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CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>GYLFAGINNING</i> AND EARLY MEDIEVAL CONVERSION THEORY. Christopher Abram | 5 |
| MANSLAUGHTER AND MYSOGYNY: WOMEN AND REVENGE IN <i>STURLUNGA</i> <i>SAGA</i> . David Clark | 25 |
| CONTEXTUALISING <i>LEIDARVÍSIR</i> : SANT' AGNESE, THE CATACOMBS, THE PANTHEON AND THE TIBER. Tommaso Marani | 44 |
| A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF GREENLAND. Derek Mathers ALAN LAWRIE BINNS | 67 95 |

REVIEWS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CORPUS OF ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE. VIII: WESTERN YORKSHIRE. By Elizabeth Coatsworth. (John Hines) | 99 |
| THE NORTHERN CONQUEST: VIKINGS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND. By Katherine Holman. (Martin Arnold) | 101 |
| LES MAGICIENS DANS L'ISLANDE ANCIENNE. ÉTUDES SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION DE LA MAGIE ISLANDAISE ET DE SES AGENTS DANS LES SOURCES LITTÉRAIRES NORROISES. By François-Xavier Dillmann. (Margaret Cormack) | 103 |
| WHEN THE NORNS HAVE SPOKEN: TIME AND FATE IN GERMANIC PAGANISM. By Anthony Winterbourne. (Richard North) | 105 |
| HOLY VIKINGS: SAINTS' LIVES IN THE OLD ICELANDIC KINGS' SAGAS. By Carl Phelpstead. (Rory McTurk) | 108 |
| THE LOST VELLUM KRINGLA. By Jon Gunnar Jørgensen. Translated by Siân Grønlie. (Elizabeth Ashman Rowe) | 112 |
| EGILS SAGA SKALLAGRÍMSSONAR. BIND III. C-REDAKTIONEN. Edited by Michael Chesnutt. (Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir) | 114 |
| SNORRI STURLUSON AND THE EDDA. THE CONVERSION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL IN MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA. By Kevin J. Wanner. (Patricia Pires Boulhosa) | 117 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| ÞÚ ERT VÍSUST KVENNA. BEATRICE LA FARGE ZUM 60. GEBURTSTAG. Edited by Klaus von See and Julia Zernack. (Lena Rohrbach) | 120 |
| THE VIKING WORLD. Edited by STEFAN BRINK in collaboration with NEIL PRICE. (R. Andrew McDonald) | 122 |
| ALTNORDISCHE PHILOGIE. NORWEGEN UND ISLAND. Edited by Odd Einar Haugen. Translated by Astrid van Nahl. (Marvin Taylor) | 124 |

GYLFAGINNING
AND EARLY MEDIEVAL CONVERSION THEORY

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SNORRA EDDA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS PAGAN RELIGION, and its possible antecedents in medieval Christian thought, have been the subject of much debate. For the most part, these discussions have centred on the *Prologue* to *Snorra Edda*, although *Gylfaginning* and the early parts of what is now referred to as *Skáldskaparmál* (the 'mythological' sections of the *Edda*) are undoubtedly also relevant to them. The focus of this discussion has been located in Snorri's distance from and degree of belief in pagan traditions:¹ while some scholars have seen in *Snorra Edda* vestiges of genuine, and vital, pagan traditions (von See 1988, 120) or evidence of ongoing syncretism between the two religions in the culture of thirteenth-century Iceland (Kuhn 1971, II 378–86), most critics, following Walter Baetke (1952) and Anne Holtsmark (1964), have come to accept that *Snorra Edda*'s version of Norse mythology has been substantially recast according to contemporary Christian codes (Böldl 2000, 74–76; Lindow 1985, 36–39). According to Gerd Wolfgang Weber, for example, Snorri's mythography was in full agreement with orthodox Christian theories such as euhemerism, natural religion, necromancy, idolatry and demonology (Weber 1986, 312), with demonology providing the most important conceptual framework for his treatment of pagan gods. According to demonological theory, Satan and his demons deceived people into regarding them as gods; Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði—the hypostases of Óðinn who attempt to deceive Gylfi into accepting themselves as deities—can be read as demons as well as euhemerised historical figures (Weber 1986, 318). Weber's case is perhaps weakened by the fact that Snorri, in marked contrast to many Christian authors, never reveals the demonic identity of his pagan protagonists; whereas his euhemerising strategies are clearly apparent in the *Prologue*, *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* (and in *Ynglinga saga*, if we take that work

¹ Throughout this article, I shall use the name Snorri as a convenient short-hand for the author of *Snorra Edda* in its conventional form. While I am happy to accept the attribution of the whole of the *Edda* (and *Ynglinga saga*) to the historical Snorri Sturluson, this attribution is not important to my arguments here.

into account alongside the *Edda*), a demonological interpretation of paganism is never made explicit in his work. Anne Heinrichs (1994, 56) notes that Snorri includes far fewer demonological elements in his work on paganism than the near-contemporary authors of the so-called ‘Conversion *þættir*’. While he seeks to understand and explain the old religion, he steadfastly refuses to condemn it (Faulkes 1983; Wanner 2008, 154–55).

But Snorri is interested in the religious status of the pagan myths and poems that his treatise preserves. And while he does not condemn his ancestors for their paganism, nor is he able to approve of it. Near the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál* (as the work is currently reconstructed),² the author addresses an audience of ‘young poets’ directly. He reminds them forcefully that stories of the type that *Gylfaginning* contains—what we might well call pagan myths—are to be enjoyed only for learning and enjoyment’s sake:

En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjölða með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er huldit er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til fróðleiks ok skemtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sögur at taka ór skáldskapinum fornar kenningar þær er höfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannynði þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá rétttri trú, ok þá næst frá Tyrkjum, hvernig Asiamenn þeir er Æsir eru kallaðir fólksuðu frásagnir þær frá þeim tíðindum er gerðusk í Troju til þess at landfólkit skyldi trúa þá guð vera. (*Skálp*, I 5/25–35)

But these things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obliquely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly enquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned into oblivion or demonstrated

² There is some doubt as to where the boundary between *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál* lies in medieval manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*. In Codex Upsaliensis (U), the only codex which consistently provides rubrics giving titles for each section, the ‘advice to young poets’ passage occurs after *Gylfaginning*, but before the beginning of what the manuscript names as *Skáldskaparmál*. It occurs on folio 19r, under the heading *her segir hversu skilja skal skáldskap* ‘here it is discussed how poetry is to be understood’. The two parts are clearly separated by several folios of interpolated material and a full-page illustration. In older editions of *Snorra Edda*, the ‘advice to young poets’ was often counted part of the so-called *Bragaræður*, the exchange of mythological information that takes place outside of *Gylfaginning*’s frame-narrative and which belongs properly neither to that text or to *Skáldskaparmál*, but provides a bridge between the two (Wessén 1940). It is no longer usual to observe this distinction. On the contents of these manuscripts, see Nordal 2001, 44–57.

to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use. Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book, where it is told what happened when mankind went astray from the true faith, and after that about the Turks, how the people of Asia, known as Æsir, distorted the accounts of the events that took place in Troy so that the people of the country would believe that they were gods. (Translations from *Snorra Edda* 1987.)

The ‘beginning of this book’ presumably refers back to *Gylfaginning* and the *Prologue*, in which the descent of the Æsir from the people of Troy is described.³

According to the ‘advice to young poets’, the origins of pagan religion lie in the narratives (*frásagnir*) that the people of Asia (the Æsir) ‘distorted’ (*folsuðu*) until people in Scandinavia came to worship them as gods. Snorri explains this process of euhemerisation in different terms in the *Prologue*, elsewhere in *Skáldskaparmál* and in *Ynglinga saga*, in which the Æsir become deified as part of a historical process, rather than as a result of their own actions. In *Gylfaginning*, however, the power of the Æsir’s stories to distort the truth and to promulgate their false divinity is a thread that runs through the framing narrative of Gylfi’s trip to Ásgarðr, within which the myths themselves are related. Indeed, the Æsir’s misrepresentation of pagan myths as some sort of religious truth, in which Christians are not permitted to believe, seems to me fundamental to Snorri’s religious-historical aims. The idea that the Æsir aim to delude Gylfi—and by implication, the rest of us—is part of the *Edda*’s wider strategy that seeks to preserve the myths while simultaneously providing a context in which a Christian audience can understand, enjoy and react appropriately to them.

It is my contention in this article that one of the aims of *Gylfaginning* is to explain away the divinity of the pagan gods as a delusion: a delusion that has been promulgated by falsifying accounts of universal history, just as Snorri accuses the ‘historical’ Æsir of doing in the ‘advice to young poets’. The idea that paganism is a delusion (or a set of delusions) is, I shall argue, one of the ideological foundations of the *Edda*’s attitude towards religion. In the section that we know as *Gylfaginning*, moreover, deception is used as a narrative device that serves to focus an

³ Von See (1988, 28–29) suggests that *í upphafi bókar* could refer back to the beginning of *Gylfaginning* rather than to the *Prologue*. U omits this reference entirely, but the other manuscripts all refer to information that is contained only in the *Prologue* with the phrase *frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá rétti trú*. See *Sköpp*, I 154.

audience's attention upon the grander deceit at the heart of pagan religion. This strategy is of course a Christian one, and I will show that it is not unique to Snorri: other medieval Christian commentators also interpreted paganism primarily as a delusion.

The title *Gylfaginning* itself (which is given to this part of the work only in the Uppsala manuscript (U)) suggests that trickery is afoot in its narratives. Old Norse *ginning*, glossed as 'tricking, fooling, or deceiving' and deriving from the verb *ginna* 'to dupe' or 'to fool' (Cleasby-Vigfusson, s.v.), leads the reader to expect and look out for deception in the narrative, and deception is not difficult to find. The eponymous Swedish king, Gylfi, is tricked into giving up part of his lands to Gefjon, one of the Æsir, who underhandedly engages the assistance of oxen fathered by a giant to plough up far more territory than Gylfi had bargained for (an episode lacking from U). Gylfi only has himself to blame for being taken in on this first occasion: he promises the meretricious Gefjon (on whom see Heizmann 2002) the land *at launum skemtunar sinnar* 'as a reward for her entertainment' (Gylf 7/2). By implication, Gylfi's lust has led to his deception.

This encounter leads (a possibly disgruntled) Gylfi to wonder how the Æsir have the apparently supernatural power to make things happen according to their will: whether it is because of their own nature or because of the divine powers that they worship (Gylf 7/20–23). In order to answer his self-imposed question, Gylfi sets out to visit the *Ásafólk* in their stronghold at Ásgarðr. A series of further deceptions await him there; significantly, the narrative of Gylfi's visit both starts and finishes with references to disorienting visual distortions. When Gylfi arrives at Ásgarðr, the Æsir prepare *sjónhverfingar* 'altered appearances' or 'optical illusions' (Gylf 7/27) for him. At the conclusion of his questioning of Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði, the Æsir's hall vanishes altogether, as if it had been a mirage, a *sjónhverfing*, itself (Gylf 54/31–35). Gylfi is no fool: he is described as *maðr vitr ok fjölkunnigr* 'a wise man and skilled in magic' (Gylf 7/20), but he seems to be taken in by the tricky Æsir, the mysterious foreigners who apparently wish to identify themselves with the pagan gods of Scandinavia (Gylf 54/36–55/5) (see Breitag 1964). If Gylfi's visit to *Háva holl* is an illusion, then the Æsir themselves, their claims to divinity and the stories of the gods that they tell Gylfi are especially illusory: we are not to believe in them. The frame-narrative of *Gylfaginning* seems to reinforce the message of the 'advice to young poets' passage in *Skáldskaparmál*: the Æsir have tried to pull the wool over our eyes, and we must not confuse their lies with truth. The audience of

the *Edda* is reminded through a range of subtle textual devices as well as by this direct instruction that to do so would be a mistake.

People in the pagan period, however, *were* deluded by stories like those that Gylfi hears; otherwise there would have been no pagans. At the end of *Gylfaginning*, Gylfi appears to be partly responsible for promulgating the very myths that reinforce the Æsir's claims to divinity. When he relates what he has heard throughout his kingdom, the stories are passed on accurately and without qualification: *Ok eptir honum sagði hvern maðr þórum þessar sögur* 'And from his account these stories passed from one person to another' (*Gylf* 54/35). There is no reason to assume that Gylfi's putative audiences did not accept these *sögur* as truth, since it is within the narrative framework of his visit to Ásgarðr that pagan beliefs are examined, interpreted and qualified. Without this distancing device, the narrated myths could be viewed uncritically as truthful. Gylfi himself never expresses an opinion about the truthfulness or otherwise of what he has heard: perhaps he has been taken in, too. The usual gloss of *Gylfaginning* as 'the fooling of Gylfi' implies, indeed, that the protagonist is the Æsir's dupe.

Rory McTurk has proposed, however, that the title *Gylfaginning* might be interpreted, in an inversion of the usual reading, as the 'fooling [of the Æsir] by Gylfi'. He suggests that Gylfi tricks the human Æsir even as they attempt to delude him: he exhausts their knowledge in the question-and-answer session; he is never convinced that the human and divine Æsir are one and the same; he then retells stories of the Æsir throughout his realms in a way (so McTurk conjectures) that emphasises the falsehood of their claims to divinity (McTurk 1994, 9–10). Gylfi thus triumphs in his battle of wits with Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði: he sees that their version of religious truth is based on a deliberate policy of deception. Gylfi's achievement is that he has got in first with his own view, so that people will be on their guard against the one promulgated by the human Æsir. In this way Gylfi, who of course lives in pre-Christian Scandinavia, has prepared the way for Scandinavia's conversion (McTurk 1994, 11).

