for students of Norse language and culture and interested amateurs in general; it would therefore be unfair to judge the work in any other light (and since the present writer is not a runologist, it would be presumptuous to attempt to do so here anyway). The fundamental point is to consider whether the book offers such readers an interesting and informative account of Norwegian runes, presented at a suitable level. Overall the answer is yes; the book fills a gap, and is worthy to stand beside, for example, Sven B. F. Jansson's *The Runes of Sweden* (itself now somewhat dated, of course, but a useful semi-popular work nonetheless).

Although the book is for non-specialists, the author manages to present an impressive array of Norwegian runic inscriptions from all periods. A great deal of attention has gone into producing accurate versions of these inscriptions, which are nearly always given in the runic original, in transliteration, in standardised Old Norse and in translation. There are many hundreds of runic inscriptions from Norway, of course, and those that appear in this book represent only a sample of them. The sample is well chosen, however, and rich: the texts are nearly always of great intrinsic interest. Moreover, many are presented in their original form in the fine selection of photographs included, so the reader can gain a good sense of the material culture of runes. Taken together, the inscriptions form a useful and attractive corpus covering all periods of Norwegian runic history.

The more general discussion of each runic inscription succeeds on the whole in observing a good balance between excitement and narrative drive on the one hand and the details of interpretation on the other (the latter being naturally more curtailed than would be appropriate in a full scholarly treatment). The reader is left with a sense both of the fascination of interpreting these often lively statements from so long ago and of the frustration of never coming to a firm conclusion about their meaning (and the more tantalisingly interesting an inscription appears to be, the less likely is it that any firm interpretation will be possible: a point brought home graphically in the presentation of the history of interpretation of the Eggja stone). This would appear to be a fair reflection of runological studies in general, as they seem to an outsider, at least.

Although the book presents the inscriptions in chronological order, each chapter appears thematically distinct, thus avoiding the sense of offering

more of the same each time. For example, the culture that produced the Eggja stone was very different from that of Bergen in the high Middle Ages, which of course produced a plethora of short and startling inscriptions. The author illuminates these cultural differences and the variety of concerns the original carvers may have had very well; from a purely scholarly point of view, some of the discussion is perhaps a little over-imaginative, but it is not out of place in the present context. The author's treatment seems to improve in tandem with the chronological development; the discussion of the origin of runes, for example, is weak, but the later material, which includes the most colourful examples, is more skilfully presented. For those unfamiliar with these inscriptions—as the intended readership largely will be—the book is worth reading just to see the vivid picture of medieval Norwegian life they afford, where a man bewails the fact that he cannot spend longer in the pub, and another is summoned by his wife to hurry back from the ale-house; where a woman is proposed to on the way to church (and then discards the slip with the inscription on in the church); and where the first documented homosexual act takes place—again, in a church. All this is presented in a lively fashion, and the discussion is firmly focused upon the runic inscriptions themselves.

The book does have its faults, however. The most off-putting aspect to me—and I accept this may be a matter of taste—is the tone used throughout. The author appears to believe that readers will not be attracted unless the book is couched in a chatty, colloquial style, replete with weak puns such as 'stonography' (clearer in the original Norwegian 'ste(i)nografi'), and is sometimes burdened with rather laboured discussions; the translator has certainly done a good job of representing the original Norwegian in these respects, but I feel insufficient notice has been taken of potential differences in the English readership's expectations. Whatever one feels about this matter, a more significant problem lurks behind it: a condescending attitude. Instead of having the sense of sharing in a scholar's excitement as he recounts the details of his specialism, the reader is rather made to feel like a benighted school pupil being instructed by a teacher, who has decided what should and should not be revealed. Why, for example, is it necessary to gloss everyday terms such as 'mnemonic' (10) or 'transliterate' (17) (but not others, such as 'preterite')? Doing so is likely rather to underline the reader's ignorance, actual or assumed. Or again, do readers capable of dealing with these complex runic texts really need the laboured explanation (187) that 'Hafgrími' is a dative?

In his determination not to overcomplicate matters for this imagined readership the author sometimes verges on the inaccurate. For example, in his rather unmeasured enthusiasm for the early form of the fuþark he writes, 'In Proto-Scandinavian, every symbol was unambiguous in that there was one symbol for every sound' (p. 78), and 'Each rune in the fuþark represented one sound and each sound was represented by only one rune. In that sense the writing system in Proto-Scandinavian was very functional, more functional than is the case of most modern languages based on alphabetic script' (p. 150). This is misleading: in terms of segmental phonology, the system was arguably as

Spurkland states, but given that, for example, long and short vowels were not distinguished, the fuþark was far from offering an accurate representation of the language's phonemic structure. At another point (pp. 82–83), Spurkland presents a simplified version of the vowel system of Old Norse—one which omits some of the various mutations and nasalisations we know to have existed, and he fails moreover to hint at the greater complexity we know to have existed. Here, as elsewhere, the author speaks down to the reader, taking upon himself the right to preclude what we are to be allowed to know.

There are many small annoyances in the volume. Óðinn is said, without comment (albeit in a citation of others' interpretations), to take the dead with him to Hel (which text is this based on, one wonders?). In attempting to demonstrate that *qnd* in pre-Christian times meant 'breath' and not 'soul', Spurkland shows little awareness of work on religious vocabulary, and falls into the trap of citing *Vǫluspá* 18, where Óðinn gave *qnd* to the first human couple (p. 136)—a passage whose precise meaning cannot be determined from the context, and which is therefore useless as evidence in any semantic argument. The overall effect of these dubious points may be to undermine the reader's sense of the book's authority, at least in its discussion of areas outside the immediate interpretation of the runes themselves.

Each chapter concludes with a short section suggesting further reading. These have been revised from the Norwegian version to reflect the English readership (some more obscure works, mostly in Norwegian, are mentioned in footnotes). A few works that one might have expected to see, such as R. W. V. Elliott's *Runes*, are absent, but in general the lists form a sensibly limited selection of works for this level of presentation.

There are two indexes, one listing the runic inscriptions discussed, and the other 'topical' index including everything else; illustrations are indicated in italic numerals. Unlike in the Norwegian version, the indexes are at least in alphabetical order, though they still contain some odd entries, such as 'Kilroy'—an imaginary catch-all characterisation of the ubiquitous rune-carver, a creation of the author that surely no one is going to look up. Over all, the entries could have been better thought out, but they perhaps manage to serve their purpose.

In sum, the book will probably be found useful and attractive by anyone interested in Old Norse or Norwegian history; specialist runologists may well wish to look elsewhere, however. Some weaknesses of the Norwegian version have been tidied up, though perhaps the opportunity could have been taken to do more. The remaining problems are generally more annoyances than serious defects, and the author's ability to present the subject in an interesting manner, while still providing many precisely presented examples of the source material he is discussing, certainly justifies the publication of this English version.

'HE DROWNED IN HOLMR'S SEA — HIS CARGO-SHIP DRIFTED TO THE SEA-BOTTOM, ONLY THREE CAME OUT ALIVE.' RECORDS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF BALTIC TRAFFIC IN THE VIKING AGE AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES IN EARLY NORDIC SOURCES. By KRISTEL ZILMER. *Dissertationes Philologiae Scandinavicae Universitatis Tartuensis* 1, *Nordistica Tartuensis* 12. Tartu University Press. Tartu, 2005. 404 pp., 36 figs, 3 tabs. ISBN 9949 11 089 0, ISSN 1736 2865.

At the centre of Kristel Zilmer's doctoral thesis is a survey and analysis of the Scandinavian runic inscriptions, dating from the period c.900–1150, which refer to traffic and travel around the Baltic. The area thus covered includes, of course, the Danish and Swedish coasts as well as the non-Scandinavian eastern and southern shores of the Sea. The introductory chapters on theory, methods and research history (pp. 13–73) are very careful and rather slow, but it is important here not to miss Zilmer's characterisation of her own approach, which she labels an 'adapted hermeneutic' method. After a neat image of each new perspective in a multidisciplinary historical analysis constituting a further and progressive full turn of the hermeneutic spiral, she succeeds in making a convincing case—to be truthful, a more convincing case than I would previously have thought possible—that the minute dissection of individual runic inscriptions, along with their monumental situations and contexts, can give real substance and vitality to the 'mini-narratives' each element implies. A recurrent theme, which cumulatively develops into a powerful general insight, is that what we look at in these texts and their contexts is consistently anchored in particular realities. Like the example quoted in the title, from a stone in Vallentuna church, Uppland, what these inscriptions record and commemorate for us were often dramatic and tragic realities of the Viking Age and the conversion period.

It comes as no surprise that the earliest, tenth-century, inscriptions in question are found in Denmark. After that, with a couple of outliers in Norway, the majority of the relevant runestones are concentrated in the central Swedish *landskap* around Mälaren. More striking is the strong west-east axis of connexions and interest these inscriptions show, looking across the Baltic to what are now the Baltic states and Russia, with only a couple of references to Finland and none to the Slavonic lands along the southern Baltic. Many geographical terms occur more than once. Zilmer describes the geographical knowledge involved here as 'general', but it is surely also right to understand the use of familiar terms to have been practical and meaningful in a way that the use of exotic, esoteric place-names could never be. From an association in a saga source of what appear to be phonologically Baltic personal names with Eistland, she notes that this name cannot be assumed to refer solely to an early Estonian territory, although it does seem to remain clearly distinct from Kúrland further south.

Overall, though, the comparison of the inscriptional evidence with references in skaldic poetry and sagas is much more positive and constructive than is suggested by that one corrective warning. These other categories of text derive from different, if overlapping, periods of time, and from very different social and geographical milieux. They also differ in the reflections they give

of Baltic travel, albeit in a generally complementary manner. In the Norse–Icelandic skaldic corpus, only Arnórr jarlaskáld’s *Hrynhenda* (*Magnússdrápa*) shows any real interest in and understanding of the details of an expedition in the Baltic. In Markús Skeggjason’s *Eiríksdrápa*, and in *Knýtlinga saga*, however, we pick up literary reflexes of the significant and persistent concern of the kings of Denmark with the Slavonic Wends in the early Christian Middle Ages. Again confirming the underlying reality of the sources concerned with the Baltic, Zilmer notes the prominent link between the Viken area of south-eastern Norway and sailing routes into the Baltic. Something that also seems particularly noteworthy is the fact that the eastern Baltic lands are generally *not* used as a setting for the fantastic: only the single episode of Þorkell hákr’s marvellous encounters and battles with a mysterious *finngálkn* and a flying dragon, which is effectively interpolated into Chapter 119 of *Njáls saga*, falls into that category.

It is, of course, a matter of predisposition and one’s own scholarly alignment, but I was genuinely surprised that the author’s final conclusions and reflections on the material collected, reviewed and analysed were literary and methodological (‘hermeneutic’) rather than historical. She proposes the narrative tradition of travelogue as the framework within which their ‘broader cultural-historical meaning’ is to be found, and offers a very subtly nuanced distinction between the genres: runic inscriptions as commemorative; skaldic poetry celebrating famous leaders; sagas as stories that revolve around fame and honour. From my viewpoint, the concrete historical differences between the sources give reliable cultural-historical insights no less interesting and significant than these extremely fine semiotic distinctions. Putting this conclusion together with the words that open her final paragraph—‘It lies in human nature to travel, and it also lies in human nature to speak or write about travels’—the author risks giving the impression that the travelogue was in the end not only the most interesting and durable product of the events and experiences in question but even their goal. I am sure she thinks no such thing, but in light of the rhetoric of New Historicism and its ‘textuality of the past’ one needs to be guarded. It is important for us all to realise what an important and informative source has been laid out and examined here, in a thoroughly scholarly and accessible way. Dr Zilmer looks for multidisciplinary perspectives, and archaeologists and historians will find much of value in her book, as well as being able to contribute much to support and extend her insights.

JOHN HINES

VIKING EMPIRES. By ANGELO FORTE, RICHARD ORAM and FREDERIK PEDERSEN. *Cambridge University Press*. Cambridge, 2005. 486 pp., 60 half-tones, 10 figures, 3 maps. ISBN 0 521 82992 5 (hardback), 9780 521 829922 (paperback).

As the authors of *Viking Empires* admit at the beginning of their book, it is an ambitious enterprise to cover thirteen centuries (starting from 1 BC) of the

history of the 'Scandinavian diaspora and its impact on western mainland Europe, the British Isles and the other North Atlantic islands'. Underpinning their work is the idea that Scandinavian interaction and integration with Europe can be traced back to the first centuries of the Christian era, 'when the Roman Empire was at its height', and that 'from the earliest times the Scandinavians were a part of the larger European community' (p. 393). The Viking Age, they argue, is to be viewed as part of this process of interaction and integration, ending in the thirteenth century 'with an apparent whimper', when 'a number of factors combined to change the Scandinavian outlook to one that was more in line with the rest of Europe' (p. 171).

More ambitious (and less desirable) is the idea that placing 'the Viking Age firmly into its wider historical context' will enable us to see its origins and development 'as part of a single process' (p. 2). This macroscopic approach has a confusing effect; zooming out to survey thirteen centuries of Scandinavian activity in the West might give a general idea of space and location, but the sense of scale and important details are lost. It is also difficult to think of a single process of expansion and integration within Scandinavia, where geographical and material conditions, as well as political development, were so diverse. On the other hand, the sacrifice of the small scale may prove beneficial if it can lead students to look at the years before and after the so-called Viking Age. This is not exactly new, as other scholars have already argued for the importance of the Viking Age's 'formative centuries' (to use Bjørn Myhre's expression) between AD 600 and 800. But as even the post-Roman period is frequently left out of studies of the Viking Age, the authors are clearly offering a fresh approach by taking 'the discussion of the origins of the Scandinavian states back to the first century AD' (p. 1).

The authors reject a view of Scandinavian raids and subsequent colonisation as a 'compartmentalised series of geographically isolated events', and emphasise the 'common dimensions [of these events] within this traumatic episode in European history' (p. 54); however, this welcome approach is sometimes lost amid summaries of military conflicts, with very little reflection upon, or dialogue with, recent scholarship. This is also aggravated by an odd imbalance in the distribution of chapters: some sections seem to have been rushed through, such as 'First contact: England and the continent' (chapter 3), which mostly summarises the traditional narratives for the period, while chapter 5, 'A water world', perhaps relies disproportionately upon technical detail relating to ship building. Scotland is given more attention than any other country (chapters 4, 9, 10), but this particular imbalance does have the benefit of filling the gap that exists in many previous books on the Viking Age. The greatest gap in *Viking Empires*, though, is Scandinavia itself (which sometimes seems to mean little more than Denmark, and perhaps Norway), and Russia, although the authors state early on that the book 'is westward looking in its orientation' (p. 5).

Sometimes sources are used without an awareness of the problems they might raise. The theory about the transfer of Gorm and Thyre's remains to the wooden church in Jelling, for example, is presented as an uncontroversial fact (pp. 178–79). One feels that the whole discussion of

Jelling—within a section entitled ‘The birth of Scandinavia’—deserved more space and that the authors did not need to suppress the academic debate on the possible interpretations of the Jelling site and monuments and of their meanings. Such problems are much less prominent in the chapters on ships and navigation (chapters 5, 11, 12), on Ireland (chapter 8) and the previously mentioned chapters on Scotland. Sometimes, though, the use of sources is a problem in itself. The use of Icelandic sagas as a source for the Viking Age does not receive the attention that it deserves; the general warning on p. 6, that the sagas’ ‘value as historical reporting has now been thoroughly undermined’, is not enough, especially when, here and there, subsequent information from the sagas is quoted without any caveats (for instance on p. 174; the exception is chapter 5, which discusses the use of Icelandic sagas as evidence for ships, ship-building and navigation). As other reviewers have also pointed out (Lesley Abrams, *Times Literary Supplement*, July 8, 2005); Eric Christiansen, *English Historical Review* 490, 2006), there are serious errors: for instance, *Heimskringla* is placed in the twelfth century (p. 6) and the sagas are said to depict King Harald fairhair’s ‘militant Christianity’ (p. 180).

It would have been impossible to write a book that could have answered all the different demands for a book about the Viking Age, and it cannot be expected that the authors of *Viking Empires* could ever have pleased everybody. The book could have been more reflective, it could have offered more discussion of recent scholarly debate, and it could have achieved a better balance of subject matter, to reflect its authors’ ambitions for it. The word ‘empires’ should also have been avoided, as it is defined so broadly as to become meaningless. And Scandinavia itself is the greatest absentee in a book which struggles to offer a more Scandinavian perspective on the Viking Age. But the book does have something to offer; despite its occasional errors, especially lamentable in view of its student audience, it certainly provides a wider perspective of Scandinavian activity in the West.

PATRICIA PIRES BOULHOSA

SKANDINAVISCH-SCHOTTISCHE SPRACHBEZIEHUNGEN IM MITTELALTER: DER ALTNORDISCHE LEHNEINFLUß. By SUSANNE KRIES. *North-Western European Language Evolution (NOWELE) Supplement 20*. University Press of Southern Denmark. Odense, 2003. 498 pages. ISBN 87 7838 873 2.

The Lowlands of Scotland have been exposed to Scandinavian influence over two quite distinct periods. An early Viking contact period in the late ninth and early tenth centuries saw Scandinavians attacking Strathclyde from Dublin as well as setting up alliances with the Scottish seat of power, possibly in an attempt to establish lines of communication between the two Scandinavian strongholds Dublin and York via the Clyde-Forth Valley. The Lowland settlement names with *-býr* have been associated with this period, as have the earliest so-called hog-back monuments, a distinct, roof-shaped type of gravestone found in northern England and Scotland. A second period of influence belongs

to the eleventh and twelfth centuries when people from Northumbria and Yorkshire, some fleeing the terror of William of Normandy, found a welcome haven in the Scotland of the MacMalcoluim dynasty. This people, who spoke a kind of pidginised Scandinavian English, became very influential in the establishment of the Scottish burghs and thus left a legacy of Scandinavian loan-words in Scots. Or so we were told to believe.

Susanne Kries's study of the medieval Scandinavian loans into Scots challenges the established view that the Scandinavian words in Scots are the result of an indirect Scandinavian influence from the Anglo-Scandinavians migrating from the north-east of England. Kries argues that if this were the case we would expect to find a common inventory of vocabulary in north-eastern England and in Scotland. However, her study shows that a substantial number of the Scandinavian loans in Middle Scots have no equivalent in Middle English.

One could have wished Kries had considered more than one explanation for the fact that there are more Scandinavian loan-words in Scots than in northern English. One possibility that could have been scrutinised is that a normalisation process within English might have eliminated many of the northern English loans. Already from William I's reign there was just such a pressure from the dialect of the south-west—where there was minimal Scandinavian influence—on the more Scandinavianised dialect of the north. However, Kries does not only rely on a difference in the number of words. In many cases where there are equivalent forms, the variations between the English and Scots forms point to a difference of linguistic and cultural influence from Scandinavia. All in all, Kries finds that the differences are too great to support the theory that the move of influential people from the north-west of England helping to set up the burghs of Scotland during the reign of David I gave Scots its Scandinavian component.

Kries convincingly identifies a Scandinavian influence on Scots that is much stronger than previously estimated. She suggests that the reason for this is that Scots had a longer period of exposure to Scandinavian than had English. She estimates that the period of contact or influence could have started as early as the ninth century and that it could have lasted until the beginning of the thirteenth century. Kries argues for such an early date by claiming that the focal area of Scandinavian influence was not the south-east but rather the south-west of Scotland. During the ninth and tenth centuries there was a node of direct contact between Scandinavians and Angles in the area around the Solway Firth. Geographically this is an extension of the Scandinavian belt of strong cultural influence stretching all the way from Cumberland to Lincolnshire, and it is in this contact area that most of the Scandinavian loans in Scots are found, including the oldest ones.

This reader feels that Kries's ideas, although interesting, are sometimes based on rather shaky foundations, notably the scarce early source material, both for Scots and Northern English. The theory of a south-western path of influence on Scots is the most controversial, and clearly the author should have put more effort into explaining how linguistic borrowings which took place in what would have been a Scottish periphery actually managed to win

general acceptance in Scots. Kries does point to the hog-back monuments which might be evidence for a Scandinavian aristocracy in the south-west of Scotland. However, the evidence for such an aristocracy is not very strong, and even if it did exist, it still would not be enough to explain how borrowings that first occurred in the south-west managed to spread to, say, Lothian and Aberdeenshire. The very strength of the hypothesis that Kries seeks to debunk is the fact that it made socio-linguistic sense for Scandinavian words to be accepted into Scots because they arrived with merchants and traders with whom Scots by necessity had to communicate. This would be similar to the situation in Scandinavia in the late Middle Ages when influential Hanseatic merchants left a very large corpus of Low German loans. It is therefore somewhat surprising that Kries does not touch upon the lively recent theoretical and methodological discussion around the Middle Low German loans into Scandinavian.

Since we are considering omissions, a modern work of this sort ought to have made use of the newest Norwegian dictionary *Norsk ordbok*, for although only half of it is yet in print, the unedited word-base is available on the Web. Kries's discussions of words sometimes gives the impression that Swedish must have played an important role when it comes to influencing Scots, as several words are listed with Swedish dialect parallels, when a simple check could have established similar Norwegian dialect words.

This criticism notwithstanding, it is important to recognise that this study is an important piece of work. For the first time the complete inventory of Scandinavian loans in Old and Middle Scots is analysed. About seven hundred words are thoroughly discussed as they appear in the recently completed *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*. The author points to several interesting features in the corpus of Scandinavian loanwords in Scots, for example the difference from north-east English. She is also able to show that the inventory of Scandinavian loans is larger than that accepted by traditional scholarly consensus, that there is a clear Norwegian or west Scandinavian presence in the Scots material, and that the period of influence is likely to have taken place over a much longer period than formerly thought. These are all interesting findings, which greatly advance research in this field, and one can only hope that some of Kries's suggested explanations are found controversial enough to be challenged in future.

ARNE KRUSE

PAPERS ON SCANDINAVIAN AND GERMANIC CULTURE, PUBLISHED IN HONOUR OF MICHAEL BARNES ON HIS SIXTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY 28 JUNE 2005. Edited by H. F. NIELSEN. NOWELE 46/47. *University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2005. 273 pp. ISBN 87 7674 037 4.

Nineteen scholars have contributed to this wide-ranging volume in honour of Michael Barnes, though they do not succeed in matching its honorand's own range of interest and expertise. Articles include *bonnes bouches* such as

Anders Ahlqvist's amusing discussion of an apparent place-name 'MacElliot' in Finland, and Peter Foote's characteristically witty and incisive dismissal of an 'Odin's stone' in Orkney. Other toponymic pieces are provided by Lars-Erik Edlund and Eivind Weyhe, who similarly debunk some other place-names.

Phonological and morphological features are discussed in three papers. Gillis Kristensson discusses place-name forms containing /sk/ in Devon, attributing them mostly to Cornish influence, though as Richard Dance and others have shown, there is also strong evidence for early Norse linguistic influence in regions of England not usually associated with Scandinavian conquest and settlement. Gotthard Lerchner discusses a possible substrate relationship between Germanic and Finno-Ugrian in terms of word-initial accent, though he rather simplifies this complex matter. Although he uses the term *Stammbetonung* for Germanic, there is no discussion of the important point that Germanic root-accent only became word-initial through loss of (virtually) all IE proclitic syllables. There is little discussion of the possibly even more fundamental Germanic shifts between dynamic and tonal accentuation. Robert Nedoma gives a densely-argued and rather too compressed discussion of the unaccented vowel or vowels sometimes represented by a in proto-Norse runic inscriptions. This is a difficult problem, with major morphological implications; it has been much masticated and remains indigestible, but this article is an important contribution to its understanding.

Lexical problems are considered in two papers. Rolf Bremmer discusses the Old Frisian forms *fule/felo* 'much, many': a lexicographical problem with phonological and lexical, even semantic, implications that could have been analysed further. Anatoly Liberman also explores a lexical item, English 'slow-worm' and its cognates, which also have complex phonological, lexical and semantic implications. This is an interesting and enjoyable piece, if not perhaps entirely persuasive.

Several papers discuss problems of categorisation: Jan Terje Faarlund discusses whether the *-sk* element of the Norse middle voice should be considered either a clitic or an affix, both or neither. Tom Lundskær-Nielsen discusses the categorisation of possessives, in a piece that oddly lacks any diachronic dimension. Likewise, Kurt Braunmüller considers word-order in early runic inscriptions, looking for typological similarities with Latin. His sample is necessarily too small for statistical methods to be applicable, and no distinction between marked and unmarked word-order can safely be established for this corpus: similarities (and dissimilarities) may therefore be random.

Other papers discussing runes are provided by Jan Ragnar Hagland, who interestingly but inconclusively discusses their possible use by skaldic poets, and two elegant and subtle pieces, by Ray Page and Karin Fjellhammer Seim, on reading or not reading runic inscriptions. Odd Einar Haugen discusses the representation of runes in Unicode computer-fonts: an apparently narrow, technical topic which in fact raises a number of important, interesting and far-reaching linguistic points.

Grammatical features are discussed in two papers. That by Helge Sandøy deals with the dying dative in Norwegian and Faroese, giving rather inadequate

reference to its use in Old Norse. The discussion unhappily lacks significant reference to modern Icelandic, with its *þágufallssjúkdómur*, let alone more widely to other Germanic languages. Matsuji Tajima gives an important survey of the development of the English ‘compound gerund’ (forms such as *having done* and *being doing*) in the seventeenth century.

Finally, one textual piece, by Gudlaug Nedrelid, discusses possible readings and interpretation of a verse attributed to Haraldr inn harðráði Sigurðsson.

Everything in this volume is interesting, most of it enjoyable, some of it important. It is reasonably accurately presented, and typographical errors are only trivial. I hope that Michael found it as worthwhile a tribute to his own achievements as I did.

PAUL BIBIRE

ICELANDERS AND THE KINGS OF NORWAY. MEDIEVAL SAGAS AND LEGAL TEXTS. By PATRICIA PIRES BOULHOSA. *The Northern World* 17. Brill. Leiden and Boston, 2005. 256 pp. ISBN 90 04 14516 8.

Icelanders and the Kings of Norway is one of the most significant books on Icelandic medieval history to appear for decades. It is characterised in equal measure by sound textual scholarship and a thoroughly novel vision of the history of the Icelandic Commonwealth (a term which, incidentally, will be hard to use in serious scholarly works after the appearance of this book). Although the book has attracted some attention in Old Norse–Icelandic scholarly circles, it can be safely predicted that its main value lies in the effect it will have on works on Icelandic history for decades to come. It would take a very foolhardy scholar to ignore its findings, even though the so-called ‘Icelandic school’ of saga criticism has often been surprisingly successful in ignoring some of the main tenets of established textual scholarship. Boulhosa’s analysis is frequently bold and innovative, and sometimes of unique value. In this book there is hardly a wasted page.

In articulating its bold and innovative vision of Icelandic history, the work opens up several avenues of debate. In this review, I shall only be able to explore a few of them.

The first chapter deals with some methodological problems concerning medieval Icelandic texts, notably questions of authorship, and whether texts can be considered to be history or fiction. It is demonstrated concisely and lucidly that it is a hazardous exercise to name the ‘author’ of any particular Icelandic medieval text, and that it would be more fruitful to look at the multiplicity of extant texts and views and recognise these texts as products of a manuscript culture. This flies in the face of a very lively tradition of Old Norse–Icelandic scholarship, and should challenge many scholars to reconsider their basic methodological approach. The question of whether the texts are fiction or history is then discussed and found to be irrelevant, which to my mind is hardly surprising.