McTurk's assertion that the title *Gylfaginning* may contain this ambiguity between who is the deceiver and who the deceived does, I think, add a valuable dimension to our understanding of *Snorra Edda*'s representation of paganism, its origins and its relationship to truth as it might have been perceived by Scandinavian Christians. His suggestion that Gylfi is in some sense an agent of, or precursor to, Scandinavia's conversion to Christianity is particularly relevant to the present study. I propose here that the form of *Gylfaginning*, as well as its purpose and

rhetorical strategies, finds close parallels in at least one example of early medieval conversion theory.

Writers connected to the early missions among Germanic pagans had for centuries wrestled with the question of how best to convince target populations of the superiority of Christianity to their traditional modes of thought. An interesting and hitherto unrecognised parallel to Snorri's strategy as it manifests itself in *Gylfaginning*, in particular, is found in the theories of the eighth-century English bishop, Daniel of Winchester.

Daniel (died 745) was a patron and supporter of Boniface's mission in the Frankish-controlled territories of Hesse and Thuringia. In about 723, he wrote to Boniface—who by then had been appointed by Gregory II as a peripatetic bishop, following his earlier, abortive mission with St Willibrord in Frisia (716–17)—with advice about how best to wean the pagans away from idolatry. Daniel was an advocate of what we might call inter-faith dialogue: he argued that the role of the missionary was to convince the pagan through reasoned argument of the truth of Christianity's claims and the benefits of conversion, and that this should be accomplished through peaceable conversation rather than by harangues, threats or entreaties (von Padberg 1995, 134–38; Sullivan 1953, 715–17). In this letter he provided an almost step-by-step guide to missionary technique, laying out a practical programme for Boniface to follow, and in so doing prefigured the conversation that, five centuries later, the author of *Gylfaginning* would put into the mouths of the legendary king Gylfi and the three hypostases of Óðinn, his embodiments of traditional Scandinavian paganism.

The main thrust of Daniel's advice is that the pagans must be allowed to discover the folly and uselessness of their false beliefs for themselves. The missionary's role is simply to guide conversation along the right lines and, above all, to ask questions. To begin with, he advises Boniface not even to dispute the divinity of the old gods (*Briefe*, 39: letter 23):

Neque enim contraria eis de ipsorum quamvis falsorum deorum genealogia astruere debes, sed secundum eorum opinionem quoslibet ab aliis generatos per complexum mariti ac femine concede eos asserere, ut saltem modo hominum natos deos ac deas homines potius, non deos fuisse et cepisse, qui ante non erant, probes.

Cum vero initium habere deos utpote alios ab aliis generatos coacti didicerint, item interrogandi, utrum initium habere hunc mundum an sine initio semper exstitisse arbitrentur. Si initium habuit, quis hunc creavit? Cum procul dubio ante constitutionem saeculi nullatenus genitis diis inveniunt subsistendi vel habitandi locum; mundum enim non hanc visibilem tantum caelum et terram, sed cuncta etiam extenta locorum spatia, quae ipsi quoque pagani suis imaginare cogitationibus possunt, dico.

Do not begin by arguing with them about the genealogies of their false gods. Accept their statement that they were begotten by other gods through the intercourse of male and female and then you will be able to prove that, as these gods and goddesses did not exist before, and were born like men, they must be men and not gods.

When they have been forced to admit that their gods had a beginning, since they were begotten by others, they should be asked whether the world had a beginning or was always in existence. If it had a beginning, who created it? There is no doubt that before the universe was created there was no place in which these begotten gods could have subsisted or dwelt. And by ‘universe’ I mean not merely heaven and earth which we see with our eyes but the whole extent of space which even the heathens can grasp in their imagination. (Hillgarth 1986, 172–73)

Gylfi begins his interrogation with three questions about the origins of the chief pagan god. (I shall omit the answers he receives at this stage.)

Gangleri hóf svá mál sitt:

1. ‘Hverr er æztr eða elztr allra goða?’ (*Gylf* 8/27–28)
2. ‘Hvar er sá guð, eða hvat má hann, eða hvat hefir hann unit framaverka?’ (*Gylf* 8/33–34)
3. ‘Hvat hafðisk hann áðr at en himinn ok jörð væri gø?’ (*Gylf* 9/6–7)

Gangleri began his questioning thus:

1. ‘Who is the highest and most ancient of all gods?’
2. ‘Where is this god, what power has he, and what great works has he performed?’
3. ‘What was he doing before heaven and earth were made?’

The answers that Gangleri receives in response to the first two questions are not sufficient to catch the pagans out: *Alföðr* is the oldest and most powerful god; he is immortal (*lifir hann of allar aldir*) (*Gylf* 8/35), and he made heaven and earth and everything in them. He sounds, in fact, very much like the Christian creator, even presiding over a pseudo-Christian paradise wherein the righteous dwell (*Gylf* 9/2–3). The influence of Christianity upon this description of ‘*Alföðr*’—which is attested elsewhere as a by-name for *Óðinn* (in *Grímnismál*, stanza 48), but whose creator-function is unique to *Gylfaginning*—has often been assumed (Holtmark 1964, 25; Marold 1998, 161). Baetke (1952, 44–45), for example, argued that this figure was part of Snorri’s representation of paganism as a natural religion that was misguided but not blameworthy: his ancestors, so he implies, already had tendencies towards monotheism which anticipated their eventual acceptance of Christianity. This might well be grist to the missionary’s mill, as it would enable him to use the *prima facie* correspondences

between the two belief-systems to find common ground with the pagan. However, from Daniel's point of view, Hár's answer to Gangleri's third question ('What was he doing before heaven and earth were made?') is crucial: *Þá var hann með hrímpursum* (Gylf, 9/8) 'Then he was among the frost-giants'. This statement causes the logic of the Alfǫðr stories to break down: if he was with the frost-giants before heaven and earth were created, he cannot have created the frost-giants when he made everything else in the universe. We do not know where the frost-giants came from, and we do not know where they and Alfǫðr cohabited before his act of creation. As Daniel put it, 'there is no doubt that before the universe was created there was no place in which these created gods could have subsisted or dwelt': only the one true God could exist before or outside creation.

As if to emphasise the point, Gangleri follows Priði's description of the primordial frost-giant Ymir with a loaded question: *Hvernig óxu ættir þaðan eða skapaðisk svá at fleiri menn urðu, eða trúir þú þann guð er nú sagðir þú frá?* (Gylf 10/36–38) 'How did generations grow from him [Ymir], and how did it come about that other people came into being, or do you believe him to be a god whom you have just spoken of?' Hár replies decisively: *Fyrir þingun mun játum vér hann guð. Hann var illr ok allir hans ættmenn. Þá kllum vér hrímpursa* (Gylf 10/39–40) 'Not at all do we acknowledge him to be a god. He was evil and all his descendants. We call them frost-giants'. Ymir comes into being as a spontaneous outcome of natural forces, and out of him is the cosmos made, yet he is also the patriarch of the race of the frost-giants; he is emphatically not a god. If Óðinn lived with the frost-giants, where did they dwell together? This question parallels Daniel's assertion that 'there is no doubt that before the universe was created there was no place in which these created gods could have subsisted or dwelt'. It also finds an echo in the enquiry by which Gangleri elicits the second creation story, where Óðinn/Alfǫðr comes into being through natural processes, but is not the initiator of such processes: *Gangleri mælti: 'Hvat var upphaf? Eða hversu hófsk? Eða hvat var áðr?'* (Gylf 9/9–10) 'Gangleri spoke: "What was the beginning? And how did things start? And what was there before?"' Of these questions, the last would be most important for Daniel's missionary: as soon as a pagan answers the question positively—stating that there was something prior to the universe's creation—proof is provided that the pagan gods, if they live in that universe, cannot have created it. Once Ymir has been introduced into the account, Gangleri asks *Hvar bygði Ymir eða við hvat lifði hann?* (Gylf 11/5) 'Where did Ymir live, and what did he live on?', apparently returning to his earlier line of enquiry.

Alfǫðr and Óðinn are equated with one another, even though they are not always identical and the two figures have different functions within the mythological system that the *Æsir*'s testimony explicates (see Marold 1998, 159–61). Hár's subsequent description of Óðinn includes a passage which confirms this identification (*Gylf* 13/14–19):

Kona hans hét Frigg Fjörgvinsdóttir, ok af þeira ætt er sú kynslóð komin er vér kǫllum Ása ættir, er bygt hafa Ásgarð hinn forna ok þau ríki er þar liggja til, ok er þat allt goðkunnig ætt. Ok fyrir því má hann heita Alfǫðr at hann er faðir allra goðanna ok manna ok alls þess er af honum ok hans krapti var fullgert.

His wife was called Frigg Fjorgvin's daughter, and from them is descended the family line that we call the *Æsir* race, who have resided in Old Asgard and the realms that belong to it, and that whole line of descent is of divine origin. And this is why he can be called All-father, that he is father of all the gods and of men and of everything that has been brought into being by him and his power.

Although we are never told explicitly that Alfǫðr is a 'created god', the presence prior to the world's coming into being of any other uncreated being along with the creator, or the existence of a cosmos in which a god can live prior to his creative act, are paradoxes of precisely the type that Daniel wished missionaries to reveal.

Daniel's first point—that the gods are born like people, and therefore must be human—is supported by an apparent contradiction in Snorri's text. Although the *Æsir* are of divine origin, they are still very much part of a genealogy: they live on earth, and they procreate and are the results of procreation. Óðinn, even though he is called Alfǫðr, has a father, Borr, a mother, Bestla, daughter of the giant Bǫlþorn, and a grandfather, Búri, who was licked into being by the cow Auðhumla (*Gylf* 11/10–13).⁴ Since Óðinn by this account was born like men he must, according to Daniel's theory, be a man and not a god. His divine nature came later, and was a function of his paternity of the rest of the *Æsir* and his power: this explanation chimes with the euhemerism of the *Prologue*, even as it undermines the *Æsir*'s initial attempt to portray Alfǫðr as a creator-god. The point that Óðinn is a mortal whose divinity depends on the belief of his worshippers is made again immediately after his ancestry has been delineated (*Gylf* 11/14–19):

⁴ Gangleri's question upon learning of the existence of Auðhumla—*Við hvat feddisk kýrin?* 'What did the cow feed on?'—may also be read as another sardonic attempt to uncover the illogic of the creation story: if Ymir and the cow were the only two beings in the cosmos, and Auðhumla fed Ymir, what was there in Ginnungagap to nourish her?

[Borr] fekk þeirar konu er Bestla hét, dóttir Bolþorns jötuns, ok fengu þau þrjá sonu. Hét einn Óðinn, annarr Vili, þriði Vé. Ok þat er mín trúa at sá Óðinn ok hans bræðr munu vera stýrandi himins ok jarðar; þat ætlum vér at hann muni svá heita. Svá heitir sá maðr er vér vitum mestan ok ágæztan, ok vel megu þér hann láta svá heita.

[Borr] married a wife called Bestla, daughter of the giant Bolthorn, and they had three sons. One was called Odin, the second Vili, the third Ve. And it is my belief that this Odin and his brothers must be the rulers of heaven and earth; it is our opinion that this must be what he is called. This is the name of the one who is the greatest and most glorious that we know, and you would do well to agree to call him that too.

This passage therefore associates Óðinn's ancestry with his humanity, and suggests that it is only in the pagans' minds (from which Gylfi's belief system is differentiated) that he may be credited with the power to control the universe (see Heinrichs 1994, 59).

Daniel proposes a follow-up question, to be used if pagans proved intractable on the subject of the universe's creation (*Briefe*, 39):

Quodsi sine initio semper exstitisse mundum contenderint, quod multis refutare ac convincere documentis argumentisque stude: tamen altercantes interroga, quis ante natos deos mundo imperaret, quis regeret? Quomodo autem suo subdere dominatui vel sui iuris facere mundum ante se semper subsistentem poterunt?

If they maintain that the universe had no beginning, try to refute their arguments and bring forward convincing proofs; and if they persist in arguing, ask them, who ruled it? How did the gods bring under their sway a universe that had always existed before them? (Hillgarth 1986, 173)

Gylfi does not attempt to refute the pagans' arguments, but his subsequent questions seem designed to elicit similar information:

4. 'Hvat hofðusk þá at Bors synir, ef þú trúir at þeir sé guð?' (*Gylf* 11/33–34)
5. 'Þettu eru mikil tíðindi er nú heyri ek. Furðu mikil smíð er þat ok hagliga gert. Hvernig var jörðin háttuð?' (*Gylf* 12/20–21)
6. 'Mikit þótti mér þeir hafa þá snúit til leiðar er jörð ok himinn var gert ok sól ok himintungl váru sett ok skipt dægum—ok hvaðan kómu menninir þeir er heim byggja?' (*Gylf* 13/1–3)
4. 'What did Bor's sons do then, if you believe that they are gods?'
5. 'This is important information that I have just heard. That is an amazingly large construction and skilfully made. How was the earth arranged?'
6. 'A great deal it seems to me they had achieved when earth and heaven were made and sun and stars were put in position and days were separated—and where did the people come from who inhabit the world?'