The most revolutionary of the author's findings is in chapter 3, where the documents relating to the submission of the Icelanders to the Norwegian king are thoroughly analysed. Following her analysis, it would be very hard to maintain that the documents, the oldest of them from the sixteenth century, which have been taken to represent a covenant made in 1262 between the Norwegian king and farmers from the North and South of Iceland, generally known as *Gizurarsáttmáli*, are in fact genuine representations of the letter drawn up at the time, which is mentioned in the Fríssbók redaction of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*.

Boulhosa also manages to raise some doubts about later versions of this covenant, known as *Gamli sáttmáli*, usually held to be composed in 1302, although they are in fact only found in documents from the fifteenth century. She makes a convincing case, based on internal evidence, that some of the clauses which have been thought to originate in 1262 or 1302, concerning the position of *lögmenn* and *sýslumenn*, summonses to go abroad, and the six ships to be sent annually between Norway and Iceland, seem more in tune with the concerns and language of the early fifteenth century. Although this anachronism is not equally marked in all cases, one can agree with the author that there is considerable room for doubt concerning claims made for the early provenance of these documents.

One clause of the *Gamli sáttmáli* which gets surprisingly little attention is the stipulation that Icelanders want to retain the office of jarl. To my mind the inclusion of this clause merits more thorough discussion, as it can hardly be said to be of any contemporary relevance when the documents were written down in the fifteenth century. On the other hand, the title of jarl still existed in Norway in the early fourteenth century, even if there had been no jarl in Iceland for some decades. On this issue, I find it very hard to agree with the author that 'this clause weakens the case for dating the texts to 1302' (p. 142). On the contrary, it is the one clause of the covenant that seems to lack any relevance to the concerns of the Icelanders in the early fifteenth century.

In chapter 4 the author discusses the significance of settlement narratives in the fourteenth-century *Möðruvallabók*, and ties this discussion convincingly in with the debate about *höldsréttir* in the *Ólafslög* discussed in chapter 2. The author raises many important issues relating to the depiction of King Haraldr hárfagri in *Möðruvallabók*, which she rightly connects with sentiments existing among the Icelandic literary élite in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It would, however, have been interesting to offer some discussion of the origins of this representation in the eleventh century, and it might have strengthened the connection identified by the author between *Ólafslög* and *Möðruvallabók*. I have argued before (in, for example, 'Óþekkti konungurinn. Sagnir um Harald hárfagra'. *Ný saga* 11 (1999), 38–53, and "Erindringen om en mægtig Personlighed". *Den norsk-islandske historiske tradisjon om Harald Hårfagre i et kildekritisk perspektiv*. *Historisk tidsskrift* 81 (2002), 213–30) that the image of Haraldr hárfagri must have undergone significant modification sometime between 1066, when the nickname is applied to the king also known as Haraldr harðráði in Anglo-Saxon sources, and c.1130,

when Ari fróði is the oldest known author to use this nickname for the putative first monarch of Norway. The synchronicity between the development of this tradition and the first known document where the term *höldsréttir* appears, written sometime between 1082 and 1107 (the arguments of Jón Sigurðsson for dating it in 1083 are tenuous at best), is interesting and could have raised further issues concerning the attitudes of Icelanders towards Haraldr hárfagri and his role in the settlement of Iceland.

In the final analysis, however, one has nothing but praise for a book that offers so many fresh insights into Icelandic medieval historiography. It cannot fail to provide an impetus for Icelandic historians thoroughly to revise established facts about the nature of Icelandic government in the Middle Ages.

SVERRIR JAKOBSSON

LITERACY IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SCANDINAVIA. Edited by PERNILLE HERMANN. *The Viking Collection 16. University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2005. 355 pp. ISBN 87 7674 040 4.

In the last thirty years the subject of literacy has come to assume an important position in medieval studies. At least in the Anglophone world, however, medieval Scandinavia has featured little in these three decades of 'literacy studies'. The landmark works on the theory and history of literacy tend to focus on ancient Greece, or medieval England, or contemporary Africa, and Scandinavia does not feature even in such a standard survey as Rosamund McKitterick's edited volume *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), just missing both the geographical and the chronological cut-off points. Yet one might have thought that medieval Scandinavia, with its extensive record of runic culture and, post-Conversion, its rapid acquisition of Roman literacy, would be an obvious and fertile field for literacy studies. It is very good to report, therefore, that this collection of essays, arising from a conference at Aarhus in 2002, goes a long way towards rectifying this situation of neglect. While it is inevitably uneven in places, this volume should immediately become the standard English-language survey of the history of literacy in medieval Scandinavia.

Following a brief but helpful 'Introduction' by the editor, the book is subdivided into five sections. The first section, 'Literacy and Vision', contains two essays. In the first of these, not in fact on a Scandinavian topic, Leslie Webster examines the Anglo-Saxons' skills in what she terms 'visual literacy', and argues that this long-established facility in the interpretation of visual objects served them well when they came to engage with literacy; this argument is advanced by the close reading of a number of objects, some familiar (such as the Franks Casket), others less so (such as the Ludlow sword pommel). In the second essay Michael Clanchy—one of the giants of literacy studies—considers the fifteenth-century wall paintings in the church at Tuse in Zealand. These depict the Virgin Mary taking the young Jesus to

school, to learn to read (and write?), and the essay shows Clanchy at his generous best: erudite, incisive, wise and illuminating. Clanchy argues against the assumption that an image, or a text, had one single meaning or interpretation in the Middle Ages; it may have conveyed different messages to different viewers. What the range of meanings of the Tuse paintings might have been is drawn out with exemplary elegance and insight.

The next section, containing three essays, is headed 'Literacy, Orality and "Runacy"', and the first essay is another of the highlights of the volume. This is Stefan Brink's wide-ranging overview of oral culture in Viking-Age Scandinavia, and of the interaction of the old oral culture with aspects of literacy. Brink examines, inter alia, poetry and runic inscriptions, and he is especially interesting on the oral/written dimensions of early Scandinavian laws. This is a must-read survey, with an extremely useful sixteen-page bibliography attached. The other two essays in this section are somewhat briefer: Terje Spurkland engages with Aslak Liestøl's old claims about literate Vikings, and suggests that we might use the term 'runacy' to refer to their literacy, while Jakob Hovl Holck offers a short review of possible foreign influences on the use of runes in Denmark between the third and the thirteenth centuries.

The third section, 'Literacy and Poetry', contains three essays. Karl G. Johansson considers Eddic poetry, taking *Skírnismál* as a test-case for the processes by which originally oral poetry came to be written down, and exploring how far the two main manuscripts of *Skírnismál* might reflect possible public performance or private reading. Judith Jesch queries the common claim that the introduction of literacy leads to changes in the function of texts, by exploring the ways in which skaldic verse aspires to (and often attains) the type of function and permanence one might normally associate with written records (for example, chronicle, peace treaty, charter, letter). Finally, Guðrún Nordal offers a fascinating account of the prosimetrum of *Njáls saga*, examining how the editor-scribes of different manuscripts of the saga included or omitted the available verses; Nordal's essay raises important questions about saga reception and the perceived roles of skaldic verse in fourteenth-century Iceland.

The fourth section, 'Literacy and Communication', also contains three essays. Wolfert S. van Egmond asks what might be learned about literacy from Latin hagiographical texts, and focuses on the Burgundian diocese of Auxerre in the Merovingian period, with a brief excursus on Rimbart's *Life of Anskar*. Marco Mostert offers an overview of the history and historiography of literacy studies, and of the theory and development of literacy in the Middle Ages (though he does not discuss Scandinavia specifically). Arnved Nedkvitne complements this with a stimulating survey of administrative, especially judicial, literacy in Scandinavia; Nedkvitne views literacy primarily as a technology to be employed according to particular cultural needs, rather than as a mentality-transforming process that has similar effects in all cultures.

The fifth and final section, 'Literacy, Peasants and Maids', contains two essays and takes us into the early modern period. Klaus-J. Lorenzen-Schmidt

examines the evidence for literacy among the Schleswig-Holstein peasantry, and suggests that peasant literacy was more likely to be found among free peasants, with their potential for market-related activity, than among manorial serfs. Finally, Charlotte Appel, in a superb essay drawn from her own extensive research, supplies an authoritative account of literacy in seventeenth-century Denmark, and in so doing shows how the discipline of literacy studies connects with those of publishing history and the history of the book.

This collection of essays, then, has many strengths and will form an invaluable guide and starting-point for future investigations. Inevitably, there are aspects one might quibble about: a number of essays perhaps do not strike quite the right balance between general theory and discussion of particular evidence, and the index, oddly, is only of secondary scholars, and not of concepts or primary sources. But these are only quibbles; the editor has done a very good job in bringing these essays together, and an extremely useful volume is the result.

MATTHEW TOWNEND

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FLATEYJARBÓK. ICELAND AND THE NORWEGIAN DYNASTIC CRISIS OF 1389. By ELIZABETH ASHMAN ROWE. *The Viking Collection 15. The University Press of Southern Denmark*. Odense, 2005. 486 pp. ISBN 87 7838 927 5.

Flateyjarbók is big. It is the Pacific Ocean, the Sahara Desert, the Amazon River of Old Icelandic literary production. It is not merely its size that makes it somewhat daunting; Flateyjarbók is also an intricate web of stories, as complex as it is large. It is bound to attract every serious Old Norse scholar. Finnur Jónsson, fearless as ever, took it on in 1927. Most others have been too timid or too prudent to get entangled in its complexities. The present reviewer found the task too formidable a decade ago and now hails his foresight since it seems unlikely that he would have produced anything as impressive as Elizabeth Ashman Rowe's massive book on this massive subject.

Its very size and complexity make Flateyjarbók a hard subject to write about. Few have read all of its contents and a book-length study of it runs the risk of becoming unintelligible, but Rowe manages to avoid this, through her systematic approach and a lucid introductory chapter (pp. 11–32) in which she provides a framework for her study, not only introducing Flateyjarbók succinctly but also setting out her overall position. Not one to get immersed in theory, she is nevertheless well aware of it. A somewhat apologetic note that Derrida and other contemporary philosophers are absent from her book (p. 30) seems superfluous.

Even though Flateyjarbók has always impressed as a manuscript and an object of value, its greatness has been qualified by its historical place as a late fourteenth-century text. As Rowe observes (p. 18), the fourteenth century was in the past seen as a period of decline for Icelandic literature. This was certainly the view of Sigurður Nordal and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, but it has been somewhat modified in the last forty years and now needs to be

revaluated and perhaps discarded. The fourteenth century was certainly an age of increased book production and the old notion that much of it was of less literary value than that of the thirteenth century is somewhat undermined by this study.

Flateyjarbók had two fathers, in the past often referred to as scribes, but Rowe establishes them as redactors—although the shadowy figure of their patron Jón Hákonarson lurks in the background, and Rowe does note the possibility that he was the mastermind behind the whole work (pp. 397–402). Jón Þórðarson and Magnús Þórhallsson come across as very different people with different tasks. Jón was responsible for the sagas of the missionary and holy kings Óláfr and Óláfr, while it fell upon Magnús's shoulders to finish the work, adding *Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga* and illuminating the manuscript. The one may perhaps be considered a theologian, the other was a chronicler as well as a visual artist—for all that they also had a lot in common, as Rowe duly notes (p. 395). In the case of Jón Þórðarson, Rowe shows how he drew on the pre-existing *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, adding new material to which she rightly pays special attention. She demonstrates how for him expansion was a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. I am not quite sure about her reading of *huorki eflid ne aukin* in the introduction to *Ásbjarnar þáttur* (p. 44) as 'neither augmented nor exaggerated'—possibly it is just a florid way of saying 'not at all exaggerated'—but on the other hand, Rowe argues convincingly that all Jón's additions had a purpose. She is nevertheless cautious; her conclusion is that he did not quite succeed in putting his mark on the work overall and that his attitudes are perhaps more evident in the parts than the whole (pp. 203–04).

One of Rowe's main projects is to demonstrate how Flateyjarbók developed from its original conception into a somewhat different project. Her argumentation is painstaking and convincing. Allowing for the speculative nature of some of her findings, their intelligent presentation cannot fail to convince, at least in part. Rowe argues that Magnús Þórhallsson did more than add his own part to Flateyjarbók, also revising the work of Jón Þórðarson with the addition of a new beginning and end. Thus he sought to redirect the reader's approach to Jón's texts (p. 297). In this interpretation, Flateyjarbók becomes a strangely heteroglossic text, Magnús supplementing Jón's work in order to deconstruct it (p. 350). Rowe is also concerned with the relationship between Flateyjarbók and the extinction of the Norwegian royal dynasty in 1387, but does not reduce the large project of producing this great book to a mere commentary on contemporary events. Her discussion is subtle and, given the length of her book, one wonders whether Rowe might have done well to add a chapter where she distills her thoughts on how to characterise the relationship between Flateyjarbók and the dynastic crisis of 1389.

The book ends with a brief history of Flateyjarbók after Jón Hákonarson's death: the late-fifteenth-century augmentation of the manuscript, its use by Arngrímur Jónsson and Torfæus, the trip to Chicago it never took in the 1890s, bringing the narrative to an end in the cafeteria at the Landsbókasafn, where the author discusses Flateyjarbók with Finnbogi Guðmundsson, one

of those responsible for the 1944 edition. This particular cafeteria is only a few blocks away from where the present reviewer lives, driving home the point Rowe makes in this epilogue: Flateyjarbók (and perhaps this can be extended to medieval studies in general) does not just exist in the past; its fate has relevance to the present as well. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe is to be congratulated for having presented us with this thought-provoking study. Flateyjarbók studies have just taken a dramatic leap into an exciting future.

ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

SKÁLDIÐ Í SKRIFTINNI. SNORRI STURLUSON OG EGILS SAGA. By TORFI H. TULINIUS. *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag* and *ReykjavíkurAkademían*. Reykjavík, 2004. 292 pp. ISBN 9979 66 155 0.

This book argues for a hidden meaning to the saga of Egill Skallagrímsson on two levels; on the one hand, as a Christian allegory, and on the other as a *roman à clef* in which the events of the saga reflect those of the life of Snorri Sturluson, supposed by many to have been the author of *Egils saga*. The book is thus divided into two parts, the first, *Gripurinn greindur*, ‘the object analysed’, about the allegorical structure and meaning of the saga, and the second, *Forngripurinn og samhengi hans*, ‘The ancient relic and his/its context’, about the social context that shaped the saga at its presumed time of writing, the early thirteenth century, and the events of its presumed author’s life.

The titles and sub-titles of each part refer back to the imaginative reconstruction of the book’s introduction, where Tulinius recreates a scenario that could have taken place at Mosfell c.1130, when the dead in the churchyard of the neighbouring church of Hrísbú are moved to the new church at Mosfell. In the process, the bones of a very large man are discovered beneath the altar at Hrísbú and, yes, people say they must be those of Egill Skallagrímsson! Speculation then follows as to why the bones of a pagan who, at best, was primesigned during his time in England, and at worst was a ruthless killer, should have been buried below the altar, a location usually reserved for saints in the early Church. This is the paradox Tulinius sets out to investigate, a paradox reflected in the book’s punning title, *Skáldið í skriftinni*, ‘The poet in the writing’ or ‘The poet in the saint’s resting place (= Latin *confessio*)’.

Part I begins with the saga’s skeleton, by which Tulinius means its external structure. He defends this against the strictures of scholars who have found its latter part (after the deaths of the two Þórólfrs) dull and long-winded. He demonstrates the undoubted patterns of repetition which bind the text into a coherent whole, though I am not sure that I can go all the way with him on the deep significance he assigns to the four characters named Ketill in the saga. He then looks inward to the significance of the saga’s action. Here again, I find myself unconvinced by many of the inner meanings he suggests lie hidden there. It is possible that Egill’s marriage to his brother’s widow, Ásgerðr, should be understood in the light of the Christian interdiction of the

levirate, given Egill's primesigning, but Tulinius's contention that this is the reason why he is reluctant to tell Arinbjörn and Ásgerðr herself about his love for her does not convince, especially as at least one of Egill's verses indicates that his reluctance is brought about because she is still grieving at Þórólfr's death.

Generally speaking, the parallels Tulinius adduces in Part I seem a little far-fetched and are not signalled in any way in the text, as far as I can see, unlike the situation in other sagas where we find conventional indicators that the pre-Christian protagonists are 'noble heathens'. The suggested parallels include an improbable comparison between Egill's killing of Røgnvaldr, the young son of Eiríkr Bloodaxe, and the death of Christ, a parallel between the Biblical figures of Cain and Judas and Egill, and a proposal that the wife and daughter of Ármóðr, who help Egill on his Vermaland expedition, should be compared to the Virgin Mary in her role as intercessor. Considerably greater credibility attaches to the suggested parallel between Egill and the Old Testament figure of the king and psalmist David, but, although the general comparison seems apt, the specific points of comparison are sometimes strained: both figures desire their brothers' wives; both are antagonists of kings (Saul, Eiríkr), both lose sons, both are supreme poets and both compose laments about close male friends (Jonathan, Arinbjörn). Towards the end of this section, Tulinius presents *Sonatorrek* as the possible *planctus* of an Old Testament David-like Egill whose poem prefigures Christian elegy.

Part II comprises two long chapters and two short concluding ones. In nearly 100 pages, Tulinius provides a thorough, almost blow-by-blow account of the lives, ambitions and kinship relations of the Sturlung family during the first half of the thirteenth century. Chapter 4 uses some of Pierre Bourdieu's key ideas very effectively to demonstrate how powerful Icelandic men of this period needed to control a number of interrelated 'fields': politics, marriage, religious life, poetry and the law. Chapter 5 shows how Snorri Sturluson and his family had both successes and failures at this game. Tulinius provides a useful digest here (parts of which he has published elsewhere), and summarises the views of several recent Icelandic historians, but most of the material treated in Chapters 4 and 5 comes directly from *Sturlunga saga* and hardly justifies the disproportionate number of pages devoted to it. Some parallels between these events and events in *Egils saga* are drawn, but they are rather sporadic and not always well argued.

To give one example, on pages 177–78 Tulinius states that conflict between brothers is a major theme of *Egils saga* (he has argued in Part I that there is enmity as well as difference between Egill and his brother Þórólfr, though in my opinion the evidence for this is dubious). This enmity is paralleled, in his view, by the 'real life' hostility between Snorri and Sighvatr Sturluson and Sighvatr's son Sturla. In the saga the sons of Haraldr hárfagri are also at odds, and Eiríkr Bloodaxe is represented as a fratricide. Tulinius quotes Egill's *lausavísa* 20 (according to Finnur Jónsson's numbering in *Skjaldedigting*) to support this point. So far, so good, but the next step in the argument is shaky. Because the verse mentions both Eiríkr's fratricide

and his wife Gunnhildr in the one clause, *brúðfang blekkir sökva bræðra*, ‘the bride-catch [Gunnhildr] deceives the destroyer of brothers [Eiríkr]’ (lines 3–4), this conjunction is used to suggest that whoever read or heard this stanza would be reminded of the conflicts between the Sturlung brothers precipitated by differences over women. The parallel is inexact and ignores the context of the verse, namely Gunnhildr’s supposed hostility to Egill and his attempts to retaliate. Such imprecise arguments are unfortunately rather common in the book.

It is a pity that Chapters 6 and 7 are so short, because they raise a number of interesting possible lines of interpretation of *Egils saga* which, in my opinion, are likely to be more productive than the drawing of parallels between the life of Snorri Sturluson and his family and the saga of Egill Skallagrímsson. In Chapter 6 Tulinius briefly adopts a Freudian perspective on the subject, but does not develop it. He also mentions several other approaches, but again there is no development. I found *Skáldið í skrifinni* a disappointing book; Part I does not really produce a coherent set of inner meanings for the saga, while Part II spends far too much time telling the Sturlung story. There is promise of a more sustained and satisfying analysis in the final chapters, but they really do not get off the ground. Thus the poet remains in the grave, but maybe the author can resuscitate him on another occasion.

MARGARET CLUNIES ROSS

ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND IN ICELANDIC MEDIEVAL TEXTS. By MAGNÚS FJALLDAL. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2005. xi + 162 pp. ISBN 0 8020 3837 9.

‘The purpose of this book,’ writes Magnús Fjalldal in his introduction, ‘is to survey and assess information about Anglo-Saxon England—its language, history, geography, and culture—that appears in medieval Icelandic texts’ (p. vii). This is a much-trodden arena and, as Fjalldal advises, anything approaching a thorough treatment of the subject would have made for a rather more ambitious effort than the study presented here (potentially consisting of a huge anthology of relevant texts); he has therefore settled by and large for simply retelling the stories in the sagas, and assessing the accuracy of their presentation of Anglo-Saxon people and events. His book accordingly offers a whistle-stop tour through the major relevant texts, summarising and paraphrasing their narratives as he goes, quoting in Modern English translation, with the Icelandic in endnotes. This survey provides plenty of interesting material, and along the way offers the opportunity to address ancillary questions of no little significance to the linguist, the historian and the literary critic.

The book consists of nine chapters, plus Introduction and Conclusion, several of which (chapters 1, 2, 6 and 7) represent reworkings of earlier articles by Fjalldal. Chapters 1 and 2 investigate the anecdotal evidence in the

sagas for the mutual intelligibility of Old English and Old Norse in the Viking Age: 1 focusses on the famous episode in *Gunnlaugs saga orms tungu*, and the evidence of the *First Grammatical Treatise* and *Hauksbók*; 2 broadly surveys other relevant references in the sagas, including the diverting story of the comeuppance meted out to the profaner of a statue in *Jarteinabók Þorláks byskups önnur* and *Laurentíus saga byskups*, and Sneglu-Halli's 'nonsense' skaldic stanza, with a glance at diverse other materials including the works of Snorri, Bede and William of Malmesbury, before a (brief) engagement with historical linguistic scholarship. Chapter 3 covers 'general knowledge' about Anglo-Saxon England and its customs in a range of material (notably *Heimskringla*, *Orkneyinga saga* and *Egils saga*), with Fjalldal remarking that Old Icelandic texts seem best informed about Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and regnal lengths, though even here they contain plenty that is erroneous, and much that appears simply to have been invented; the perennial stereotype is of an England that is wealthy and that offers good opportunities for trade.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 all deal with particular groups of sagas and the quality of their information on Anglo-Saxon England. Chapters 4 and 5 between them describe and compare events in Anglo-Saxon history related in *Heimskringla*, *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*, *Fagrskinna*, *Knýtlinga saga* and *Morkinskinna*. In these sections, Fjalldal tries to get a handle (albeit generally rather briefly and sketchily) on what may be motivating these accounts, with some comparative recourse to other things, including *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and attempts to determine whether the Icelandic texts drew on any Anglo-Saxon sources where this has been previously suggested; he concludes once again that Icelandic historians knew little of Anglo-Saxon events beyond the regnal lists known to have circulated in Iceland. Chapter 6 focusses on *Egils saga*, presenting a detailed look at the *Vínheiðr* episode and a review of scholarship about it; Fjalldal finds the historicity of the episode largely unconvincing, and looks instead to what he calls 'literary patterns' (p. 79), finding in it various contrasts and oppositions of significance to the saga as a whole, with the relationship between Egill and Þórólfr especially being foregrounded. Chapter 7 moves briskly over *Breta sögur*, *Saga Ósvalds konungs hins helga*, *Dunstanus saga*, and *Játvarðar saga*, with the conclusion once again being that there cannot have been much first-hand knowledge about Anglo-Saxon England in Iceland in the later Middle Ages.

Chapters 8 and 9 turn to a more broadly thematic focus. Chapter 8 treats the Icelandic love/hate relationship with the idea of kingship and royal courts via an analysis of such texts as *Hemings þátr* and *Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar*, Fjalldal suggesting that Icelandic authors have clear agendas in contrasting ideal and generous Anglo-Saxon monarchs with scheming and sometimes murderous Norwegian kings. Chapter 9 focuses on the proposition that Icelandic heroes' adventures in England follow a distinctive pattern, which recurs regularly, especially as regards their relationship with the king. Via an analysis of *Gunnlaugs saga*, *Illuga saga* and various

fornaldarsögur, Fjalldal concludes that Anglo-Saxon England provided an ideal setting for saga writers: it was perceived to be within the Scandinavian ‘orbit of influence’, but equally was long enough ago and far enough away to be the scene of incredible adventures (‘in the sagas, England is more a stage than a country’ (p. 120)). The book’s conclusion emphasises these findings further: Fjalldal remarks upon Icelandic writers’ tendency to substitute relevant cultural and political circumstances in the history of Norway for those of Anglo-Saxon England when they were ignorant of the latter, and in general, in the presentation of England in the sagas ‘one often senses a desire on part [sic] of the Icelandic author, either conscious or unconscious, to create another, perfect Norway in England’ (p. 122). In other words the version of Anglo-Saxon England offered up in the sagas represents a form of ‘escapism’, having more to do with painful contemporary Icelandic relations with Norway, and the desire to throw these into sharp relief, than with what the England of the time was itself really like. Contrary to some previous attempts to account for the enthusiasm of medieval Icelandic engagements with the history of Anglo-Saxon England (e.g. that Icelanders had a particular fondness for England, or that these treatments simply represent a facet of a general love of knowledge in medieval Iceland), Fjalldal concludes that the depiction of England in sagas of all sorts is fundamentally the same, as a ‘never-never land’, and that no medieval Icelandic authors had much real familiarity with Anglo-Saxon history.

There is a great deal of interesting material in this book, and those concerned to probe the use of specified historical events and locales in medieval Icelandic prose writings will no doubt find it of use. It surfs the crest of a multitude of Icelandic engagements with Anglo-Saxon (or putatively Anglo-Saxon) settings and personages, including material from sagas both well-known and less familiar, and provides some fascinating diversions along the way (often just in terms of how wildly inaccurate these stories could be in historical terms). Fjalldal has several noteworthy opinions to contribute, and his final conclusion has much to recommend it. As a whole the book is not consistently much more than a survey of what medieval Icelanders seem to have known about Anglo-Saxon England and, since this is the stall that the author sets out in his introduction, it would arguably be unfair to find too much fault with the volume for this—were it not for the sense that it does sporadically try to be more ambitious, but can only bring off these laudable extensions of its remit in frustratingly thin patches. Sometimes, for instance, it takes an interest in the literary sources that might have been available to and used by Icelandic authors; sometimes it delves into the linguistic situation in Viking-Age England, and how exactly information about England might have been transmitted; sometimes it ponders the broader facets of how medieval Icelandic literature treats adventures in foreign realms other than England; and, and most crucially, sometimes it tries to offer answers to the ‘big’ literary-critical questions that the whole study begs about what (if not a concern for historical accuracy) *did* motivate Icelandic authors when they told their stories. But such questions are just as often left unasked altogether,

leading to a tantalisingly uneven engagement, and hence the book as a whole does not provide enough to bring any of these glimpsed subsidiary (but altogether worthwhile) ambitions to fruition. Fjalldal often seems to offer the most detailed discussions in those cases where previous scholarship has tackled the texts in depth, notably the case with the treatment of *Egils saga* in chapter 6, which has an extended engagement with scholarly debate as well as some valuable focus on literary themes. But in many instances he has little comment of his own to add when scholarly interest has not formerly been much excited: hence in Chapter 7 he is keen to address the issues of the sources of *Játvarðar saga* where he is able to draw on the extensive work by Christine Fell, but he hardly touches such matters when it comes to the other sagas addressed in the same chapter, and his engagement with recent scholarly work on Anglo-Saxon England itself and on medieval Insular textual culture is in general a touch wanting (the reference on p. viii to ‘Middle English writers such as Giraldus Cambrensis’ is perhaps symptomatic).