Like the Anglo-Saxon missionary, Gylfi turns his attention to the nature of the world once he has established that the gods live in a universe that existed before them. The phrase *ef þú trúir at þeir sé guð* once more implies that Borr's sons are not divine: it is a matter of faith, and Gylfi indicates that he does not share the Æsir's beliefs. He does not cast doubt on the information that Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði give him about the gods' arrangement of the cosmos, although one might detect an ironical tone in his repeated use of the adjective *mikill* to describe their achievements. *Mikil tíðindi* are indeed 'great tidings' or, as Faulkes translates it, 'important information'; but they are also, according to this interpretation, 'tall tales'.

Daniel concluded his point-by-point model with a number of other questions that the missionary might ask (*Briefe*, 39–40):

Unde autem vel a quo vel quando substitutus aut genitus primus dea fuerat? Utrum autem adhuc generare deos deasque alios aliasque suspicantur? Vel, si iam non generant, quando vel cur cessaverunt a concubitu et partu; si autem adhuc generant, infinitus iam deorum effectus numerus est. Et quisnam inter tot tantosque potentior sit, incertum mortalibus est et valde cavendum, ne in potentiolem quis offendat.

Whence or by whom or when was the first god or goddess begotten? Do they believe that gods and goddesses still beget other gods and goddesses? If they do not, when did they cease intercourse and giving birth and why? If they do, the number of gods must be infinite. In such a case, who is the most powerful among these different gods? Surely no mortal man can know. Yet men must take care not to offend this god who is more powerful than the rest. (Hillgarth 1986, 173)

Daniel then goes on to describe some of the inconsistencies and absurdities of the worship of pagan gods, which lies outside *Gylfaginning's* mythographic scope. Although his final questions about polytheism find no direct parallels in Gylfi's later enquiries, the idea of one god's supremacy over the other deities has been addressed by *Hverr er æztr eða elztr allra goða?* (*Gylf* 8/27), and Gylfi has already prompted the Æsir to explain the gods' progeniture in some detail.

The desired effect of all these questions is, according to Daniel's precepts, to coax the pagans into realising the absurdity of their beliefs, to unmask their delusions (*Briefe*, 40):

Haec et his similia multa alia, quae nunc enumerare longum est, non quasi insultando vel inritando eos, sed placide ac magna obicere moderatione debes. Et per intervalla nostris, id est christianis, huiusmodi comparandae sunt dogmatibus superstitiones et quasi e laterere tangendae, quatenus magis confusae quam exasperate pagani erubescant pro tam absurdis opinionibus et ne nos latere ipsorum nefarios ritus ac fabulas estimant.

These and similar questions, and many others that it would be tedious to mention now, should be put to them, not in an offensive and irritating way but calmly and with great moderation. From time to time their superstitions should be compared with our Christian dogmas and touched upon indirectly, so that the heathens, more out of confusion than exasperation, may be ashamed of their absurd opinions and may recognise that their disgusting rites and legends have not escaped our notice. (Hillgarth 1986, 173)

While Daniel's tone is here much more militantly anti-pagan than anything we find in *Gylfaginning*, I believe that Gylfi's questions in the first part of the text partly fulfil the missionary agenda. Calmly, and with great moderation, Gylfi—who is not a Christian, but is certainly not a coreligionist of the Æsir—touches upon the superstitions and absurd opinions that underlie the pagans' creation story and account of the origins of the old gods. And at the conclusion of *Gylfaginning*, the whole edifice of paganism, metaphorically made up of the delusions with which the Æsir have attempted to beguile or befuddle Gylfi, famously crumbles away (*Gylf* 54/31–35):

‘En nú ef þú kant lengra fram at spyrja þá veit ek eigi hvaðan þér kemr þat, fyrir því at øngan mann heyrða ek lengra segja fram aldarfarit. Ok njóttu nú sem þú namt.’

Því næst heyrði Gangleri dyni mikla hvern veg frá sér, ok leit út á hlið sér. Ok þá er hann sésk meir um þá stendr hann úti á sléttum velli, sér þá ønga holl ok ønga borg. Gengr hann þá leið sína braut ok kemr heim í ríki sitt ok segir þau tíðindi er hann hefir sét ok heyrtr. Ok eptir honum sagði hverr maðr qðrum þessar sogur.

‘And now if you know any more questions to ask further into the future, I do not know where you will find answers, for I have heard no one relate the history of the world any further on in time. And may the knowledge you have gained do you good.’

Next Gangleri heard great noises in every direction from him, and he looked out to one side. And when he looked around further he found he was standing out on open ground, could see no hall and no castle. Then he went off on his way and came back to his kingdom and told of the events he had seen and heard about. And from his account these stories passed from one person to another.

Hár's final speech shows that he and his colleagues have been defeated by Gylfi's questions: they have reached the limits of the knowledge available to pagans. The pagan world will come to an end, and they are incapable of looking forward to the next world, to a religion predicated upon the idea of an eternal kingdom. It is left to Christian readers to compare ‘their superstitions with our Christian dogmas’ for themselves, but Gylfi's questions, read in the light of Daniel's advice to missionaries, provide signposts in this direction. Anne Holtsmark (1964, 14–15 and

22–26) saw the principles of association and contrast between paganism and Christianity as being fundamental to Snorri’s mythographic agenda. According to her interpretation (15), Snorri wished in the *Edda* to combine two strands of inherited tradition—the pagan stories known to him through poetry, and the Christian worldview and Biblical teaching that his education had inculcated in him—and to make sense of their similarities and differences. Daniel’s theories, too, make use of this principle of ‘contrastive association’: missionaries are to encourage pagans to compare their own ‘superstitions’ with analogous elements of Christian dogma. The superficial correspondences between the two bodies of knowledge should help the missionary to point out where and why they differ from one another. Typological similarities between the two religious systems, in other words, could be used as a tool with which to assert the superior epistemological status of the Christian worldview.

The events of Gylfi’s visit, and by implication the content of the Æsir’s speeches, are finally passed around as *sögur* ‘stories’. Although the word *saga* is unprejudicial with regard to the truthfulness of a narrative, it might be noted that doctrine, lore or wisdom, including Christian learning, is usually denoted in Old Norse by the term (*kristni-* or *helgi-*)*fræði* (Lönnroth 1964, 12–15), which occurs nowhere in *Gylfaginning*. But as Hár indicates at the start of the dialogue, it will be the protagonist who is *fróðari* ‘wiser’ or ‘more learned’ who will prevail in the exchange of stories: he tells Gylfi that *hann komi eigi heill út nema hann sé fróðari* (Gylf 8/23) ‘he would not get out unscathed unless he was more learned’. There is a subtle ambiguity in this phrase: Gylfi may need to prove himself wiser or more knowledgeable than his antagonist in order to escape alive, but it might also be interpreted as ‘he would not get out unscathed unless he was wiser [than he is now]’. In other words, Gylfi must learn something, or come to a better understanding of the world, over the course of the knowledge exchange. In either case, the pseudo-Christian Gylfi is clearly revealed to be *fróðari* at the end of the narrative.

Old Norse mythological wisdom-contests are sometimes settled in a similar manner: when one participant runs out of answers to his antagonist’s questions, as at the end of *Vafþrúðnismál*, he is defeated. Carolynne Larrington (2002, 62) considers that the type of questions asked by Gylfi—Where are the gods? When did they create the world and mankind? And what are they doing now?—are partly answered in the exchanges of mythological information contained in the eddic poems *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. At the same time, Larrington notes that questions of this sort seem ‘ridiculously rational and anachronistic to

ask of Old Norse religious thought and the Norse mythological system. Yet these questions certainly occurred to medieval Christians'. Snorri was familiar with the eddic wisdom poems, and may have been influenced by them in his portrayal of Gylfi's encounter with the Æsir: Hár's challenge to Gylfi's knowledge is closely comparable to *Vafþrúðnismál*, stanza 7, for example. It is possible also to see in *Gylfaginning*'s wisdom-contest, however, a Christian impetus towards rationally codifying and explaining an irrational universe. As in the case of Óðinn's defeat of the giant Vafþrúðnir, Daniel's theories suggest that one's opponent should be undone by incessant, ultimately unanswerable questions. At one point prior to the conclusion of the debate, Gylfi believes that he may have come up with such a question. Having received an unsatisfactory reply to a question about Þórr's exploits, he briefly appears triumphant: *Svá lízk mér sem þess hlutar mun ek yðr spurt hafa er engi er til færri at segja* (*Gylf* 36/32–33) 'It looks to me as though I must have asked you something that none of you is capable of telling me'. The Æsir manage to persuade him that they do possess the information that he requires on this occasion; but finally they must run out of answers.

To return to McTurk's idea that Gylfi tricks the Æsir, rather than vice versa, I propose that each party aims to trick the other. The Æsir's carefully prepared *sjónhverfingar* symbolise their intention of deceiving Gylfi, but his questions only cause them to reveal their folly; he tricks them into revealing their own self-delusion. Rather than glossing *Gylfaginning* as either the 'tricking of' or the 'tricking by' Gylfi, I might be inclined to render it more ambiguously as 'Gylfi's deluding', and see in it a possible secondary meaning: it could perhaps serve as a sort of kenning for 'pagan religion' in general.

Gylfaginning and the *Prologue* have recently quite often been viewed as complementary parts of an exercise in religious historiography: one which reflects Christian ideas about the origins and nature of paganism but stops short of offering a theological interpretation of the narratives contained in these parts of the *Edda* (Weber 1986; Clunies Ross 1992; Beck 2007). Anthony Faulkes (*Gylf*, xvii) suggests that Snorri's *Prologue* reveals him 'not only as a mythographer but also as a historian of religion', and that he 'had only a scholar's and an artist's interest in mythology; he was preserving it for antiquarian not religious reasons' (xxvii). In his 'advice to young poets', however, Snorri writes in his own voice that *eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heidin goð*. This advice is expressed as an imperative: Christian people must not believe in heathen gods. Its phraseology is emphatically hortatory, and would not look out

of place in a sermon. Even if Snorri is just paying lip-service to conventional piety, this phrase places an important condition upon the reader's response to the *Edda* as a whole. The traditional material that Snorri wishes to preserve can only be used and enjoyed by Christians under the fundamental condition that it must not be regarded as containing religious truths. While this attitude is not a particularly sophisticated piece of theological thinking, at the same time it is not neutral or unengaged with questions of belief.

Once we accept that the 'advice to young poets' is as integral to the *Edda* as the *Prologue*, and that it provides a key to the author's intentions for his work as a whole, it becomes necessary to take into account Snorri's views of paganism from a religious perspective that is both historicising and, importantly, instructive. Daniel of Winchester's particular brand of conversion theory casts a new light on the process by which Snorri guides his audiences towards a particular ideological position relative to their ancestors' religion. Daniel's suggestions to Boniface set out a programme by which pagans can be persuaded of the folly of their own beliefs and the superiority of Christianity through dialogue. When forced by subtle questioning to state their beliefs, the pagans will eventually come to realise the logical fallacies that underlie their cosmological notions for themselves: they will run out of answers. Gylfi, ingenuously playing the role of the Christian missionary even though he cannot himself be a Christian, achieves the same effect in his dialogue with the *Æsir*. The stories upon which these representatives of Scandinavian paganism build their religion are reduced by the end to mere *sögur*, just as Daniel stated that the missionaries should view such tales as *fabulae*. While the pagans to whom Gylfi passes on the *Æsir*'s stories seem to accept them uncritically, *Snorra Edda*'s audiences should see them for what they are.

The similarities between *Gylfaginning* and Daniel's theories probably do not arise on account of direct textual influence. My purpose in comparing *Gylfaginning* with Daniel's letter to Boniface is not to suggest that the latter was a source for the former: while the Bonifacian correspondence continued to be copied *en bloc* in continental Europe for several centuries after the saint's death (see *Briefe*, vi–xxvii; Orchard 2002, 17–18), there is no evidence that it was transmitted to Iceland. I moreover do not wish to revisit the longstanding controversy over Snorri's Latinity, or lack thereof. A comparison between Daniel's theories and Snorri's narratives, however, reveals a remarkable degree of continuity in attitudes towards paganism in Northern Europe.

The apparent congruence between the ideas of these two theorists, who worked in very different milieux, might be explained in two ways. First, Snorri's interest in the religious history of Scandinavia may have encompassed the processes by which the conversion to Christianity had been achieved. If he was aware of Christian conversion theory in any form—either directly or derived independently from a historian's conception of how conversion in Scandinavia had actually happened—it seems likely that he would have used it primarily as a historiographic tool: understanding conversion processes may help the scholar to understand the nature of paganism as well as the methods by which it was defeated.

Very few records of the theological background to the conversion of Scandinavia survive, unfortunately, but we know that English and German missionaries played an important role in the conversion of Norway, whence Iceland was in turn converted (Abrams 1994 and 1995; Berkeli 1971; Hallberg 1986). These missionaries would have brought with them their own theoretical perspectives on conversion, their own paradigms for success in their missions. It is possible that Daniel's model of conversion had been adopted into some such paradigm, either through missionaries' direct familiarity with this text or as part of a general inheritance of earlier intellectual approaches to missionary work within English and German ecclesiastical circles. Foreign missionaries, when they came to a new territory, had to adapt their methods to new circumstances; yet conversion was not haphazard. It proceeded along broadly similar lines, determined at least in part by the theological and pastoral paradigms established by earlier missionary theologians and conversion theorists and put into practice by earlier missionaries. It is possible that Icelandic Christianity retained traces of Daniel's attitudes towards paganism as late as the thirteenth century, as a result of this type of dissemination, but without better evidence of the nature of Christian teaching in Iceland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, it is difficult to establish with any precision the theological basis of conversion-era instruction of present or former pagans.