There are some more specific niggles. In the first two chapters, the book takes pains to stress the importance of trying to understand how speakers of Old English and Old Norse might have communicated, and concludes (p. 21) that

Not being able to determine the answer to this problem is exceptionally frustrating, because virtually everything else concerning the issue of what Icelanders knew about Anglo-Saxon England boils down to the question of communication between the English and the Norse.

Such being the case, however, it must be said that important aspects of this major subject are really rather sidelined: in particular, the compelling (and complex) linguistic evidence recently treated in such depth by Matthew Townend’s book *Language and History in Viking Age England* (2002; reviewed in *Saga-Book* XXVIII 2004, 129–34) gets only a cursory, tacked-on mention at the end of Chapter 2 (pp. 19–21), where Townend’s conclusions, based on a survey of a variety of different sorts of material that go well beyond the anecdotal evidence of the sagas, are very briefly summarised and (it seemed to me) deliberately downplayed.

Perhaps more importantly still, the potentially very rich evidence of skaldic verse is hardly treated in the book at all. There are some interesting asides about poetic material in Chapter 3 (the fascinating Waltheof stanzas), but otherwise Fjalldal is remarkably dismissive of the corpus: it has been much examined already, he tells us, ‘and it is generally concluded that it is too traditional, artificial, and hyperbolic to be considered a reliable source of historical information’ (p. 33). Quite apart from the subtleties of scholarly argument steam-rolled by this comment, the attitude that it espouses strikes one as unhelpful at best in the context of a study such as this: even if skaldic stanzas contain historical information that is demonstrably erroneous (which is what, after all, Fjalldal argues for most of the prose corpus), these verses surely have a great deal to tell us about how particular takes on and ideas about Anglo-Saxon events were transmitted to Scandinavian posterity, and

how that posterity preserved and engaged with them (an object lesson is provided by Townend in ‘Whatever Happened to York Viking Poetry?’ *Saga-Book* XXVII (2003), 48–90). Presumably there would have been little argument if Fjalldal had simply (and legitimately) appealed to the size of a study that took into account verse as well as prose, and had for that reason elected to confine himself to the latter; but to dismiss the skaldic material outright is somewhat perversely to draw attention to what in some lights looks like another of his book’s missed opportunities.

In sum, then, this is an interesting and worthwhile volume able at times to muster both breadth and depth, but one is left with the impression that it could (and perhaps should) have gone somewhat further.

RICHARD DANCE

FORNALDARSAGORNAS STRUKTUR OCH IDEOLOGI. HANDLINGAR FRÅN ETT SYMPOSIUM I UPPSALA 31.8–2.9 2001. Edited by ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON, ANNETTE LASSEN and AGNETE NEY. *Nordiska texter och undersökningar* 28. Uppsala Universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk. Uppsala, 2003. 270 pp. ISBN 91 506 1726 5.

Six years ago Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agnete Ney set in train a series of three conferences about the medieval Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* (literally ‘sagas of ancient times’, but known to Anglophone scholars as ‘mythic-heroic sagas’ or ‘legendary sagas’). The first conference was held in Sweden in 2001, the second (at which this reviewer gave a paper) was held in Denmark in 2005, and the third will be held in Iceland in 2008. This volume contains seventeen of the papers presented at the first conference. It opens with an introduction by the editors that describes the genre and contextualises the contributors’ papers by reviewing some of the long-standing issues in the scholarship.

The essays are arranged thematically, the first essays dealing with general aspects of the genre. In ‘Fornaldarsogene—vurderinga og vurderingskriteria’, Else Mundal surveys the critical reception of the *fornaldarsögur* from the Middle Ages to the present day. She suggests that although these works may not be sources of genuine pagan mythology or historical facts, they are valuable for the study of past mentalities, as shown by the example of *Friðþjófs saga*, with its unusual perspectives on women and social mobility. In ‘Fornaldarsagans genremässiga metamorfoser: mellan Edda-myt och riddarroman’, Lars Lönnroth returns to the question whether the diverse *fornaldarsögur* can truly be said to constitute a homogenous literary genre. After looking at *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which contains chapters strongly influenced by romance as well as chapters in the traditional heroic style, he proposes that instead of being divided into three groups (heroic tales, adventure tales and Viking tales), all *fornaldarsögur* should be considered mixed or hybrid works that, depending on the specific scenes being narrated, are influenced to varying degrees by Eddic myths, the Germanic heroic tradition, folk stories and courtly romance. In ‘Kärleken i fornalldarsagorna—höviskt eller heroiskt?’, Daniel

Sävborg reports on *fornaldarsögur*-related results from a much larger study of medieval Icelandic literature, finding that, as regards descriptions of love, the *fornaldarsögur* stand much closer to the *Íslendingasögur* than to the medieval Icelandic imitations of continental romance. Given the importance of the theme of love for the latter, Sävborg sees this difference as indicating that the native romances and the *fornaldarsögur* are separate categories. In 'Fornaldarsaga och ideologi. Tillbaka till "The Matter of the North"', Torfi Tulinius reiterates his analysis of *Völsunga saga* and other *fornaldarsögur* in order to argue that their social themes, which also appear in the contemporary sagas, were relevant to thirteenth-century Iceland.

The second set of essays deal with specific sagas. In 'Trust in words. Verse quotation and dialogue in *Völsunga saga*', Judy Quinn analyses *Völsunga saga* as a narrative of dynastic misfortune, broken vows and failure to consult with daughters regarding the marriages proposed for them. Quinn argues that the narrator's interest in individual motivation and reaction to events is articulated by the detailed reporting of dialogue and the choice of substantial verse quotations focussing on the efficacy of speech. In 'The Rhetoric of *Völsunga saga*', Stefanie Würth asks whether the passages in *Völsunga saga* that are reminiscent of oral style are actual remnants of an oral tradition, or whether they are conscious imitations of oral style. In her view, *Völsunga saga* is a self-conscious product of textuality, and its references to oral tradition are superficial at best. In 'Genus och ideologi i *Völsunga saga*', Agneta Ney looks at the nouns used for various kinds of men and women and finds that their distribution supports the division of this saga into a 'mythological' first half and a 'courtly' second half. The resulting contrast is also seen in the two scenes of the waking of Brynhildr, first in the mythological context of the shield-wall, and then in the courtly context of the castle. Rory McTurk's 'Recent and projected work on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*' forms a postscript to his *Studies in Ragnars saga loðbrókar and its major Scandinavian analogues* (Oxford, 1991). After discussing hitherto-unconsidered scholarship on the saga, he argues that the Raknarr episode of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* may have been derived from the *Miracula Sancti Germani*, which describes the death of Ragenarius, a viking who plundered the monastery of St. Germain in Paris. McTurk hypothesises the existence of a story in which Raknarr appears supernaturally after his death to the poet Bragi and gives him his shield, thus inspiring him to compose *Ragnarsdrápa*. In 'A valiant king or a coward? The changing image of king Hrólfr kraki from the oldest sources to *Hrólfs saga kraka*', Valgerður Brynjólfssdóttir finds *Hrólfs saga kraka* to be influenced thematically as well as structurally by *Karlamagnús saga*. *Hrólfs saga* seems to be a parody of courtly literature, with Hrólfr himself an example of unkingly qualities. In 'Transgression in *Hrólfs saga kraka*', Marianne Kalinke similarly argues that this saga contains overwhelming evidence that its protagonist is not an ideal king but rather one whose downfall is brought about by his lack of wisdom, prudence and justice. In 'Queens of terror. Perilous women in *Hálfs saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*', Ármann Jakobsson reflects on the negative depiction of women in these sagas, which show that

even virtuous women are dangerous, and evil women are more terrible than evil men. In “‘Hvat líðr nú grautnum, genta?’—Greek Story-telling in *Jötunheimar*”, Gottskálf Þ. Jensson argues that the characteristics of the frame narrative in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* resemble those in the ‘Milesian tales’ of ancient Rome, such as the *Asinus Aureus*, which Icelanders may have encountered in Avignon.

The third set of essays deal with the social function of the *fornaldarsögur*. In ‘Den prosaiske Odin. Fortidssagaerne som mytografi’, Annette Lassen surveys the use of Óðinn as a character in the *fornaldarsögur*. Noting that the earliest of these works were written not too long after Snorri composed his *Edda*, Lassen sees these works as a kind of mythography. In ‘Den eksotiske fortid. Fornaldarsagernes sociale funktion’, Sverrir Jakobsson argues that the *fornaldarsögur* are best thought of as a kind of history, rather than a kind of literature. After suggesting that these texts created regional or local identities with which Icelanders could identify, he then considers whether they were a means of reconciling an exotic, magical, half-human past with a more mundane Christian present. In ‘Fornaldarsagorna och den höviska bilden i Norden’, Hermann Bengtsson turns to art history to show that the *fornaldarsögur* were constituted from elements of an internationally oriented courtly culture that was also influential in the illuminations of Flateyjarbók.

The last essays treat the *fornaldarsögur* from a post-medieval perspective. In ‘The *fornaldarsögur* and Nordic Balladry: The Sámsey Episode across Genres’, Stephen Mitchell argues that the version of the Sámsey story attested to by the Swedish ballad *Kung Speleman* and a related Swedish ballad fragment preserve some elements known only from Saxo’s version of the story, as well as other elements known only from the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*. Rather than adducing a complicated process of borrowing, omission and conflation at work in the Swedish version, Mitchell supposes that it is an independent version of the fuller original tradition from which both Saxo and the Icelanders drew. In ‘Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda: The stories that wouldn’t die’, Matthew James Driscoll assesses the popularity of the *fornaldarsögur* in late medieval and early modern Iceland via the sheer number of copies that have survived, estimating that between ten and twenty thousand handwritten copies of these works may have been produced in all. Remarkably, this figure is far from the ultimate total, as it omits printed editions, copies of *rímur* based on *fornaldarsögur*, copies of sagas based on *rímur* that were based on *fornaldarsögur* and copies of ‘reconstituted’ *fornaldarsögur* retelling myths and legends. A list of the contributors rounds off the volume.

Although many of these essays are quite interesting in themselves, a substantial part of this volume’s worth comes from the larger picture of consensus that emerges. The heterogeneity of the *fornaldarsögur* has presented fundamental difficulties to the scholar, who cannot begin to work with these texts without making some assumptions about their genre (or lack of it). Because there is little agreement about how or whether genre as a theoretical construct is applicable to the sagas at all, *fornaldarsaga* studies very often become bogged down in sterile repetition of problems and positions. By focusing on

the contemporary context of the *fornaldarsögur*, using more sophisticated comparisons with courtly and Latinate culture and taking genre analysis to the level of scene or chapter, the contributors to *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi* have succeeded in making real progress in a difficult field.

ELIZABETH ASHMAN ROWE

KOMMENTAR ZU DEN LIEDERN DER EDDA 4: HELDENLIEDER. By KLAUS VON SEE, BEATRICE LA FARGE, WOLFGANG GERHOLD, DEBORA DUSSE, EVE PICARD and KATJA SCHULZ. *Universitätsverlag Winter*. Heidelberg, 2004. 810 pp. ISBN 3 8253 5007 X.

The latest in the *Kommentar* series from the team in Frankfurt, *Kommentar-4*, is another triumph of inclusiveness, clarity and wide-ranging scholarship. It treats the three Helgi poems, considering them both collectively and in turn. Additionally, it provides an enormous general and focussed bibliography, including both Goscinny and Uderzo's *Asterix und die Normannen* and the short stories of Gabriel García Márquez. It is almost exhaustive and relatively easy to use, though it was hard to locate bibliographical information for the *Griplur*, which are frequently referred to, but do not appear in the list of primary texts. The introduction to *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (hereafter the poems will be referred to as *HHI*, *HHII* and *HHV*), contains most of the general discussion pertaining to the origins of Helgi as a figure, exploring the arguments for Helgi as a sacral and semi-divine being, a sacrificial victim offered up to Óðinn to ensure fertility, or as a sovereignty-figure, and thus identical with Helgi Higrvarðsson. Alternatively, Helgi and his tribe the *Ylfingar* have been considered to be a historical reality, which may perhaps be localised among the Migration-Age Lombards, or to seventh-century Sweden, shortly after the events chronicled in *Beowulf*. The authors summarise these arguments rather than adjudicating between them, though Bugge's summary of the possible origins of the Helgi poems is rightly described as too complicated to be plausible. The authors' affiliations seem clearly to lie with later scholars such as Klingenberg and Haimelr who sensibly insisted on working with the texts as preserved in the Codex Regius. Thus in *HHI*, the *senna* is regarded as integral to the poem, since it is more important than the battle itself; *HHII* is clearly more of a patchwork of Helgi material.

Like its predecessors, the *Kommentar* is, of course, a volume of reference rather than a book which many will wish to read from cover to cover. Thus there is a degree of necessary repetition. A very clear distinction is maintained between what the *Prosa-ist* (identified with the *Redaktor* of the Codex Regius) was able to gather from the strophes which are preserved, and new information that has been fed into the prose links. Thus it is demonstrable that *HHII* is highly dependent on the prose to link together what are likely to be Helgi stories from disparate sources, and that *HHV* also needs a considerable amount of prose explanation to articulate its plot, to such an extent that Theodore Andersson has characterised the text as a prosimetric

fornaldarsaga. The textual relations between the poems are helpfully anatomised: the *HHII Prose* author used *HHI*; the poet of *HHI* drew on an earlier poem, not preserved, parts of which are separately reflected in *HHII*. Other lost poems—such as *Völsungakviða in forna* and *Károlióð*—are all accommodated within *HHII*'s account of itself.

Some broadly generalised readings which link all three poems together begin to emerge, noting the strong emphasis on lineage and heroic prowess. *HHI* marks the beginning of the sequence of heroic poems in the Codex Regius: conscious of its initiating status it begins with a deliberate echo of *Völuspá*, situating the action in the *Uranfang* of legendary history. The Helgi of *HHI* is vividly imagined as a Viking prince, whose victories largely depend on sea-power. The authors comment on the unusual emotionalism of *HHII* with its focus on the feelings of Sigrún, and note the complex implications of the different stories which are assembled in *HHv*: the warrior-in-disguise, the contrast between the warlike Helgi who avenges his maternal grandfather and his father Hiorvarðr who neglects that duty, and the curious encounter between Helgi's brother Heðinn and the troll-woman, Helgi's *fylgja*, who dooms him to vowing to marry his brother's intended, the valkyrie Sváva. There is thorough discussion of the interconnections between the poems—the suggestion that Helgi Hundingsbani is Helgi Hiorvarðsson reborn, and that the second Helgi is reborn as Helgi Haddingjaskati, who appears in *Hrómundar saga*. The unusual prevalence of 'speaking names' is discussed: place-names which have a cosmic significance, or which evoke a generalised heroic context, through, for example, the frequent deployment of the heroic name Sigarr in compound place-names.

Useful tables—outlining the relations of Helgi, Hundingr and his sons, and Sigurðr, across the different texts, or the views of various critics about the possible sources of the piecemeal poem that is *HHII*—provide a clear overview of some complex arguments. Connections with other texts are traced; it is concluded that the link with the *Völsung* material is probably original, since the recurrence of names such as Hundingr and Eylimi (the father of Sváva), and the reappearance of the sons of Hundingr in the Sigurðr material, point in that direction. Thematic links with the Hildir story (the *Hjáðningavíg*), the *Völsung* cycle, the stories of Hagbarðr and *Hrómundar saga Gripsson*, and the international Lenore folktale are demonstrated; linguistic connections noticed, with skaldic poetry (especially in the kenning-heavy *HHI*), and also with *Skírnismál* in the *Hríngerðarmál*, which go beyond the general features of threat as speech act. *Þiðreks saga* is a clear intertext for *HHv* and other *fornaldarsögur* which include bridal-quest narratives.

Not the least of the volume's features are the incidental bibliographies. There are judicious notes with excellent introductory bibliographies on such topics as *sennur*/flytings, beasts of battle, talking birds, Vikings, norms and Rán. The latter is put into a context which includes *Hríngerðr* and her dangerous mother, showing how both Helgis are menaced by female sea-powers, against whom the valkyrie offers protection. There is useful material on valkyries, paradoxically elicited by Sinfjötli's insulting description of Guðmundr as a

valkyrie and a witch, rather than as an explanation of the status of the poem's heroine. Later notes discuss the etymology of Yule, and give exemplary summaries of what is known about both *fylgjur* and *norns*.

This volume of the *Kommentar* series matches its predecessors for learning, for usefulness and authority. There is a revival of interest in the heroic poetry of the Edda at present, and though the Helgi poems trail behind the Völsung and Gjúkung material, it seems likely that this volume will be the stimulus to interesting new work on these neglected poems.

CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

GESCHICHTE DER ALTNORDISCHEN LITERATUR. By HEIKO UECKER. *Universal-Bibliothek* 17647. Reclam. Stuttgart, 2004. 308 pp. ISBN 3150176476.

Famous for their pocket-sized, yellow *Universal-Bibliothek* of German and world literature, over the last ten years Reclam have published new translations of both Eddas and new paraphrased collections of Germanic myths and legends (some in a larger, cloth-bound format), so Heiko Uecker's history of Old Norse literature is a logical addition to the catalogue; it is paper-bound in spring green, the colour reserved in the *Universal-Bibliothek* for literary history and criticism, and costs (in Germany) a mere 7.80 Euros. Students of modern literature know Uecker as the author of the handbook *Die Klassiker der skandinavischen Literatur* (1990, 2nd edition 2002), but Old Norse scholars are aware that he also possesses impeccable qualifications as a medievalist. Over thirty years ago, coincidentally, he contributed to another resurgence of Old Norse publishing activity, the almost simultaneous appearance of the four *Sammlung Metzler* handbooks: *Germanische Verskunst* by Klaus von See, *Einführung in die Runenkunde* by Klaus Düwel, *Sagaliteratur* by Kurt Schier, and his own *Germanische Heldensage*.

In size and scope, there is no comparable book on the market. (Readers of Russian, to be sure, have access to M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij's *Drevne-skandinavskaja literatura*, 1979.) The book's strongest competitor in a compact format will probably be Rudolf Simek and Hermann Pálsson's *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur* (1987), which, despite its greater detail (and higher price), can also serve beginning students well, since it provides articles for text groups and genres as well as individual titles. Other compact handbooks, such as those in the *Sammlung Metzler* mentioned above, address particular genres only. In fact, as far as I can establish, Uecker's is the first German-language introduction to Old Norse literature in a pocket format to appear since that of Gustav Neckel in 1923, though Neckel's was reprinted as late as 1963.

The book under review bears a strong resemblance to a college lecture course. After an introductory chapter sketching the history of Scandinavia and its literary productivity in the Middle Ages, each chapter presents one genre: religious literature, learned prose, historiography, historical fiction (*Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*), chivalrous literature, poetry. Despite

the title, literary history in the narrow sense is not prominent (there is a quasi-apology for this in the afterword on page 269)—as indeed it should not be in an introductory survey; rather, the impression made is that of a catalogue in which exemplary items are singled out for description or quotation, though Uecker does provide at least a rough chronology of works, text types and characteristics within each genre/chapter and occasionally refers to dating controversies. No Scandinavian language skills on the part of the reader are presumed, no documentation is given (though there is a bibliography), and references to the history of scholarship are made without naming names.

Among the book's virtues is one that it has in common with *Die Klassiker*: Uecker not only knows his material, but is also an accomplished raconteur, and neat and unexpected turns of phrase make every page interesting reading, without the style seeming forced. (Some close calls: 'unik und einzigartig' on page 7, 'das war's' on page 68, 'Baldr und Vali e tutti quanti' on page 241.) A further virtue of the book is its thematic and chronological integration of important East Norse texts into the presentation: the page on *Sturlunga saga*, for example, is followed by one on *Erikskrönikan*. This policy, rare even in the most compendious literary histories, is all the more remarkable in that it is essentially denied in the preface, which seems to offer an apology for the fact that 'the other Scandinavian countries have nothing comparable' to the literature of medieval Iceland (p. 7, cf. p. 269), and absolutely denied in the back cover blurb, which refers only to Iceland (someone at Reclam evidently took the apology too literally)! A sister virtue of Uecker's approach is his conviction that it is necessary to view Old Norse literature in a European context (pp. 7, 19); this credo emerges clearly in his granting of equal space to Latin texts of Scandinavian origin, his fair and full consideration of influences and parallels from other European literatures, and his agnostic position on certain questions of dating dear to generations of *Altertumskundler*. On the latter point, a few characteristic statements: 'Of the ancient Germanic lore that older scholarship imagined it had found [in *Hávamál*], there is no trace' (p. 205); 'We are not going to call *Völuspá* to the witness stand to give evidence for reconstructing the pagan religion, but consider it as a poetic monument' (p. 200); 'This time frame of half a millennium [from Common Scandinavian syncope to the date of the Codex Regius] still offers more than enough room for speculation about the age of the individual Eddic poems. A debate on which can lay claim to greater age, Eddic or skaldic poetry, is completely pointless, however, since we lack the criteria for resolving it' (p. 198); 'Egil lived in the tenth century. Whether the events in the saga took place as presented, we are unable to determine—and we don't have to, any more than we have to answer the question whether all the verses are really by Egil' (pp. 123–24).

Uecker's history is a reliable guide for anyone beginning to read Old Norse texts and desiring to put them in historical and typological perspective; my checks revealed incongruities but no substantial errors in the information provided. On page 25, familiarity with the *Legenda Aurea* is assumed, though this work and its compiler are not formally introduced until page 30; Sven

Aggesøn's name is dropped enigmatically on page 15, never to reappear. The term 'Renaissance of the Twelfth Century' is introduced and defined on page 19 and then again with a different, though not contradictory, definition on page 64. A translation error has crept into the first version of the Theophilus legend cited on page 27: 'da sah ihn der Hebräer mit Ungemach (*ógleði*) an' should read 'da sah der Hebräer eine große Traurigkeit in ihm' (*Maríu saga*, ed. Unger, p. XXXI: *þa sa enn ebręski maþr a honom mickla vgleþi*). The sentence cited on page 118 as an example of saga objectivity (Flosi's skin changing colour, *Njála* ch. 116) is hardly suitable as such, because historians of saga style regard it rather as atypically purple prose; a description without similes and without an accompanying verbal outburst, such as that of Egill sitting in full armour at Æthelstan's court (*Egla* ch. 55, partially quoted by Uecker in another context on page 122), might have served the purpose better. The statement that verbal duels are often called *senna* in the scholarly literature on the model of *Lokasenna* (p. 213) is misleading in two ways: verbal duels are not generally called *senna*, and when they are, it is not because of *Lokasenna*. The *senna* paragraph, incidentally, may have suffered from last-minute changes without sufficient editing, since its closing sentence blatantly violates two principles followed throughout the book: it cites an Old Norse sentence without translation (the norm is a translation without the original) and with the parenthetical documentation '1336—DN VIII,99,11' (documentation is otherwise never given, abbreviated or not; moreover, the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* appears nowhere in the bibliography). Ironically, the only paragraph in the book in which modern scholars are actually named, the discussion of the controversy between Finnur Jónsson and E. A. Kock (pp. 245–46), misrepresents Kock's position on the example chosen to illustrate the controversy, *Harmsól* 41, ll. 1–4. The interpretation and emendation presented here as Kock's were in fact proposed by Jón Helgason; Kock accepted Jón's syntactic grouping but argued that no emendation of *blakk-* was necessary, since one could read *þrimu tjalda blakk-* 'shield-horse', i.e. 'ship' (*Notationes Norrænæ*, §2933).

Like the author of any survey, Uecker had to omit a great deal, and disagreement on the chosen emphasis is inevitable. In a few cases, I found the initial treatment of a topic too brief, but discovered on reading further that more information and examples were given in the discussions of individual texts; these topics include saga style, open and formulaic composition, topoi and the fluidity of genre distinctions. Other omissions are more complete. The Old Norse language itself is one; I suspect many readers would fare better with some kind of definition of this language and notes on at least three details: the special characters, the meaning of the word *saga* (which is translated in every saga title as 'Geschichte' but not mapped out as a notion or distinguished from the German word *Sage*) and the fact that *Snorra* in *Snorra Edda* (never directly translated) is a genitive. Nor does Uecker define the corpus of Old Norse literature. An overview of all text types would have been helpful, especially since *þættir*, *rímur*, ballads and legal texts receive only the briefest of passing references and the runic corpus is missing

entirely. The policy of not referring to post-medieval scholars by name may be understandable from a logistical point of view, but the anonymity seems forced. (Exceptions to the rule are made: nods are given to Shakespeare, Tegnér, Andreas Munch, Bjørnson, Ibsen, Wagner and Thomas Mann on the one hand, to Arngrímur Jónsson, Brynjólfur Sveinsson, King Frederik III, Olof Verelius, Laurents Hanssøn, Peder Claussøn Friis, Mattis Størssøn and C. C. Rafn on the other—where is Árne Magnússon?—and among modern scholars only to Kock and Finnur Jónsson.) And it is galling to see the famous comment on the sagas of Jón Ólafsson úr Grunnavík ('bændur flugust á') presented as if Uecker had thought of it himself (p. 114). Emphasis placed on European connections at the expense of the Germanic heritage gives some topics an unaccustomed slant—necessary though this slant may be as a backswing of the ideological pendulum. The fact that Old Norse literature is by far our most important source of information on Old Germanic religion never emerges, for Uecker remains firmly agnostic on such matters. In the section on Eddic poetry, the emphasis is on Scandinavian innovation and European parallels; Uecker does mention in passing that the Eddic long line is rooted in 'older Germanic epic' (pp. 193–94) but does not explain this genre designation, and it is not until halfway through the section that the reader encounters the titles *Beowulf*, *Hildebrandslied* and *Nibelungenlied*—named in passing alongside the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Kalevala* (p. 218). In the chapter on religious texts, the translated *Duggals leiðsla* is placed in the context of European visionary literature (Dante) and compared with *Draumkvædet* (pp. 33–34), and in the poetry chapter there is a similar comment on *Völuspá* (p. 201), but nothing is said—anywhere in the book—about the well-known abundance of dreams and visions in dozens of other Old Norse texts from *Darradarljóð* to *Skíða ríma*; Uecker does mention individual dreams in his discussions of *Sverris saga* and *Gísla saga*, so why not at least cross-refer to these? On each of the above points, I support Uecker's intellectual agenda but still cannot help wishing he had put more meat and potatoes on his undergraduates' plates.