The second possibility is that *Snorra Edda's* attitudes towards pagan religion reflect contemporary concerns that Icelanders might be susceptible to apostasy; if they engaged and identified themselves too closely with the monuments of pagan culture that Snorri wished to preserve for antiquarian and aesthetic reasons they (and he) might run the risk of being taken for pagans, or even reverting to paganism. While we might accept that two centuries after its formal conversion Iceland was a fully Christianised country, the conversion of individuals and communities

might yet have been superficial rather than deep, and partial rather than total.

Although the conversion of groups and polities occurred for a number of reasons in the Middle Ages, within each national or communal conversion countless individual conversions were required (Morrison 1992, 7). The conversions of individuals, viewed from the perspective of the missionary, always had a single goal: what A. D. Nock (1933, 7) famously defined as ‘the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another’. Daniel’s advice to Boniface deals with one aspect of this concern of pastoral missionary theology: how to set the pagans on the course of turning away from their old modes of belief and ways of life. Iceland formally became Christian after an overnight change in policy at the Alþingi in 999 or 1000, but such a sudden peripety is often only the start of conversion. For the individual as for a society, conversion was in the medieval world ‘a long formative process, rather than a sudden cataclysmic change’ (Morrison 1992, 23). If Snorri meant Gylfi to stand as a symbol of Iceland’s progress away from paganism and towards Christianity, it may bespeak an awareness on the author’s part that this process was still ongoing.

This attitude seems to have been shared by other Scandinavian authors in the thirteenth century, who still found it necessary to preach Christianity at a rather elementary level. At the start of the period, the compilers of the Icelandic and Norwegian Homily Books still included in their collections *sermones ad populum* that addressed the most basic tenets of the Christian faith: the importance of learning the Paternoster and Creed, observing feast-days and proper behaviour in church (see for example *Gamla norsk homiliebook*, 35–38: item 3; *Homilubók*, 22–25: item 7 and 25–28: item 8). Around 1300, at about the same time as the earliest surviving manuscript of *Snorra Edda* (U) was produced, Haukr Erlendsson copied an earlier Old Norse translation of Ælfric’s homily *De falsis diis* (Hauksbók, 156–64; see Taylor 1969), a text that uses euhemerism to explain the delusion of pagan religion and to persuade its audience to reject the old gods (see Meaney 1984). *De falsis diis* in turn derives from Martin of Braga’s sixth-century *De correctione rusticorum*, which makes use of both euhemerism and demonology as the theoretical underpinnings of its diatribe against idolatry.⁵ Ælfric felt

⁵ Ælfric does not elaborate upon the demonological aspect of Martin’s treatise in his version, leading some critics to suggest that he did not favour demonology as an explanation of the origins of paganism (Johnson 1995).

a need to appropriate Martin's theories for the edification and instruction of eleventh-century Englishmen and women, even though Christianity had been established in England for several centuries.

The circulation of the Norse *De falsis diis* in the thirteenth century may also suggest that there was a continuing anxiety about the possibility of pagan recidivism in Norway and Iceland, or else that ecclesiasts were simply aware that the conversion of the northern countries was not yet complete. Ideas deriving ultimately from writings by Martin, a successful converter of pagans in Portugal seven centuries earlier, still had relevance in the broad cultural milieu that produced *Snorra Edda*. Holtsmark (1964, 10–12) compared Snorri's euhemerism to that which underpins the Hauksbók homily, and found several similarities between the two, although she was not able to claim that Snorri knew the homily directly. *Snorra Edda* is not a theological treatise, but the religious attitudes that it displays—focusing on the delusional, baseless nature of idolatry, its euhemeristic origins and its misunderstanding of the origins of the world and the causes of natural phenomena—are aligned with both influential examples of early medieval conversion theory and with derivative texts that continued to circulate long after national conversions had been accomplished. Only in Daniel of Winchester's letter and *Snorra Edda*, however, do we find these ideas couched in the form of a knowledge contest between a Christian missionary (or his surrogate) and a pagan.

By reading Gylfi as a prototype Christian and *Gylfaginning* as a dialogue that aims to trick the representatives of paganism into revealing the delusions and absurdities at the heart of their religion, we therefore gain a new perspective on *Snorra Edda* as a work which potentially bears upon religious life in the thirteenth century, even as it examines paganism as primarily a historical phenomenon. It aims to preserve and exhibit traditional pagan culture, primarily for aesthetic reasons and in the context of its overriding interest in poetics (Marold 1998, 178). At the same time, it subtly demonstrates the falsehoods that lie at the heart of pagan religion. The *Prologue* explains how paganism came about as the result of a series of misunderstandings of the world, involuntary or wilful. The 'advice to young poets' in *Skáldskaparmál* indicates that the aesthetic value of pre-Christian Scandinavian culture should not be confused with religious truth; to do so would be to fall prey to another delusion. Meanwhile, *Gylfaginning* shows these delusions for what they are by establishing an entire pagan mythology, only to demonstrate through its narrative strategies that this has no foundation: it vanishes

when held up to the light of Gylfi's questions. Like Daniel's model dialogue, *Gylfaginning* is a Christian knowledge contest in which there can be only one winner.

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MANSLAUGHTER AND MISOGYNY:
WOMEN AND REVENGE IN *STURLUNGA SAGA*

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Sweet is revenge, especially to women.
George Gordon, Lord Byron,
Don Juan Canto I, cxxiv (1819–24)

Introduction

ONE OF THE MOST DISCUSSED FEMALE STEREOTYPES in Old Norse–Icelandic literature is that of the inciter, or *Hetzerin*; indeed, the incitement by a woman of a male relative to take vengeance on her behalf is one of the more familiar saga *topoi*.¹ As William Ian Miller emphasises, a ‘bloody token’ is an important factor in many incitements, and this can take the form of a murder weapon, a bloody cloak or even a decapitated head.² The few women in the *Íslendingasögur* who attempt to take active revenge are usually unsuccessful and the actual physical act of vengeance is generally left to the female inciter’s male relatives.³

In *Old Norse Images of Women*, Jenny Jochens argues that the reason saga women so often feature as inciters of revenge ordinarily carried out by men is that inciting women are scapegoats, designed to exonerate men from blame for the trouble their killings cause (Jochens 1996, 211). It is certainly true that much blame for killings is apportioned to women, implicitly by the very nature of the *topos*, and explicitly by male characters within the texts.

¹ The classic study of women in the sagas is Heller 1958; the third chapter deals with the inciting female (*die Hetzerin*). Heller counts 51 of these female goaders in the *Íslendingasögur* at a conservative estimate. More recent studies are cited in the discussion and footnotes below.

² Miller 1983 and 1990, 210–15. For an important consideration of the methods and contexts of such whetting episodes, see Clover 1986; see also the discussion in Clark 2005b.

³ In chapter 37 of *Gísla saga Súrssonar* Þórdís attempts to avenge her brother by killing Eyjólfur but succeeds only in wounding him in the thigh. The actions of the notoriously successful female killer Freydís Eiríksdóttir in *Grænlendinga saga* chapter 8 are so monstrous that the narrator is uncharacteristically moved to make an adverse comment upon her.

The clearest example of explicit blame is found in chapter 116 of *Njáls saga*, after Hildigunnr flings the bloody cloak over Flósi and charges him solemnly with revenge. Flósi retorts:

Þú ert it mesta forað ok vildir, at vér tækim þat upp, er qllum oss gegnir verst, ok eru kold kvenna ráð.⁴

You are the greatest monster, and would have us take up the course which will be worst for all of us, and ‘cold are women’s counsels’.

Jochens’s argument therefore has a certain amount of support, and this article does not seek further to elucidate the role of vengeful women in the *Íslendingasögur*. However, in two further pieces Jochens seeks to contrast this literary stereotype with what she sees as the historical reality of women’s roles in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation. This compilation, created around 1300, collects together a number of sagas composed during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries about the events of those centuries, hence the common designation of them as *samtíðarsögur* ‘contemporary sagas’. It is with the depictions of women in this compilation that I wish to engage here, since careful analysis presents a challenge to Jochens’s approach.

The first piece by Jochens is an article entitled ‘The Medieval Icelandic Heroine: Fact or Fiction?’ (although in fact the argument is somewhat more nuanced than the stark binary of the subtitle would suggest). The first part of the article analyses ‘the nature and extent of power exercised by the heroines found in the family sagas’, and this is complemented by a second section which compares this picture ‘with evidence drawn from the law codes, the contemporary sagas, and the meager charter material’ in order to ‘determine whether the heroines should be taken at face value or whether they are irredeemably fictitious’ (Jochens 1989, 101), finding ‘a clear discrepancy’ between the Family Sagas and the ‘legal and historical material’ (120). Jochens recognises that laws are frequently ‘prescriptive rather than descriptive’ (116), and thus, although she concedes that the ‘historical material’ may contain ‘some distortion’, she relies primarily on *Sturlunga saga* for her picture of the historical reality of medieval Icelandic women’s experience, deeming them ‘at least more coherent and most likely more reliable than the literary sagas’ (120). She concludes concerning the female inciter (125):

⁴Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 291–92. On male reluctance to seek revenge, see Jochens 1996, 195–98, and specifically on this passage, see Clover 1986, 141–46 and 175–79.

The fact that we cannot find her equivalent in the contemporary *Sturlunga saga* should inhibit our acceptance of her historical existence. The domineering Icelandic heroine of the family sagas bears little resemblance to female existence and, *hélas*, should be consigned to the realm of male fiction.

Leaving aside the issue of Jochens's apparent desire to find evidence of 'domineering women' in history, she is here effectively setting up a binary distinction between fiction and history. She recognises that legal material cannot quite be placed on the 'historical' side because of its prescriptive character, although she does align it with the historical material, but seems to see historical material generally, and *Sturlunga saga* specifically, as a generally straightforward reflection of social reality.

Jochens sets up a similar contrast in another article on the female inciter in the *konungasögur*, where she asks if this figure reflects 'a social reality, if not of pagan times, perhaps of the authors' contemporary situation' (Jochens 1987, 100). In the first two sections of the article, Jochens analyses the depictions of inciting females in the Kings' Sagas and discusses Snorri's possible literary motivation for depicting women in this way in *Heimskringla*, arguing in the third section that he modelled the inciting women on Oddr Snorrason's depiction of Sigríðr stórráða in his saga of Óláfr Tryggvason (see esp. 115), and, in the fourth section, that the ultimate 'prototype of all evil and revenging women' is to be found in Queen Gunnhildr (118). In the final section, Jochens makes a brief connection between paganism and the inciting woman in the Family Sagas, before concluding in this way (119):

The female inciters in the Kings' sagas and especially in the Family sagas are unique by the almost frightening success of their goading. That the social reality was different can be seen from *Sturlunga saga* where female goading behavior is far less frequent and almost without success.

Again, then, Jochens sets *Sturlunga saga* up as the primary source of information on the social reality of women's situation and behaviour, opposing this to the 'male fictions' of the Family and Kings' Sagas.

As this article will show, however, a more detailed analysis of some of the female characters of the *Sturlunga saga* compilation does not in fact support Jochens's assumption. There are indeed several significant and proactive women in the work, and these characters are based on historical figures.⁵ Nevertheless, it will be seen that the episodes in which they

⁵ Jochens does not actually analyse the female figures in any detail. In her article on the Family Sagas she comments specifically on marriage and divorce practices (1989, 112–13) and the lack of prominence of women and particularly inciting women (117–19). However, the only woman in *Sturlunga saga* of whom

appear (and in which they are often scapegoated) bear clear marks of significant shaping for literary purposes, and thus cannot be taken as a straightforward indication of social reality in the way that Jochens proposes. It has, of course, long been recognised by historians that all narrative, including historical narrative, is 'shaped'; only the barest annalistic pieces could lay any claim to be considered as 'pure' history, and even then what incidents have been selected and what have been ignored needs careful consideration.⁶ This article does not seek simply to separate out elements of 'fact' and 'fiction' in *Sturlunga saga*; rather, it seeks to explore certain literary themes and motifs in the compilation in order to investigate the place of women in the texts. It will be argued that women play a significant role in the compilation's exploration of vengeance and violence in the Sturlung Age, and that literary analysis of 'historical' Norse texts can be as rewarding as literary analysis of the Family and Kings' Sagas. Unlike the articles by Jochens discussed above, this article does not search for the social reality of medieval Icelandic women, but it does seek to elucidate further the significance of the female inciter in the Contemporary Sagas, and thus the representation of women by male authors in medieval Icelandic texts.

It must be said that these texts have not generally received sustained critical attention from a literary perspective, although they afford much useful and interesting material to the literary critic.⁷ A notable exception to this trend, however, is Stephen Tranter's monograph, *Sturlunga Saga: The Role of the Creative Compiler*. Tranter characterises the message of the prefatory sagas of the compilation as follows (Tranter 1987, 221):

she gives a (relatively) detailed account is Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir, wife of Hálfðan and sister of Þórðr kakali, who unsuccessfully urges her husband to aid her brother's revenge attempt (118). Other women are mentioned only briefly, such as a woman who lets two killers escape, to her husband's annoyance, and a wife whose attempt to cool her husband's temper is rebuffed (119).

⁶ Hayden White is one of the better known writers on this subject. However, he has received a certain amount of criticism from historians, many of whom claim that he states what has long been their understanding of history, or who deem his political views to have adversely affected his academic writing. See initially Jenkins 2003; White 1986.