The bibliography (pp. 271–93) includes a list of general titles followed by lists for each chapter/genre, and its balance mirrors that of the text. Thus, for example, one finds no textbooks or dictionaries (since the language is not discussed), and nothing on the pagan religion as such (since Uecker is sceptical of reconstructions). Within these limits, the bibliography is surprisingly full, listing editions and translations as well as secondary sources. Here, Uecker clearly has advanced university students in mind, since it is doubtful whether many general readers will tackle the original texts, to say nothing of monographs in modern Icelandic. Serious general omissions are Hans Bekker-Nielsen et al., *Norrøn fortællekunst* (1965) and Phillip Pulsiano (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia* (1993); under historiography some will miss Anne Heinrichs, *Der Óláfs þátrr Geirstaðaálfs* (1989), under *Íslendingasögur* Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (1964), Peter Hallberg, *Die isländische Saga* (1965), Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Fortælling og ære* (1993), Baldur Hafstað, *Die Egils saga und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen*

Werken des nordischen Mittelalters (1995), under *fornaldarsögur*—since so few exist in German translation—Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (trans.), *Seven Viking Romances* (1985), under poetry Klaus von See, *Germanische Verskunst* (1967). Hermann Pálsson's *Sagnaskemmtun Íslendinga* (1962) is listed twice, but his later books in Icelandic as well as his *Oral Tradition and Saga Writing* (1999) are all missing. Space could have been made for missing titles by deleting, for example, unhelpful anthologies of essays (I count ten candidates); though often included in bibliographies, anthologies rarely offer beginners reliable orientation unless they are compiled expressly to document the history of research. Apart from typographical errors, which are addressed at the close of this review, the bibliographical entries suffer from occasional inconsistency: the entry for Jan de Vries's *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* of 1964–66, a complete reworking of the first edition, does not identify it as the second edition, and the series name *Islandica* is omitted in the entry for Einar Ól. Sveinsson's *Age of the Sturlungs* (1953), though provided in other entries.

The book closes with an index of work titles (pp. 295–304) and an index of personal names (pp. 305–08). Both are useful, but the reader soon observes that they must have been prepared by having a word processing programme search for titles and names. This is of little consequence for the index of names, but it means that the index of works registers only those pages on which the title actually appears, and if the discussion continues on the following pages without a second mention of the title, such pages are not registered. For *Gísla saga*, for example, '138' should read '138–41', for *Grímnismál*, '205' should read '205–07', for *Edda*, '191f., 198, 209, 231' should read '191–233' (the chapter on the *Edda*), and so on. On the other hand, the coexistence in the text of German and Old Norse forms for some titles and names (*Grímnir-Lied* / *Grímnismál*) and the numerous spelling inconsistencies (*Grímnismál* / *Grimnismál*, *Óláfs saga* / *Ólafs saga* / *Olafs saga* / *Olafssaga* / *Olafsaga*), though annoying, did not produce any noticeable indexing errors. In the index of names, page 74 should be added to the entry for Beda Venerabilis, C. C. Rafn should have an entry listing page 151, and Finnur Jónsson and E. A. Kock should each have an entry listing page 245f. The index of works wrongly conflates two law codes named *Grágás*: the Icelandic codex named on page 13 is not identical with the Norwegian one (a lost precursor of the *Frostaping Law*) named on page 85.

Reclam will not have had an easy typesetting job: Old Norse forms are used for names and work titles (alongside German forms), and several text passages are printed in the original in order to illustrate stylistic points. Normalisation was evidently attempted, at least sometimes, with *ö* generally being substituted for *o* (though not always: the poetic examples on pages 193–94 have *o*, on 198–201 there is only *ö*, on 203–04 *o* again, from 237 on only *ö*); the result, however, cannot be labelled satisfactory. Surely, in a book of this nature, consistent normalisation would have been both possible and desirable (making necessary exceptions for titles of published editions and East Norse forms). Furthermore, apart from the

‘on-off’ attitude towards normalisation, the rate of typographical error is disappointingly high.

It is instructive to compare the treatment of the two prose excerpts presented in Old Norse. The first of them (p. 44), a translation of two lines of Prosper, has been normalised, but with an erroneous long *í* in the participle *lifanda* and the misleading *hellsk* for *helzk* (ms *hellzc*). Furthermore, although Uecker’s point is to show how skilful the translation is, the end of it has been cut off (Porvaldur Bjarnarson, *Leifar fornra kristinna fræða íslenzkra*, 1878, p. 2: *þat it fylla ei at vera sem hann ei er*). One feels compelled to ask what sort of reader Uecker had in mind for this page, a reader who could breeze through a Latin couplet and judge the merits of a (very free) Old Norse rendering of it without the benefit of any translations into German. The second passage (p. 175), a lengthier excerpt from *Tristrams saga* chosen to illustrate the untranslatable features of the florid style, looks at first glance like a normalisation attempt gone awry, with modern Icelandic *ö* and *-st* but half a dozen accent errors and a wrong gender (*gaman mín* for *gaman mitt*); it has nothing in common with the text in the edition of this saga cited in the bibliography, which has been expertly normalised to a medieval standard. Instead, Uecker must have taken his text from Eugen Kölbing’s diplomatic edition, which is listed in the bibliography only under translations (it also contains a translation). The gender error, however, is Uecker’s, not Kölbing’s. Why did Uecker not draw on the excellent normalised edition listed in his own bibliography?

The typographical errors, which number well over one hundred, fall into several groups. One small but dismaying group is made up of what might be called pseudo-Old Norse forms: *Sveinn tveskeggr* (p. 307) for *tjúguskegg*, *Útferðsdrápa* (pp. 83, 303) for *Útferðardrápa* and *Vínland sögur* (p. 114) for *Vínlandinga sögur* seem to have been translated—superficially and unsuccessfully—‘back’ into Old Norse/Icelandic from other languages. A similar fate befell the Old Norse word *norrænn*, which appears in the bibliography in the bastardised forms *Norrøne fornkvæði* for *Norræn* in the entry for Sophus Bugge’s edition of the *Edda* (p. 291) and *Notationes norrönæ* for Kock’s Latinised Norse *norrænæ* (p. 293). A second, much larger, group consists of misplaced, confused (*æ / œ / oe, þ / Þ / ð*), missing or disproportionately sized accents and special characters of Old Norse and modern Icelandic, as well as confused allomorphs (*-a / -ar*, etc.). For example, the bibliographical entry for *Íslenzk forrit XI* (p. 283) lists the titles of five texts contained in the volume (ignoring nine others), but commits five typographical errors in the process. Group three, also large, contains the typographical errors familiar in all languages. A dozen English and Scandinavian book titles are mangled, Menippos becomes Mennippos (p. 212) and Ulrike Sprenger is renamed Ursula in one of her bibliographical entries (p. 292). There are errors in the German text, too, one with a tragicomical result: the omission of a comma makes the sentence at the bottom of page 112 say that at the Reykjahólar wedding in 1119 sagas were recited about the murder of Snorri Sturluson! Curious is also the missing comma in the famous ‘Deyr fé’ line (p. 204),

contrary to Neckel-Kuhn; even the translation leaves it out: 'Es stirbt Besitz Verwandte sterben'. A fourth group, smaller and less serious, I reserve for the syllable division of Old Norse forms in violation of the Icelandic standard—sometimes the German standard as well. Certain examples are relatively harmless (*Háko-narkviða*, *Sæm-undr*), but irritating are *Stren-gleikar* (p. 172, twice), *Hymisk-viða* (p. 195) and *Sigrd-rifa* (p. 224), and the Norwegian *fris-tatstiden* (p. 273) is hardly better.

Having spoken my piece on the mechanics of the book, let me reiterate that I find it in substance an absolutely trustworthy contribution to Old Norse studies; for its size and price, the book is excellent. Uecker is a conscientious, intelligent and engaging epitomiser who dares to make difficult decisions, and he deserves our admiration for undertaking what was certainly in some respects a thankless job. For the first time in decades, readers of German have a paperback introduction to Old Norse literature, and congratulations are in order.

MARVIN TAYLOR

CHAUCER AND THE NORSE AND CELTIC WORLDS. By RORY McTURK. Ashgate. Aldershot, 2005. x + 218 pp. ISBN 0754603911.

After Schildgen's *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems and Jews in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (2001) and Heffernan's consideration of a more general Orient (2003), we now look North and West, to the Norse and Celtic worlds, but less for authorial treatment of alien populations than for affinities among a narrow range of literary works. Rory McTurk's entertaining and lucidly written book often borrows both image and effect from its subject texts: here the reflection of an illusory Norse throne room, there a breath from a windy English House of Fame, even the echo of a contentious Irish hostel. What comes perilously close to being a house of cards is erected on the constructional principles of analogy and analogue, with some buttressing from the old-fashioned study of recognised sources.

In five chapters McTurk addresses Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, in particular the treatise on poetics, *Skáldskaparmál*; Chaucer, Gerald of Wales and Ireland; the English author and the Irish saga tradition; the Wife of Bath and analogues, both Celtic and Germanic; and, lastly, Chaucer and Irish poetry. In each section McTurk deftly isolates, then treats in detail, key points of comparison. For the *Tales* and *Edda*, these are framed narrative, literary anthology and pilgrimage. On the first count, the author employs the conventional two-dimensional spatial image of 'levels of narrative' (turning subsequently to their various 'functions'), but this proves less than illuminating when medieval authors create a multi-dimensionality that more resembles the wormholes of advanced physics. The elusive narrative voice replicates some of the allusiveness of puns, kennings, and other paraphrase. The limitations of McTurk's interrogative model may contribute to his assessment of the imperfect structure and unfinished qualities of the two works

(20). Yet narrator positions and stances are convincingly shown to be very conscious sitings, displaying great sophistication, even in their instability and impermanence. Chaucer's Geoffrey and Snorri's Gylfi make a fine pair, wry but sly. The points of correspondence subsumed in literary anthology and pilgrimage call for a less full discussion and will be readily agreed to. The discussion of the 'poetic eagles' in the Norse account of the theft of the mead of poetry and in Chaucer's *House of Fame* might be completed by associating that portion of mead expelled behind the air-borne Óðinn and intended for poetasters with 'Geoffrey' the rhymester as the other eagle's passenger. Indian parallels are also adduced. McTurk concludes this tone-setting first chapter by stating that the two stories 'descend, independently of one another, from a common source' and are thus analogues, according to the earlier definition of heuristic instruments in the scholar's conceptual toolbox.

In the second chapter McTurk argues for Chaucer's greater familiarity with the works of Gerald of Wales than has earlier been assumed, his reading now expanded to include *Topographia Hibernie*. Eagles are again at the focal point of the comparison, and the argument of the preceding chapter is now, a tad repetitively, expanded. This entails some less than full correspondences, such as that between the elixir of poetic creation and the fire at St. Brigid's shrine at Kildare. Pagan affinities (extended to include the rotating fortresses of Irish saga tradition), more than Christian theology, make for intriguing points of contact with the aerial House of Fame. This discussion introduces two central arguments of the book: the possibility of Chaucer's having spent his 'lost' years (1361–66) in Ireland, and the related but very distinct issue of his exposure to, and influence from, Irish story-telling, poetry and poetics.

McTurk offers a fresh and thorough review of a now considerable body of admittedly circumstantial evidence to build a case for Chaucer accompanying Prince Lionel, son of Edward III, to Ireland. Lionel would oversee the estates of his wife, Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, in whose household was counted Philippa Chaucer, and more importantly he would stem the tide of gaelicisation among the population of British origin (English, Anglo-Norman, Anglo-Breton, Welsh, Pembrokeshire Fleming, etc.) that had resulted from minority demographic status, long-term, largely rural residence, intermarriage with Irish magnates, native Irish estate and household staff (not least entertainers), and so on. On the point of greatest relevance to Chaucer, these efforts were encoded in the Statutes of Kilkenny (February, 1366), one stipulation of which in part read as follows (p. 63):

it is agreed and forbidden that any Irish minstrels, that is to say, tympanours, pipers, story tellers, babblers, rhymers, harpers, or any other Irish minstrels shall come amongst the English, and that no English shall receive or make gift to such.

Even the use of the Irish language was banned among the 'English'. Notwithstanding this injunction, whose premises would have been familiar to all in Lionel's household even before their passage into law, McTurk argues that Chaucer so assiduously frequented Irish-speaking circles (if such could be

clearly drawn) that he not only needed to be sent on his 1366 Spanish mission to avoid falling within the ambit of the statutes when passed, but also acquired sufficient familiarity with Irish story-telling matter and poetics to affect his subsequent writings. We can only speculate on Lionel's likely laxity in this regard or Chaucer's recklessness, but this reviewer finds the overall proposition implausible, even admitting that the statutes were by and large ineffectual. To jump, momentarily, ahead to McTurk's penultimate chapter on 'Chaucer and Irish Poetry', the conclusions of which posit Chaucer's intimate familiarity with Irish syllabic poetry, one may wonder whether six years or less of covert contact with the Irish language, and most importantly with its phonemics, on which the entire structure of metrics is erected, would be sufficient to grasp all the intricacy of a poetics in which syllable length, syllable count, consonance, assonance, alliteration, partial and full rhyme (internal and final), patterns of stress, permissible elision, stanzaic structure, and more, formed the basis for further stylistic elaboration through paronomasia, learned allusion, inverted parallelisms, opening and closure effects, and other tropes. Even without adducing the notoriously long apprenticeship ascribed to Irish poets, we may suspect that more than six years of evenings in the hall under the conditions of Chaucer's service in Lionel's household would have been needed to achieve such mastery. Had Chaucer been as familiar with Irish culture as McTurk suggests, how could he have resisted the occasional lexical Hibernicism in his own work, or a set piece on the 'wild Irish', or a Paddy-figure like Shakespeare's 'ethnic' captains in *Henry V*? And for Harry Bailey to have condemned the 'rymyng' of 'Sir Topas' for its Irish affinities (McTurk, 187) would have required him, as well as Chaucer, to have spent many a night before the turf fire.

This major reservation does not diminish the pleasure of reading McTurk's account and does not invalidate his thoughtful discussion of the 'loathly lady' motif in Ch. 4, where one can scarcely deny some affiliation between the various reflexes of the Irish goddess of territorial sovereignty (e.g. Queen Medb of Connaught, the Old Woman of Beare) and the Wife of Bath and *puella senilis* of her tale. The darker, as distinct from simply repulsive, faces of the goddess are not explored. As concerns *Acallam na Senórach* (now authoritatively translated by Dooley and Roe as *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*, 1999) and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga (The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel)*, even the presence of such *comparanda* as framed narrative, ambulatory narration on an itinerary of (semi-)sacred sites (my terms), and the literary anthology would be more prudently examined under the author's rubrics of analogy and analogue than as direct influences on Chaucer.

'Chaucer and Irish Poetry' (Ch. 5) contains what to my knowledge is the best current introduction to a difficult subject and contested history, one that hardly offers a convenient point of access to any reader who does not have oral and auditory proficiency in the Irish language. The historical and highly technical discussion would bulk very large (pp. 154–81) in McTurk's book even if we could accept the likelihood that, *mutatis mutandis*, it would have

been comprehensible to Geoffrey Chaucer. As it is, it exerts considerable drag on an otherwise lively book.

The several analogies and analogues adduced in *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds* make for compelling and informative reading, even if we cannot find a rigorously researched and rigidly structuring linear causality to give them a sounder interior framework and sharper external contours. It is undeniable that many motif clusters in medieval European literature exhibit startling geographical range, and historical depth and longevity, at the same time as they are not always exploited to the same authorial ends nor always bear the same ideological charge. The depth of scholarship (very up-to-date as concerns secondary literature) and breadth of vision that inform McTurk's book recommend it to all readers, even those who may not be willing to follow the author through to some of his more speculative conclusions, in particular those related to the central issue of Chaucer's willed or casual exposure to an Irish culture shortly to come under English ban. But studying literary cultures so allusive and elusive as the Norse and Irish, and an author at once both overt and covert, so self-referential and self-questioning as Chaucer, a scholar may be forgiven his airier flights—eagle-mounted or otherwise.

WILLIAM SAYERS

ANDERS SØRENSEN VEDELS FILOLOGISKE ARBEJDER. By MARITA AKHØJ NIELSEN. *Universitets-Jubilæets danske Samfunds Skrifiserie* 562. C. A. Reitzels Forlag. Copenhagen, 2004. 820 pp. (2 vols). ISBN 87 7876 378 9.

Anders Sørensen Vedel is not a name that crops up a great deal in conversation. Indeed, it is probably safe to assume that many toilers in the field of Scandinavian Studies have only the scantiest acquaintance with this notable figure of Danish Renaissance humanism. With the appearance of Nielsen's new study, however (her doctoral thesis), such ignorance will be harder to justify. Although primarily concerned with Vedel the philologist, the book offers a comprehensive account of the man himself, his extraordinarily wide range of interests, his achievements and failures, and the times in which he lived.

Vedel was born in Vejle, Jutland, in 1542 and died in Ribe in 1616. He received a solid education and mixed in learned circles and with the nobility. As a young man he became tutor to the Danish nobleman, Tyge Brahe (later to achieve fame as one of the pioneers of modern astronomy), and in the years 1568–81 was a clergyman at the Danish court. As befits a Renaissance humanist, Vedel was something of a polymath. His published works include a translation into Danish of Saxo's history of Denmark (1575), an edition with commentary of the first three (of four) books of Adam of Bremen's chronicle of the archbishops of the Hamburg-Bremen see (1579), a tract on the origin of the name *Denmark* (1584), and a pioneering edition of Danish medieval ballads (1591). His greatest contribution was, however, to have

been a history of Denmark, written in Danish, and running perhaps to as many as 2000 pages. Unfortunately this work never materialised, although Vedel made a fair number of preparatory studies, and wrote an introduction and one or two sections on the late Viking Age that have survived. The reasons for his failure to bring the project to completion were many, but chief among them seem to have been half-hearted official support and a tendency to get side-tracked. In his travails with this monumental undertaking Vedel bears something of a resemblance to the modern academic. The painstaking handwritten account of his aims and objectives and how he intended to achieve them (*Om den danske Krønike at beskrive*, 1581) reminds one uncomfortably of the early twenty-first-century grant application, while the repeated assurances he gave that completion was just around the corner carry more than faint echoes of the bluster and prevarication that regularly precede British Research Assessment Exercises. And all the while Vedel was failing to deliver, he was busying himself with things that caught his fancy. Nemesis finally overtook him, however, in the shape of the redundancy that also stalks the unproductive British academic. In 1594, having exhausted the patience of the Danish authorities who had extracted from him a pledge to write the History, he was relieved of his duties as (unofficial) historiographer. Worse than that: he was compelled to hand over most of the materials he had amassed while working on the project. These eventually found their way to Copenhagen University Library, where they perished in the great fire of 1728. Fortunately Vedel seems to have kept a certain amount back, and to have made a number of copies. Thus it is that the philological contributions edited by Nielsen in the present work have survived.

Anders Sørensen Vedels filologiske arbejder is in fact much more than a critical edition—as indicated above. The major part comprises twelve discursive chapters. These deal with the following: (1) the aims and background of the study; (2) Vedel's printed and handwritten works; (3) his working methods; (4) his thoughts on language and language research and their importance for understanding historical sources; (5) his conception of the term 'Gothic' (which he equated with Old Norse and other manifestations of earlier Germanic); (6) his etymological musings, including a dissertation on the origin of the word *jul*; (7) his collections of Danish words and phrases; (8) his dictionary of 'barbarisms'—Latinised words of non-Latin origin, or neologisms derived from classical roots (taken principally from Danish sources); (9) his onomastic notes, with their unusual emphasis on contemporary naming practices; (10) Vedel and runes (not a very illuminating chapter, either on Vedel or on runes); (11) the reception of Vedel's works and their influence on later writers; (12) Vedel the philologist—his merits, shortcomings and achievements.

The manuscripts edited, each of which is given detailed presentation, are Rostgaard 219, 4to; Ny kongelig Samling 642^b, 4to, 2–12; Additamenta 121, 4to, 19–20 and 26–27; and Additamenta 58, 8vo, 37–46. Together these represent the most important of Vedel's hitherto unpublished philological works. His sixteenth-century Danish is unglossed, but where he

writes in Latin a modern Danish translation is appended. Rounding off Nielsen's study is a list of manuscripts consulted in its preparation and three bibliographies—one comprising all of Vedel's known works, one listing the source materials used, and one secondary literature. Finally there are three indexes devoted to (1) Danish, Norse, Low German, High German and Latin words Vedel treats in his philological works; (2) proper names; and (3) authors and works that appear in the bibliography of source materials.

As a scholar whose knowledge of Vedel is only a little above average, I am neither in a position to lavish well-considered praise on Nielsen's study nor to subject it to searching and detailed criticism. What I have been able to observe is that it is clearly written and well structured. Further, the author seems very much in command of her subject. And given the care that has been taken over presentation and proof-reading, I would assume that Vedel's manuscripts have been accurately transcribed in most, perhaps all, of their detail.

This book will be of particular importance to students of early post-Reformation Denmark and of the history of linguistics. It should also appeal more generally to those with an interest in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Danish language and culture.

MICHAEL BARNES

LJÓÐMÆLI 3: RÍMUR. By HALLGRÍMUR PÉTURSSON. Edited by MARGRÉT EGGERTSDÓTTIR, KRISTJÁN EIRÍKSSON and SVANHILDUR ÓSKARSDÓTTIR. *Rit 64. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*. Reykjavík 2005. xiv + 292 pp. ISBN 9979 819 71 5.

BAROKKMEISTARINN. LIST OG LÆRDÓMUR Í VERKUM HALLGRÍMS PÉTURSSONAR. By MARGRÉT EGGERTSDÓTTIR. *Rit 63. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi*. Reykjavík 2005. 474 pp. ISBN 9979 54 663 8.

Margrét Eggertsdóttir has devoted much of her academic career to Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–74), a commanding figure in post-medieval Icelandic literary life. Her fastidious editorial work has done much to reveal the multifaceted literary priorities and personality of this much-loved poet. She has now placed scholars interested in post-medieval Icelandic literary culture still further in her debt by the appearance of the third volume of the on-going major critical edition of Hallgrímur's poetry (*Ljóðmæli 3*), and also by producing a wide-ranging and stimulating monograph in which Hallgrímur's works are discussed in their many intellectual and literary contexts (*Barokkmeistarinn*).

Ljóðmæli 3 is the third volume of five that will form the first part, dedicated to poetry, of the complete edition of Hallgrímur Pétursson's works. The project divides Hallgrímur's works into four main parts: poetry, groups of psalms, *rímur* and prose works. The first volume appeared in 2000, the second in 2002. As noted in my review of *Ljóðmæli 2*, the poetic material in each volume is grouped according to content, with the first volume devoted to

poems about the evanescence of life, and the second primarily to occasional verse. Although Hallgrímur Pétursson is best known as a religious poet and psalmist, his other spiritual poems are less familiar, and constitute the primary focus of the present (third) volume. Overall, the editors clearly wish to draw attention to less familiar aspects of Hallgrímur Pétursson's literary production, and challenge the stereotypical notion of Hallgrímur as mainly a psalmist and religious writer.

The present volume contains forty-three psalms and occasional verses (groups of psalms, *sálmaflokkar*, will be treated in Part II of the critical edition), among which are psalms based on Biblical texts, psalms of penitence and solace, including the celebrated one (*Á einum guði er allt mitt traust*) that Hallgrímur must have written during his last illness. Many of these psalms are acrostics, a popular seventeenth-century poetic device. Among the spiritual poems traditionally attributed to Hallgrímur Pétursson, some are considered spurious by Margrét Eggertsdóttir and her editorial colleagues, Kristján Eiríksson and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, and therefore relegated to a separate volume, along with all other poems of doubtful attribution.

The arrangement of material in the edition follows that of the previous volumes: each text is prefaced by an introduction—where perhaps some sort of graphic device to identify titles more easily would have been a good idea—explaining the textual history and tradition of each item, where the readers will enjoy following the intriguing conjectures offered in the attempt to reconstruct the origins and affiliations of the manuscripts. The text of each poem is then reproduced, accompanied by full critical apparatus. The volume also includes an extensive bibliography and codicological description of all the relevant manuscripts.

Along with this welcome third edited volume, Margrét Eggertsdóttir has also published *Barokkmeistarinn*, a reworking of her doctoral dissertation. This monograph, with its handsome cover featuring an ornate title page from AM 148 8vo, examines the literary art and intellectual background to the works of Hallgrímur Pétursson, placing him securely within a broad European literary context, as well as within the context of what remains (for many readers) an unfamiliar period in Icelandic literary history. The study begins with a detailed evaluation of the concept of baroque literature in seventeenth-century Europe (chapters 2 and 3), before focusing on post-Reformation Iceland (chapters 4–7), and concluding with a detailed analysis of Hallgrímur's poetry, in which his works are read for the first time in the light of current understandings of baroque modes (chapters 8–18). After a concluding chapter, readers are provided with a summary in English, an extensive bibliography, and appropriate indexes.

It is not long ago that the term 'baroque' was applied primarily to art, and thus the concept of 'baroque literature' is a fairly new one. In her opening chapters Margrét traces back the history of the term 'baroque', not least in the context of its having often been used to describe literature considered excessively elaborate and (even) tasteless. We have to wait until the end of World War One—or even as late as the second half of the last century—for

a more sympathetic reevaluation of a baroque sensibility that is neither of the Renaissance nor of the Romantic period, but which may be said to have many affinities with Modernism and Expressionism. Margrét's discussion of the parallels between baroque literature and Modernism are particularly illuminating. The author then attempts to delineate this multifaceted literary style, with its emphasis on the importance of the harmonisation of all contrasts and tensions between lay and spiritual, evanescent and infinite; with its sense of poets being part of an international brotherhood of learned men, founding their *ars poetica* on classical and Christian traditions; with its tendency to prioritise form over content; and with its valorisation of classical Latin rhetoric as the key to this new poetic approach.

Seventeenth-century Iceland has long been considered the age of sorcery, a 'black hole' in Icelandic literary history, dominated by superstition and the supernatural, deprived of learning, and devoted to the sterile repetition of old literary materials and traditions. Margrét argues that the notion of post-Reformation Icelandic literature as an isolated phenomenon unconnected with contemporary foreign literature is unsustainable. It has been claimed that Iceland lacked the necessary conditions for a flourishing baroque literary culture because it had no monarch and therefore no court which could support literary or artistic production. But Margrét's discussion shows that baroque literature does not consist solely of court poetry; other themes and topics flourished that were well suited to other members of an agrarian society. The fourth chapter ('An Isolated Island in the Danish Kingdom') is particularly interesting, with its illuminating picture of the social and economic condition of Iceland at the time. Iceland society emerges as much less uniform than is often suggested—there was a strong sense of social class, and indeed part of society needed baroque literature, even though only a small proportion of the literary production found its way into print, and the only available press, at the Skálholt bishopric, was in the service of the Church.

Margrét draws attention to two other poets among Hallgrímur Pétursson's forerunners and contemporaries who may be considered representative of Icelandic baroque literature. The analysis of such texts reveals significant contacts with foreign contemporary literature, and the steady circulation of texts to and from Europe, as writers sought to elevate the status of the Icelandic language by contact with Latin and classical traditions, and by the resurrection of old metres and lore. All the literary genres deployed by Icelandic baroque writers are shown to have their counterparts in contemporary European writing.

The chapters dedicated to Hallgrímur Pétursson show in detail how the poet was influenced by dominant concepts of his day—on the world, on poetry, on the role of the poet, and on contemporary aesthetic values. The image of Hallgrímur Pétursson constructed in the Romantic period—a sick, destitute and isolated figure—is thus shown to be only part of the truth. Hallgrímur was also knowledgeable, open to new foreign influences, and well respected. In this sense, the microcosm of the poet perfectly mirrors the macrocosm of Iceland at the time.

In its range, methodology and insights Margrét Eggertsdóttir's monograph represents a major achievement in the analysis of baroque Icelandic literature. The image of seventeenth-century Iceland that emerges is of a land and culture richer and more colourful, less isolated and self-referential, more cosmopolitan than is usually thought. At the end of her Foreword in *Barokk-meistarinn*, Margrét Eggertsdóttir describes Hallgrímur Pétursson's poetry as *gefandi*, 'giving'. The same may be said of Margrét's work. This is a scholarly monograph that can be read almost as a novel, and can engage its readers on many levels. It is a most praiseworthy volume.

SILVIA COSIMINI

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