⁷ Compare Úlfar Bragason's comment to the same effect (2007, 428), in a survey giving further details on the compilation's content and compilation, and a summary of other literary approaches, which have mostly concerned narrative method and the relation of the Contemporary and Family Sagas (Úlfar Bragason 2007); see also Simpson 1961.

The less prepared the body of good men within the land are, whether as individuals or through social institutions, to act as mediators, the longer, the more violent, and less reconcilable will be the conflicts through which the land is plagued.

He continues:

The remainder of the compilation is therefore to be read as a demonstration of the evils that came upon the land as a result of men's failure to secure reconciliation . . . [It is] a plea to the men of the compiler's own age to learn from the Age of the Sturlungs and to settle their differences before they fall into further chaos.⁸

Although Tranter's characterisation of *Sturlunga saga* is persuasive, he repeatedly speaks about the behaviour of men within the compilation and men's reception of the work. The present article is more limited in scope than Tranter's work, but seeks to investigate further the place of women in the masculine dynamic he delineates along the lines outlined above: to evaluate the writers' attitudes to women and their perception of the role of women in the conflicts of the Sturlung Age.

Men vs Women: Sturla and Þorbjörg in *Sturlu saga*

Þorbjörg, the wife of Páll Sölvason in *Sturlu saga*, figures in that text as an incompetent mutilator of her husband's adversary, the formidable Sturla Þórðarson. Although Þorbjörg certainly existed, her function in the passage examined here indicates that the events recounted have been described in a way which betrays the author's ideological biases.⁹

The incident is related in chapter 31 of the saga, and occurs in the context of a *sáttarfundr* 'meeting of reconciliation' between the priest Páll and Böðvarr Þórðarson and his kinsman, Sturla. The reader is told (*Sturlunga saga*, I 109):

Þorbjörg, kona Páls, var grimmúðig í skapi ok líkaði stórilla þóf þetta. Hon hljóp fram milli manna ok hafði kníf í hendi ok lagði til Sturlu ok stefndi í

⁸ Tranter's analysis of *Sturlunga saga* is comparable to my argument about the purpose of the compiler of the *Poetic Edda*, for which see Clark 2008. Úlfar Bragason agrees with Tranter to a certain extent, but argues that the compilation reflects 'the Icelandic ruling class's attempt to understand its new situation after 1262, when Iceland became a part of the Norwegian kingdom, and to underscore its right to power based on origin and wealth' (Úlfar Bragason 2000, 472).

⁹ The events described take place in 1148–83, and the saga was probably written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century (Úlfar Bragason 2007, 432).

augat ok mælti þetta við: ‘Hví skal ek eigi gera þik þeim líkastan, er þú vill líkastr vera,—en þar er Óðinn?’ Ok í því var hon tekin. Ok stöðvaðist lagit ok kom í kinnina, ok varð þat mikit sár.

Þorbjörg, the wife of Páll, was of a ferocious disposition and heartily disliked this endless struggle. She ran forward between the men with a knife in her hand and thrust it at Sturla, aiming at his eye, saying this: ‘Why shouldn’t I make you just like the one you wish to be most like—and that is Óðinn?’ But she was seized immediately. And the thrust came to a stop and had entered his cheek, and it was a serious wound.

Böðvarr and Sturla’s men are furious and want to fight, but Sturla prevents this, saying (109–10):

‘Setist menn niðr, ok tölum um sættina, ok þurfu menn eigi hér at lýsa vanstilli fyrir þessa sök, því at konur kunnu með ýmsu móti at leita eftir ástum. . .’ Hann hafði höndina at andlitinu ok dreifði blóðinu á kinnina ok mælti: ‘Þess er mest ván, at vit Páll munim sættast á okkur mál. . .’

‘Let people / men sit down and we will talk about reconciliation—and there is no need for people / men here to display a lack of self-control in this case, because women know how to seek for love in various ways. . .’ He had his hand to his face, and the blood was dripping down his cheek, and he said: ‘It is most to be hoped that Páll and I will be reconciled in our dispute. . .’

Rather than having this new case discussed immediately, Sturla has that between Páll and Böðvarr reopened; the two men are reconciled, *ok lét Páll þá gangast þá hluti, at áðr höfðu í millum staðit* ‘and then Páll let those things go which had stood between them before’ (110).

It is at once evident that Sturla has manipulated the situation by his display of self-control and moderation, so as to bring his kinsman’s case to a successful conclusion. Impressed by his forbearance over Þorbjörg’s attack, his opponents are better disposed toward him than before. However, it becomes apparent just how calculating Sturla is when we see that his conduct has caused Páll’s friends to urge him to give Sturla self-judgement in the matter. Although Páll is at first unwilling he is persuaded, and Sturla accepts these terms, promising to drop the case. In the following chapter, however, Sturla instead pronounces a decision which awards him a huge amount of compensation, prompting Páll to accuse him of *ósómi* ‘dishonour’, and the narrator comments: *þótti öllum mönnum mikil undr, er honum kom í hug at kveða slíkt upp* ‘it seemed to everyone extraordinary that it came into his mind to call for such a thing’ (111).

It seems that in this episode the saga author is acknowledging Sturla’s flaws, emphasising by the comment on people’s perceptions of the event

how manipulative and scheming Sturla has been: pretending to have no ill-will to Páll in order to score off him the more heavily later.¹⁰ His meanness is again underlined at the end of the saga, where he takes to his bed on learning of Þorbjörg's death. When people say that they would not have expected him to be upset by her demise, he explains the real reason for his apparent sorrow (114):

Ek virði svá sem aldri væri saklaust við sonu Páls ok Þorbjargar, meðan hon lifði. En nú samir eigi vel at veita þeim ágang, er hon er önduð.

I considered that I'd never be without due cause against the sons of Páll and Þorbjörg, while she was alive. But it's not very becoming to get at them now she's dead.

Since this is the last thing the reader is told about Sturla before his death, his reaction gives a rather sour and petty cast to his character, and evinces the true nature of his declaration in chapter 31 that *lengi hefir vinfengi okkart Þorbjargar verit mikit* 'there has long been great friendship between Þorbjörg and me' (110). Sturla's grudges are long harboured and surface appearances can conceal a lasting enmity.

Nevertheless, looking more closely at the passage, one can argue that the entire episode works at the expense of women. First of all, it is Þorbjörg's violent temperament (she is *grimmúðig í skapi* 'of a ferocious disposition') that contrasts with Sturla's cool, measured equanimity in not becoming enraged at a grave wound (*mikit sár*) that nearly cost him his eyesight, allowing him to speak calmly whilst blood pours down his cheek. His patronising comment that *konur kunnu með ýmsu móti at leita eftir ástum* 'women know various ways of seeking for love' points up the contrast in their behaviour: he presents himself as a calm and moderate man, making allowances for a violent and uncontrolled woman. The comment also removes Þorbjörg's autonomy, if we understand it to imply that she is doing this in order to gain or keep her husband's love, whilst simultaneously implying by its generalising quality that all women are similarly motivated by their need for male affection but confusedly choose inappropriate ways of gaining it (*með ýmsu móti*). Additionally, the author has Sturla repeat the word *menn* ('*Setist menn niðr. . . þurfu menn eigi . . .*'), which emphasises the fact that gender is at issue in this speech. *Maðr* does of course often mean 'person' without necessarily specifying the gender of the person. However, it can also be used in

¹⁰ This may also be reflected in Þorbjörg's comparison of him with Óðinn, who often seems a manipulative or obsessively controlling figure, and who regularly resorts to deceit to get his own way.

opposition to *kona*,¹¹ and thus the repetition of the term in the plural here, followed by the use of the specific term *kona*, also in the plural, creates an implicit contrast between the two. The ambiguity of the term *maðr*, then, suggests that although rational behaviour—sitting down calmly and discussing disputes—is what should be expected of people in general, it is in fact only to be expected from men and not from women, who are ruled by their emotions.

It is true that Sturla is creating a scene for his own ends and that his behaviour is criticised here. However, the way that the episode is framed indicates that the author perhaps concurs in blaming the undesirable outcome on Þorbjörg and her womanly lack of self-control. It is her inappropriate intervention that provides the opportunity for Sturla's injustice, first allowing him and Böðvarr to get their own way in the initial case, and then permitting his unfair self-judgement in the second case. The passage may thus suggest that other women, too, like Þorbjörg, may act on violent impulse, unable to bear the 'endless struggle' (*bóf*) of men's controlled, rational litigation.¹² If so, this should not come as a surprise, given the prevalence and longevity of medieval misogynistic constructions of women as corporeal, irrational entities in opposition to men who represent rationality and the intellect (stereotypes which still have influence even today). These models are, of course, seen most clearly in the writings of the Church Fathers such as Augustine, and are conveniently summarised by Caroline Walker Bynum in her comment that

*Male and female were contrasted and asymmetrically valued as intellect/body, active/passive, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, self-control/lust, judgment/mercy and order/disorder.*¹³

It is perhaps such clerical thinking that lies behind the framing of this passage in *Sturlu saga*, the author by his description of the results of Þorbjörg's behaviour in effect corroborating Sturla's analysis of her womanly nature, even if he himself is not viewed positively either. He may not live up to his words, but their message still stands.

The rest of this article explores some other episodes where women seem to be viewed negatively in the other texts in the *Sturlunga*

¹¹ See Zoëga 1926, s.v. *maðr* sense 3.

¹² Þorbjörg's failure to blind Sturla, instead only wounding his cheek, is comparable to Auðr's failure to kill Þorkr in chapter 37 of *Gísla saga*, and similarly presents women as ineffective though perhaps valiant adversaries.

¹³ Bynum 1992, 151. She goes on to complicate this picture by showing how these binaries are often in fact subverted in medieval texts.

saga compilation, and some episodes which seem to run counter to this pattern, in order to gain a fuller picture of how women feature in the compilation.

Female Scapegoats in *Guðmunds saga dýra* and *Íslendinga saga*

First to be considered are two women in *Guðmunds saga dýra*, both called Guðrún. The first, Guðrún Þórðardóttir, has trouble getting on with her second husband, Hrafn Brandsson, after an ominous marriage night when she runs away from the marital bed (chapter 5). After some temporary respite at her previous father-in-law's, Guðrún returns to Hrafn's house, where she is visited by a further male suitor, Hákon Þórðarson, until she feels she has to discourage these visits whilst Hrafn is still alive, saying *en ger sem þér sýnist síðan* 'but do as you think best after that' (p. 170). Soon after, Hákon attempts to kill Hrafn, wounding his chest with a spear. When Hrafn picks up an axe and gets to his feet, we are told that *Guðrún tók til hans, ok bað hann eigi fram ganga* 'Guðrún grabbed him and begged him not to go forward' (i.e. 'attack'). Hrafn says that he (i.e. Hrafn) would not have got far anyway and she asks *hvé mjök hann væri sárr* 'how badly he was hurt'. Although his reply plays down the seriousness of his wounds in the laconic manner typical of a saga hero, Hrafn dies three nights later. The clear implication is that Guðrún is complicit in her husband's slaying and that she wishes to get him out of the way so as to be free to marry Hákon, and this is confirmed in the following chapter where Guðmundr tries to settle the case. We are first told that

Þórðr kvaðst eigi nenna at bæta Hrafn fé, nema Guðrún bætti at helmingi. Þórðr kvað hana ráðbana Hrafns. En Guðrún vildi þat eigi ofrast láta. (171)

Þórðr declared that he would not pay compensation for Hrafn unless Guðrún paid half; he said she was the contriver of Hrafn's death. Guðrún didn't want to let that become known.¹⁴

Moreover, the chapter ends by telling us of Hákon's marriage to Guðrún, and we are informed that he *var við hana harðr ok kvað sér eigi skyldu þat verða, at hennar menn stæði yfir höfuðsvörðum hans* 'was severe with her, and said that it must never happen to him that her men [lovers?] should have him [lit. his scalp] in their power' (171). Guðrún features

¹⁴ An editorial note to *ofrast* suggests the alternative: 'But Guðrún was not willing to admit to that', which would provide further support for my argument. Thanks to Alison Finlay for alerting me to this.

here as the real scapegoat for Hákon's actions, and as an unfaithful and even callous wife to Hrafn.

The second Guðrún, daughter of Önundr, features in a traditional inciting scene, serving her three brothers singed sheep's heads and feet to force them to avenge the burning to death of their father (ch. 17, p. 195). Her brother Vigfúss responds that *Eigi er þat, at þú minnir oss eigi á, hvat vér eigum, þar er sviðin eru* 'It's not that you haven't reminded us about what we must do, as far as the singed heads are concerned',¹⁵ and vengeance duly comes. However, the blame for the series of killings which follow can ultimately be attributed to Guðrún, and one may even see an allusion to the Eddaic archetype of vengeful femininity, Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, in the first name that these two women share.¹⁶

A further scene, which may initially seem innocuous, but where (as in *Guðmunds saga dýra*) the blame for men's violent actions is ultimately attributed to women, can be found in *Íslendinga saga*, chapter 105, where two parties prepare for a fight during Lent.¹⁷ The author informs us that the quarrel occurred because

Skofa hvarf skyrt ok fannst á Játvarði Guðlaugssyni, —var þat þá af gert, at konur hefði gleymt í þvætti. Aðrir váru í skála, en aðrir í stofu. Órækja átti hlut at ok sætti þá í því sinni, ok varð þó engi alvara með þeim. (381)

Skofti's shirt disappeared and was found on Játvarðr Guðlaugsson—it happened because the women had forgotten it in the wash. Some people were in the hall, and others in the sitting-room. Órækja had a part in it and reconciled them this time, and yet they did not take the reconciliation seriously.

Part of the fault here lies with the way men have allowed a trivial incident to escalate into a major conflict, and thus the episode evidently reflects poorly on the moderation of the men involved. However, the ultimate blame remains with the women who have not performed their household duties adequately: 'the women had forgotten it in the wash'. The correct role for men here is to respond with moderation to

¹⁵ R. George Thomas translates: 'No one can deny that you have reminded us what we have suffered through singed flesh' (McGrew and Thomas 1970–74, II 187)—Önundr had been burned to death.

¹⁶ Guðrún herself appears in a vision to Jóreiðr in chapter 190 of *Íslendinga saga*, where she embodies the past and heroic vengeance. On this episode, see Quinn 1987, at 60 and 63; also Jochens 1996, 28–29, 205, 215, and Jochens 1995, 14–16, 16, 170.

¹⁷ The saga was written by Sturla Þórðarson in the mid- to late-thirteenth century and covers the period between approximately 1183 and 1264 (Úlfar Bragason 2007, 432).

provocation, and the correct role for women is to attend carefully to their domestic responsibilities. This is perhaps a small detail, but its significance is supported by the function of women more generally in this saga.

One of the recurrent themes of *Íslendinga saga* is the appearance in a vision or dream of a woman who is often large and evil-looking or ill-smelling, and who announces war, often in verse, as for instance in both chapter 65 and chapter 122. It must be said that it is not just women who appear in visions portending or indeed enacting violent death, as witnessed by the similar male figures in chapters 122 and 131. Indeed, in chapter 136 there is a whole series of ominous dreams and visions of fighting and slaughter. Thus both men and women feature in these visions in *Íslendinga saga* to emphasise and render vivid the narrative's depiction of contemporary Iceland as a dangerous and increasingly lawless and violent place.¹⁸ However, although men do sometimes appear in this role, the majority of these ominous apparitions are female, and, if one looks in detail at two further visions of women speaking verses in this chapter, one sees that these women are more than simply harbingers of doom: they often actually embody or symbolise enmity and violent strife.

The first woman appears to a man called Snæbjörn, and is *mikil ok þrýstilig* and *í dökkbláum kyrtli* 'large and robust . . . in a dark-blue tunic' (424–25), the colour of her tunic an ominous sign in itself for experienced saga readers. She speaks a verse, the first half of which reads (425):

Gríðr munk gumnum heðra,
—grand þróask margt í landi—,
sótt munk yðr, þvít ættak
efni margs at hefna.

Gríðr [a giantess; here, a harmer, destruction] will I be to men here—injury increases greatly in the land—sickness will I be for you, for I have had reason to avenge many things.¹⁹

¹⁸ Compare Tranter 1987. On the function and nature of the verses, see Quinn 1987, 54, 65 and 70.

¹⁹ Skaldic verses have been translated as literally as possible, since in order to produce an idiomatic translation the exact meaning would have to be sacrificed. The translations of saga prose have been rendered more idiomatically, and the characteristic switch between present and past tenses has been removed.

The saga author thus has the apparition make explicit her personification of death and *sótt* ‘sickness’ to men, driven by vengeance (*hefna*).²⁰ Then in a second verse she reveals (425):

Eisandi ferk unda
undrsamliga funda,
líðk of hól ok hæðir
hart sem fugl inn svartí.
Kemk í dal, þars dyljumk,
dánarakrs til vánar,
harmþrungin fórk hingat
Heljar ask at velja,
Heljar ask ferk velja.

Rushing wondrously, I go off to wound-meetings (i.e. battles); I travel fast over hill and heights, like the black bird. I come, as expected, into a dale of the land of death where I lie hidden; pressed with grief I came here to choose the dish of Hel (i.e. hunger)—I go to choose the dish of Hel.

The woman’s flight over *hól ok hæðir*, along with her association with ravens (*fugl inn svartí*), the field of the dead (*dánarakr*) and Hel, seems to identify her with the valkyries and certainly makes her an embodiment of male death in battle.

The second woman speaks to a priest called Þorgeirr in a dream, saying (427–28):

Líðk of heim ór heimi
heims myrkrum frá þeima,
hörð munu gjöld of gjalda
grimmleiks stafir rimmu.
Fásk munu sár af sárum,
svás heldr, þars menn felldusk,
koma mun hörð fyr harða
hríð ok skammt at bíða.

I pass over the world out of the world from the darkness of this world—the staves of tumult (i.e. men) will pay a hard payment for their grimness. From wounds, wounds will be produced, thus it is rather, where men felled each other. A hard storm (i.e. battle) will come before [another] hard one, and not long to wait.

²⁰ The use of a giantess-term also connotes antipathy to men, although the choice of Gríðr is ambiguous. The name appears in *Skáldskaparmál* in kennings for axe and wolf in the sense ‘troll-wife’ (verses 241 and 245), and as part of a valkyrie name in a *pula* (v. 449), but she is also known for helping Þórr against Geirríðr and as the mother of Óðinn’s son Viðarr (ch. 18; v. 81). (See Faulkes 1998.)

Here, the female apparition seems to personify the evil that goes throughout the world and inspires the endless chain of violence (*sár af sárum*), which men have perpetrated (*menn felldusk*) despite the cost to themselves; she warns of a succession of hard battles. Although the self-destructive nature of men's behaviour is emphasised by the *figura etymologica* on *hörð* / *harða* and *gjöld* / *gjalda*, read in conjunction with the previous verse, the use of the female figure seems to make her the overseer of this behaviour.

It can be argued, then, that women in this narrative represent the impetus and take much of the blame for male violence. In Kristevan terms, the female apparitions might even be seen as representing abject woman, rendered monstrous by their ugly appearance or unnatural size and strength; in their roles as those who are present at, or perceive, or predict human conflict, they seem to constitute female embodiments of vengeful strife.²¹

One might set against this pattern the horrifying burning later in the saga, in chapters 172–74, where Gizurr's wife Gróa and his son Ísleifr are killed, and where at first glance men might seem culpable. The narrator comments on this burning:

Þessi tíðindi spurðust brátt, ok þótti öllum vitrum mönnum þessi tíðindi einhver mest hafa orðit hér á Íslandi, sem guð fyrirgefi þeim, er gerðu, með sinni mikilli miskunn ok mildi. (ch. 174, p. 493)

These events were quickly heard of, and these events seemed to all wise men some of the greatest to have occurred here in Iceland, for which may God forgive those who perpetrated them, in his great mercy and grace.

This divine invocation underlines the gravity of the deed and the horror it aroused, but the author does not stop there: he enables the audience to feel the situation by creating empathy with Gizurr. The remains of Gróa and Ísleifr are brought out to him, and he identifies them to Páll: *Ok fann Páll, at hann leit frá, ok stökk ór andlitinu sem haglkorn væri* 'And Páll found that Gizurr looked away, and [tears] sprang from his face as if they were hailstones' (494). This motif of hard tears has parallels in the Family Saga corpus and lends an epic grandeur to the scene.²² One could therefore

²¹ The male apparitions are not generally distinguished in this way: compare the man in chapter 122 who is only described as big, with the woman who is also evil-looking and carries a bloody cloth with which she decapitates men (pp. 307–08), although there are some exceptions, such as the ugly male figures in chapters 131 and 136.

²² The motif appears in *Gísli saga* ch. 14, *Njála* ch. 142 and *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 7 (where the tears become those of vengeful laughter).

see the saga author as blaming men for this awful revenge, crowning the pathos with a final emphasis on the surviving daughter-in-law Ingibjörg, who moves to stay with a kinswoman after the burning: *Var hon mjök þrekuð, barn at aldri* 'She was greatly worn, [although] a child in years' (494).

Nevertheless, elsewhere it can be seen that the blame even for violence which harms women is laid at their door, if we look back to one of the few inciting scenes in the saga. In chapter 168, Eyjólfur Þorsteinsson asks Vígdís Gísladóttir *í gamni* 'in fun':

'Hvat myndi honum Gizuri til ganga, er hann vildi eigi byggð þína í Skagafirði?'

Vígdís varð fá um.

Þá svarar Þuríður, dóttir hennar: 'Því at Gizuri,' segir hon, 'þótti hver herkerling líkligri til at hefna föður míns, Sturlu, en þú. Sér hann þat, at þér er litr einn gefin.' Eyjólfur svarar engu ok var rauður sem dreyri. (481)

'What reason could Gizurr have had for not wanting your dwelling in Skagafjörður?' Vígdís was reserved about this. Then Þuríður, her daughter, answered: 'Because any and every old woman seemed to Gizurr more likely to avenge my father, Sturla, than you. He sees that all you have been granted is your appearance.' Eyjólfur did not answer and was red as blood.

By chapter 170, the audience learns that Eyjólfur and Hrani have planned to attack and kill Gizurr and his son. Thus the saga author implicitly gives a woman, in her function as the inciter of this revenge, the ultimate blame for the terrible death of Gizurr's wife and son, and the devastation of his young daughter-in-law, old before her time. *Íslendinga saga*, then, employs the *topoi* of predominantly female supernatural apparitions and of the female inciter in a way which often leaves women as the ultimate scapegoat for the vengeful violence of the period. There are, of course, several violent incidents between men which do not involve or foreground women, but it nonetheless seems significant that crucial conflicts can often be traced back to female causes.²³

Women as Anti-Incitors in *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða* and *Svínfellinga saga*

The apparent misogyny of *Íslendinga saga* is not to be found uniformly in the other texts in the *Sturlunga* compilation, however. In *Þorgils saga ok Haflíða*, for instance, women act to prevent violent revenge on

²³ Additionally, Guðbjörg's violent response (along with two young boys) to Einarr's attempt to claim her property in chapter 2 leads to major conflict, as does Jóreiður's refusal to marry so as not to deprive her daughter of her property in chapter 57.

two occasions. In chapter 5, Óláfr has given Már a skin-deep wound for responding rudely to his polite request for compensation for having seized Óláfr's possessions. The reader is told (Brown 1952, 7):

Gengr Óláfr út, en [Már] vill hlaupa eptir honum. Þorsteinn hleypr upp ok heldr Má[vi] ok þægir honum í bekkinn. Már verðr ákafliga óðr við ok lézk Þorsteini vilja slíkan kost, ef hann bannaði honum at hefna sín. En Þorsteinn gaf engan gaum at orðum hans. Þá eggjaði Már son[u] Hneitis út at ganga ok hefna sín. En sveinarnir hlupu út, en móð[i]r þeira eptir þeim ok bað, at þeir hlupi eigi í þetta vandræði. Óláfr ferr nú leiðar sinnar. En þær konur bundu sár Más. Hann þiggr þat illa. Ok litlu síðar spréttu upp Már ok at honum Þorsteini ok vegr hann.

Óláfr went out, and Már wanted to run after him. Þorsteinn jumped up and held Már back and shoved him onto the bench. Már became fiercely enraged at this and declared he would give Þorsteinn the same terms if he forbade him from avenging himself. But Þorsteinn gave no heed to his words. Then Már egged on Hneitir's sons to go out and avenge him. And the boys ran out, but their mother [went] after them and told them not to rush into this difficulty. Óláfr now went his way. But the women bound Már's wound. He received this badly. And a little later Már sprang up and at Þorsteinn and slew him.

Although Þorsteinn is the focus for the episode, first ignoring Már's threats, and then giving his life for his refusal to countenance unjust revenge, the nameless mother of Hneitir's sons also contributes to peace by persuading them not to involve themselves in Már's evil. She is presumably also one of the women who binds up Már's wound, perhaps an implied attempt (although an unsuccessful one) to pacify him and prevent further action.²⁵

The second situation has a happier result for all but Már, and occurs in chapter 9, when he and his men are intending to ride after Óláfr over boggy moors (13):

Í því kemr heiman af Staðarhóli fjöldi kvenna, gyrðar í brækr ok höfðu sverð í hendi. Þeir Már fóru þá af baki ok ætluðu at henda Óláf á hlaupi, er hestunum mátti eigi við koma. Ok þá er kómu heiman at konurnar, snúa þeir undan ok vildu til hesta sinna ok náðu eigi, komask á hlaupi undan ok áttu fótum fjör at launa.

At that moment a crowd of women came from the house at Staðarhóll, girded in breeches and they had swords in their hands. Már and his men then

²⁴ This saga is cited from the edition by Ursula Dronke (Brown 1952). It describes the conflict of the eponymous chieftains in 1117–21 and has been dated variously to the late twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century (Brown 1952, x–xxix).

²⁵ We may compare Hafliði's wife Rannveig, who reproaches her husband for carrying a weapon in chapter 16, and who is designated *vitr kona* 'a wise woman' by the narrator (25) (and, indeed, Hafliði himself in chapter 18, p. 26).

dismounted and intended to catch Óláfr by running, since the horses could not do it. And when the women came upon them from the house, they drew back and wanted to [go] to their horses and did not reach them—they got away by running and had to ‘make the heels save the head’.

Here again women prevent violent action, albeit by impersonating men. The pacific activity of women in this particular saga may be a consequence of its late date, since it may have been composed a century after the relatively early events it describes. Certainly Sverrir Jakobsson has argued that the rhetoric of arbitration in the saga is related to the *Pax Dei* movement, which became influential in Iceland from the late twelfth century.²⁶ Moreover, the cross-dressing activity of the Staðarhóll women also sets the saga apart from its companions and reminds one of Auðr’s similar behaviour in *Laxdæla saga*. However, *Porgils saga* is not the only text in the compilation containing this motif of women as pacifiers or ‘anti-inciters’.

We find a further female anti-inciter in Álfheiðr in *Svínfellinga saga*, chapter 6.²⁷ She tries to persuade her son Guðmundr not to take part in Sæmundr’s expedition against Ögmundr, and although he answers angrily that he is old enough to decide for himself,

hon kvað hann þó eigi mundu fara svá búinn ok bað hann ganga með sér til litlustofu ok gera klæðaskipti. Ok er hann klæddist, gengr hon brott af stofunni ok rekr fyrir lás. Ok er hann verðr þessa varr, tekr hann einn stein, er hann fann í stofunni, ok brýtr frá hurðina ok komst út eftir þat. (*Sturlunga saga*, II 91)

she said he would nevertheless not go thus dressed and bade him go with her to the little sitting-room and make a change of clothes. And while he was dressing, she quickly went out of the sitting-room and drove the bolt across. And when he became aware of this, he took a stone, which he found in the sitting-room, and forced open the door and got out after that.

Here the woman takes not only verbal but physical action to prevent revenge, although she is unsuccessful against her apparently young son, who perhaps feels that his manhood is being called into question by this enforced incarceration by his mother. Nonetheless, such examples show that women are not uniformly blamed for vengeance and violence in this compilation.²⁸

²⁶ Sverrir Jakobsson 1998. In another article I have considered the perception exhibited in several Contemporary and Family Sagas that moderation in revenge is necessary (Clark 2005a).

²⁷ The saga deals with events of 1248–52 and was written around 1300.

²⁸ The female ‘anti-inciter’ is, of course, also a theme in some *Íslendinga-sögur*, for example *Eyrbyggja saga* chapter 18, where women attempt to stop the fighting, and Auðr even loses her hand.

Positive and Negative Images of Women

In the collection as a whole, then, both positive and negative female characters are employed in such a way as to encourage women to inhabit the approved female roles of nurturers (as dutiful wives and mothers), mediators and healers, and to discourage female autonomy. This dynamic coexists with a frequent tendency to seek to blame women where possible for male conflicts and violence, and we can see both impulses at work if we return briefly to *Sturlu saga*, the text with which we started. Chapter 4, for instance, ends with what Oddi Þorgilsson calls an *illr* 'evil' act (67), when Aðalríkr strikes Skeggi in the head with an axe, an act with far-reaching consequences in the saga. However, the source of this male conflict can be traced back to the start of the chapter where Aðalríkr's mistress, the *skillítill* 'not very trustworthy' Vigdís (65), steals linen belonging to Skeggi's wife. Similarly, Þordís Bersadóttir causes trouble between men in chapter 23 when she leaves home to visit her sister and, because she is *óskapvær* 'of a restless temperament' (95), is reluctant to return, and, in chapter 29, the beauty of Hallgerðr causes conflict when she is abducted by Páll from her husband.²⁹ In chapter 11, on the other hand, Guðfinna Sveinsdóttir fits the role of the anti-inciter when she holds Einarr Þorgilsson back in his attempts to avenge what he sees as his ill-treatment by Einarr Ingibjargarson.³⁰ Thus, although the dominant picture of women in *Sturlu saga* is negative, a positive role as mediator can be envisaged.

There is much more that could be drawn out from the *Sturlunga saga* compilation on this subject. However, the analyses above are enough to undercut Jochens's argument that, because there are not very many inciting women in *Sturlunga saga*, the Family and Kings' Sagas are male fictions, and, conversely, that the *samtíðarsögur* represent unmediated historical reality. It is apparent from the foregoing study that, although dealing with contemporary events and those of the recent past, the authors of *Sturlunga saga* still use literary conventions and shape the narrative, just as the *Íslendingasögur* are based on historical events, but manipulate them; the difference between the genres is more a matter of

²⁹ That both husband and abductor are priests may indicate that the episode supports attempts to stop priests from inappropriate sexual and martial involvements, but it functions at the expense of the woman, and fits in with medieval religious warnings of the dangers of female beauty, which is viewed as culpable.

³⁰ Compare *Þorgils saga skarða*, where Gróa, Jórunn and Herdís serve as the voice of reason, protecting their husbands in chapters 1, 9 and 42 respectively; Gróa urges moderation again in chapter 14.

authors employing different motifs and conventions to differing degrees (in *Sturlunga saga*, for instance, there is a much greater use of dreams and visions at key points in the narrative). Moreover, a more subtle analysis of the Contemporary Sagas is needed, in order to reveal the literary shaping of narratives and manipulation of events. Although Stephen Tranter's study of *Sturlunga saga* makes some progress in this direction, it has been seen that Tranter's arguments about the role of men within the work and their reception of it do not pay enough attention to the role of women and gender issues in the compilation.

The interpretation of the vengeful female characters of the Contemporary and Family Sagas is a complex issue. This article has shown that, as far as the former are concerned, misogynistic tropes such as the scapegoating of women for the results of men's violent actions, and negative images possibly resting on religious constructions of women as irrational and corporeal, or even abject, are employed in *Sturlunga saga*. However, the picture is not a uniform one, and in several texts in the compilation one finds women acting as mediators or 'anti-inciters' who attempt to dissuade men from revenge and destructive acts, although this may ultimately suggest that female autonomy is discouraged except in the approved nurturing, mediating and healing roles.

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CONTEXTUALISING *LEIÐARVÍSIR*: SANT' AGNESE,
THE CATACOMBS, THE PANTHEON AND THE TIBER

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Introduction

LEIÐARVÍSIR, WRITTEN APPARENTLY by a certain Abbot Nikulás of Munkaþverá, is a well known Old Norse itinerary from Iceland to the Holy Land. It has generally been considered by scholars to be a journal summing up the personal experiences of the author on a real journey.¹ Research since the fundamental work of Eric Werlauff has been devoted primarily to identifying the places mentioned in *Leiðarvísir*, in order to trace on a map the route Nikulás took and to obtain useful historical information on Scandinavian pilgrimages in the Middle Ages. The recognition of possible written sources on which the work could be based has been no more than a secondary purpose. The material included in the itinerary has very often been considered mainly the product of Nikulás's individual experiences and impressions and of the information he collected during his actual journey. At the end of *Leiðarvísir* he is said to be *minnigr* 'having a good memory' (Kålund 1908, 23, l. 20). This could be taken to imply that he was working on the basis of his own recollections. In relation to this, Rudolf Simek (1990, 265, 271) states that it is not unlikely that the abbot took notes during his travels, to help his 'good memory', and that he may have used oral sources in addition.

In fact it is more than likely that Abbot Nikulás turned to written sources for some of his material, given the medieval tradition of collecting items of information and often passages of text verbatim without any indication of their nature as borrowings, but with the intention of producing an excellent text based on the best information and ideas available. My purpose in this article is to show that written sources on

¹ *Leiðarvísir* is contained on folios 11r–16r of an important geographical miscellany belonging to the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen, manuscript 194 8vo. The manuscript can be dated precisely because the scribe, a priest named Óláfr Ormsson, informs us that it was written in 1387 at the farm of Geirrauðareyri, today called Narfeyri, in western Iceland (Kålund 1908, ii 54). A fragment of the same itinerary is also included in manuscript AM 736 II, 4to (c.1400).

Rome serve as the foundation for Nikulás's description of four important places included in his Roman itinerary: the church of Sant' Agnese, the catacombs, the Pantheon and the Tiber. In particular, I will show that medieval descriptions of Rome, Bede's *De temporum ratione* and hagiographic texts have played a fundamental role in the composition of the relevant passages of *Leiðarvísir*. In doing so, I will highlight the textual relations of *Leiðarvísir* with other references to Rome's history and topography traceable in the Old Norse tradition.

Nikulás and his Itinerary

The itinerary is generally attributed to Nikulás Bergsson. The Icelandic abbot lists report that an abbot Nikulás returned to Iceland from a journey in 1154, and that he died there between 1158 and 1160. Since Nikulás was also the name of the first abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Munkaþverá (founded in 1155), it has been conjectured that he was the Abbot Nikulás mentioned at the end of *Leiðarvísir* (23, l. 19). Janus Møller Jensen (2004, 286–91) and Simek (1990, 266–67) offer a complete picture of the issues concerning the attribution of the itinerary and the figure of Nikulás. Using internal textual evidence, modern scholars have concluded that the journey took place after 1149, since Nikulás describes the Sepulchre and Calvary in one single building, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was consecrated in this new form in 1149.² Benjamin Kedar, however, argues that 1149 is not a reliable *terminus post quem* because we do not know for certain how much time passed between the construction of the significant part of the church and its consecration: it was probably during the years 1140–49 that most of the new church was built, so it is possible that Nikulás observed a part of it during its construction. Kedar therefore suggests 1145 as a more trustworthy *terminus post quem*, because this is the year of the *inventio* of the relics of St John the Baptist in Samaria (2005, 266–67), which are also mentioned in *Leiðarvísir* (21, ll. 26–27). The year 1153 is commonly accepted as *terminus ad quem*, because Nikulás points out that Ascalon was in the land of the Saracens and that it was still heathen (21, ll. 14–15); he must therefore have left the Holy Land before the Christians captured Ascalon in August of that year.

Leiðarvísir contains the description of an itinerary from Iceland through Europe to Jerusalem, indicating routes and alternative routes,

² See on this aspect Hill (1983, 176), Simek (1990, 266) and Møller Jensen (2004, 292).

distances, times and stopping places. It is also informative about churches and episcopal sees, as well as peoples and their dialects. The itinerary is rich in practical information, but there is no clear distinction between real and fantastic places: Nikulás intersperses his geographical information with fantastic stories and anecdotes which may have been taken from written or oral sources (see Waßenoven 2008, 44–49). This is so in the case of the fantastic elements drawn from Germanic heroic legends, such as *Gnitaheiðr*, where Sigurðr killed Fáfnir (13 ll. 20–21; Magoun 1943, 212–18), which is placed by Nikulás in the stretch of the itinerary between Paderborn and Mainz;³ another such element is Gunnarr’s snake-pit, placed in Lunigiana (16 ll. 16–17; Magoun 1943, 211–12). These elements associated with the stages and stops of *Leiðarvísir* show Nikulás collecting and incorporating a variety of materials, including literary texts but possibly also oral accounts received from other pilgrims, to flesh out his itinerary and make it vivid. Thus *Leiðarvísir* appears to be a text more complex and stratified than a mere travel account.

Medieval Descriptions of Rome

The author of *Leiðarvísir* would have been able to consult and use many sources in order to collect historical or geographical information about the city of Rome (those relevant to the present study will be presented in the course of this analysis). In the mid-twelfth century there were several texts which described the city in detail and could have been used by both the travelling pilgrim and the sedentary scholar far from Rome. One of the oldest of these texts—which were distinguished by their wide circulation and importance in the tradition of this genre and which, directly or through their textual traditions, were available in Nikulás’s day—is about the churches of Rome and is commonly known by the name *Stationes ecclesiarum urbis Romae*. This text takes the form of a list which indicates, for every day of the year, a station (i.e. church) where the principal mass for the day was to be celebrated. The oldest manuscript dates back to the eighth century (Miedema 1996, 15). In an eighth-century manuscript is preserved another important text on the churches

³ Nikulás places *Gnitaheiðr* near Kiliandr (13 l. 20), for which Magoun (1943, 216–17) proposed a possible identification with Kilianstädten on the Nidda river, a tributary of the Main in Hesse. The location of *Gnitaheiðr* between Paderborn and Mainz given in *Leiðarvísir* is hardly compatible with its much debated identification with Knetterheide (near Lemgo), which is north of Paderborn. Rossenbeck (1974) gives an overview of this debate.

of Rome, the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*. This work was probably written under Honorius I (625–38) and included, for the most part, churches outside the city (VZ, II 72–99). Another famous text is the *Mirabilia urbis Romae*. The *Mirabilia* consist of lists and descriptions of monuments and sites, many belonging to ancient Rome. The *terminus ante quem* of its first known version is 1143, several years before Nikulás's journey is believed to have taken place. It was part of the *Liber politicus* by Benedictus, Canon of St Peter's. It has been maintained that the *Mirabilia* should be dated to the end of the tenth century, in the reign of Otto III, but Nine Miedema has argued convincingly for its dating in the mid-twelfth century (1996, 3–11). The text which was in fact most commonly used from the late twelfth century through the Renaissance is the *Indulgentiae ecclesiarum urbis Romae*.⁴ This gained wide circulation in the fourteenth century, and its oldest manuscript (late twelfth century), British Library Cotton Faustina B.VII (Miedema 1996, 45; 2003, 20–21), comes just after the supposed date of Nikulás's trip; it is universally recognised, however, that it is based on traditions which began earlier. The *Indulgentiae* appear in many versions, the common feature of which is that they are accounts of the churches of Rome and the indulgences that could be obtained in each, although the versions differ in the number of churches and their descriptions.⁵ Many manuscripts contain several of these sources on Rome, as is already the case in BL Cotton Faustina B.VII, which includes the *Indulgentiae* immediately after a shortened version of the *Mirabilia* and before a list of the *Stationes ecclesiarum*.

My aim in reviewing these various sources on Rome and in comparing *Leiðarvísir* to them has been to indicate that a range of written precedents could have been relied on in drafting the descriptions of the church of Sant' Agnese, the catacombs, the Pantheon and the Tiber. The evidence, as will be shown below, does suggest that Nikulás had access to written sources for the details he supplied in *Leiðarvísir*.⁶

⁴ Miedema offers a comprehensive catalogue of the Latin manuscripts containing the *Mirabilia*, *Stationes* and *Indulgentiae* (1996, 24–95).

⁵ See Miedema on the textual history of the *Indulgentiae* (2003, 18–23). In reviewing the *Indulgentiae* that could be part of the tradition informing *Leiðarvísir*, I have taken into account the five published editions of the Latin versions of the *Indulgentiae*, based on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts (Huelsen 1927, 137–56; Hulbert 1923, 403–24; VZ 4: 78–88; Weißthanner 1954, 39–64; Schimmelpfennig 1988, 637–58), as well as BL Cotton Faustina B.VII.

⁶ See Marani (2006) for another treatment of some of the above material.

Rome in *Leiðarvísir*

The section of *Leiðarvísir* dedicated to Rome is notable for its length and wealth of detail. In his itinerary Nikulás depicts important sacred places, such as the patriarchal basilicas of St John Lateran (for which he includes a list of relics kept there), Santa Maria Maggiore, San Lorenzo fuori le mura, San Paolo fuori le mura and St Peter's; he also describes the churches of Santa Maria in Domnica, San Giovanni a Porta Latina and Santi Giovanni e Paolo, together with the Pantheon and the catacombs. He also includes secular places like the Porta Latina, the Thermae of Diocletian, the Tiber, Castel Sant'Angelo and the Obelisk of St Peter.

The section of the itinerary dedicated to Rome differs stylistically from the earlier descriptions. Particularly significant is the fact that, in the description of Rome, Nikulás repeatedly uses Latin, much more frequently than in the rest of *Leiðarvísir*. He names the first 'bishop's throne', *Ions kirkiu baptiste* 'the church of John the Baptist', i.e. St John Lateran (17, l. 17), using the Latin genitive for the name of the Baptist; in the list of the relics kept there we also find two Latin genitive forms, *blod Christi* 'the blood of Christ' (17 l. 20) and *umskurdr Christi* 'the foreskin of Christ' (17, l. 22), immediately followed by the Old Norse form *Christz*, in the phrase *af þorn Christz* '[a great part] of Christ's crown of thorns' (17, l. 23). The three forms of the name are abbreviated with a capital *x* with, respectively, the genitive endings *i* and *s* superscripted. Latin genitives are used for the names of the churches *Stephani et Laurenti* 'of Stephen and Lawrence' (17 l. 27) and *Iohannis et Pauli martirum* 'of John and Paul the martyrs' (18 l. 12).⁷ Latin is also employed to indicate the gate *er heitir ante portam Latinam* 'which is called *ante portam Latinam*' (18 ll. 8–9), to refer to the *catacumbas* 'catacombs' (18 l. 17) and when giving the dimensions of St Peter's: *Ecclesia Petri CCCCLX a foribus longa ad sanctum alltare sed lata CCXXX p[e]dum* 'the church of Peter is four hundred and sixty feet long from the door to the holy altar, and two hundred and thirty feet wide' (18 ll. 27–28). Two other Latin genitives are used to refer to Pope Sylvester I, when Nikulás describes the church of St Agnes, built *ath radi Silvestri pafa* 'on the advice of Pope Sylvester' (18 l. 7), and when he mentions his altar inside St Peter's, *alltari Silvestri pape* 'the altar of Pope Sylvester' (19, l. 2); the genitive *Constantini* (18 l. 4) is used in describing the church of St Agnes. The frequency of Latin expressions in the Roman section of

⁷ 'Iohannis' is the form which Kålund (1908, 18) prefers to the attested form 'Iohanni'.

Leiðarvísir strongly suggests the presence of written sources. The possibility that Nikulás was relying on notes which he himself had written in Latin during his journey cannot be excluded, but it would not account for the higher incidence of Latin phrases in the section about Rome; nor could the possibility be corroborated with any of the source material we have, whereas noteworthy correspondences can be identified between *Leiðarvísir* and other written texts.

At this point I shall turn to the analysis of some particularly significant analogies with written sources that can be identified in the descriptions of four important places included in Nikulás's Roman itinerary: the church of Sant' Agnese, the Pantheon, the catacombs and the Tiber. The identification of these written sources may be vital for understanding and contextualising *Leiðarvísir*.

The Church of Sant' Agnese

The church of Sant' Agnese is mentioned in *Leiðarvísir* after the basilicas of St John Lateran, Santa Maria Maggiore and San Lorenzo fuori le mura. In the church of Sant' Agnese there is no *biskups stoll* 'bishop's throne' like the ones Nikulás says are to be found in the other three basilicas (17 ll. 18, 25, 27); nevertheless, according to Nikulás, Sant' Agnese is the most splendid in the entire city (18 l. 3). The church of Sant' Agnese fuori le mura, which is still visible today, was built by Pope Honorius I (625–38), as will be discussed shortly. Nikulás refers to the legend of Constantina, or Constantia (18 ll. 3–7), which is linked not to this church but to the large building next to it. This building, which has been in ruins for many centuries, is what is technically called a circus-shaped basilica (i.e. one in the form of a long rectangle with a semicircular end). A brief sketch of the extensive and complex archaeological history of the area of Sant' Agnese will now be given, as it will be of great help in reaching a better understanding of this passage of *Leiðarvísir*.

The Constantinian Basilica of Sant' Agnese and the Basilica Built by Pope Honorius I

The circus-basilica was built by Constantina, daughter of Constantine, between 337 and 351, when she was living in Rome (Fusco 2004, 13). The external dimensions of this structure are considerable: it is 98.27 metres long and 40.87 metres wide (Venturini 2004, 29).

The *Liber pontificalis* is a source of fundamental importance for reconstructing Constantine's building activity in Rome and his policy

towards the Church of Rome, and by extension the history of the basilica of Sant' Agnese. The *Liber* gives a list of the basilicas built in Rome by the emperor; this is inserted in the life of Pope Sylvester I (314–35) and lists the donations Constantine made to the Church (*LibPon*, 172–87). The formula *eodem tempore fecit basilicam* 'at that time he built a basilica' is used to attribute their construction to Constantine (Fusco 2004, 12). The list in the *LibPon* includes the following: the *basilica Constantiniana*, that is, St John Lateran (*LibPon*, 172); the basilica of St Peter (*LibPon*, 176); the basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura (*LibPon*, 178); the basilica *in palatio sessoriano* 'in the Sessorian Palace', that is, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (*LibPon*, 179); the basilica of Sant' Agnese (*LibPon*, 181); and the basilica of Santi Marcellino e Pietro (*LibPon*, 182).

Soon after the basilica of Sant' Agnese was built in the fourth century it fell into disuse. At the beginning of the sixth century it was already in decay (Fusco 2004, 20), as testified by the *LibPon* in the life of Pope Symmacus (498–514), where we read that he *absidam beatae Agnae quae in ruinam iminebat et omnem basilicam renovavit* 'restored the apse of Sant' Agnese, which was threatening to collapse, and the whole basilica' (*LibPon* 263). In the course of the seventh century the building was finally abandoned, so that Pope Honorius I (625–38) built a new basilica which is preserved to this day, *ad corpus* 'at the body' of St Agnes (*LibPon*, 323):

Eodem tempore fecit ecclesiam beatae Agnae martyris, via Numentana, miliario ab urbe Roma III, a solo, ubi requiescit, quem undique ornavit, exquisivit, ubi posuit dona multa.

At that time he had the church of the blessed martyr Agnes built up from the ground on the Via Nomentana, three miles from the city of Rome, and he decorated this church all over, and was attentive to every detail and made many donations to this church.

After the ancient building fell into ruin the remaining walls were used for other purposes, including as an enclosure for farmed land around an adjoining monastery (Magnani Cianetti 2004, 75).

The original function of the Constantinian basilica *sanctae martyris Agnae* remained obscure for a long time. Its 'circus' shape, its dimensions and its position outside the walls of the city are not obviously similar to other Constantinian basilicas that have remained in use up to the present day. In the Renaissance, and in the following centuries, it was believed to be an ancient racecourse or a theatre (Esposito 2004, 44). In the last century the studies of Richard Krautheimer

were instrumental in clarifying its function. In his article ‘Mensa—Coemeterium—Martyrium’ (‘stone table [serving both as altar and ceremonial banquet table]—cemetery—martyr’s shrine’, the three key elements of a circus-basilica), he explains how the ‘coemeteria-basilicas’ outside the walls of Rome found their source in ‘the relationship between the martyr’s tomb, a burial ground for the faithful, and the celebration of funeral banquets both in honour of the martyr and of ordinary mortals’ (1960, 33). Krautheimer describes how Sant’ Agnese and the other funerary basilicas fell progressively into decay (1960, 34–35):

When the floors of the *coemeteria-basilicas* were all covered with graves, leaving no space, and when at the same time the custom of funeral banquets fell into disuse and was frowned upon, the structures, in the course of the late fifth and sixth centuries, lost their *raison d’être*. Their original function was forgotten, even more so since *basilicae ad corpus*, beginning with the late sixth century, began to rise alongside them over the graves of the martyrs.

Recent excavations, the results of which are explained in Cianetti and Pavolini (eds) (2004), have confirmed Krautheimer’s thesis and reinforced it with archaeological evidence, putting Sant’ Agnese in the context of the other Constantinian circus-basilicas.

The Honorian Basilica in Pilgrim Guides

It is significant that the Constantinian basilica of Sant’ Agnese mentioned in *Leiðarvísir* was already being omitted from the pilgrim guides from the seventh century (Krautheimer 1960, 22; Venturini 2004, 36). In the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae* the pilgrim is invited to go along the *via Nomentana ad ecclesiam sanctae Agnae, quae formosa est, in qua sola pausat—et ipsam episcopus Honorius miro opere reparavit* ‘to the church of Sant’ Agnese, which is beautiful, and in which only she rests—and Bishop Honorius repaired this same church magnificently’ (VZ, II 78–79). In the *De locis sanctis martyrum quae sunt foris civitatis Romae*, it is observed that Sant’ Agnese, on the *via Nomentana*, is *mirae pulchritudinis, ubi ipsa corpore iacet* ‘extraordinarily beautiful, where her mortal remains rest’ (VZ, II 115). The *Einsiedeln Itinerary*, from the second half of the eighth or the first half of the ninth century, and Sigeric’s *Itinerarium*, written at the end of the tenth century, include in their lists only a church of ‘St Agnes’, which can be identified with the church built by Pope Honorius I (VZ, II 185; Magoun 1940, 271, 273). The *Mirabilia urbis Romae* simply refer to a ‘cemetery of St Agnes’ (VZ, III 27). Significantly, William of Malmesbury, in the topographical excursus on Rome included in his *Gesta regum Anglorum* (written in the first

half of the twelfth century), also mentions only the medieval basilica of Sant' Agnese, the *ecclesia Sanctae Agnetis et corpus* 'the church of St Agnes and her body' (VZ, II 144–45). In the *Stationes ecclesiarum* of the twelfth-century MS BL Cotton. Faust. B.VII, two stations are '*ad sanctam Agnetem*' (folio 17rb, 17va), clearly referring to the seventh-century basilica; also in the *Indulgentiae* editions that I have compared (see note 4 above) I have found only this basilica mentioned, without any reference to the legend of Constantina (Huelsen 1927, 145; Weißthanner 1954, 63; Schimmelpfennig 1988, 657).

Written Sources for Sant' Agnese in Leiðarvísir

Taking into account the early decay of the Constantinian basilica and its consequent absence from the pilgrim guides after the seventh century, how can one explain the presence of this same *Agnesar kirkia* associated with Constantina in *Leiðarvísir*, traditionally dated around the mid-twelfth century? Scholars who have commented on this passage have missed this historical discrepancy, which is of fundamental importance if we are to understand and contextualise Nikulás's text. Werlauff (1821, 45), Kålund (1913, 76) and Magoun (1940, 273, 282) did not distinguish between the two churches, erroneously attributing to Sant' Agnese fuori le mura, built by Honorius I, the legend of the Constantina foundation, linked with the early circus-basilica. The difference between the two churches has been briefly pointed out in two recent contributions (Marani 2006, 643; Waßenhoven 2008, 37–38).

The similarities with written sources here are quite strong. The formulation of the legend of Constantina given in the *Vita* of Sylvester I in the *LibPon* is very close to that in *Leiðarvísir* (18 ll. 2–7):

En austr þadan II milur er Agnesar kirkia, hun er dyrliguzt i allri borginni, hana lét gera Constantia dottir Constantini konungs, er hon tok fyrri tru en hann, ok bad hon leyfis ath lata gera Agnesar kirkiu, en konungr leyfði henne utan borgar ath radi Silvestri pafa.

Two miles east from there is the church of Agnes, the most splendid in all the city. Constance, daughter of King Constantine, had this built when she accepted the faith before him and she asked leave to have the church of Agnes built, and the king gave her leave to build it outside the city on the advice of Pope Sylvester.

In the section of *LibPon* dealing with the basilica of Sant' Agnese (*LibPon*, 180) we find the information that Constantine

eodem tempore fecit basilicam sanctae martyris Agnae ex rogatu filiae suae et baptisterium in eodem loco ubi et baptizata est soror eius Constantia cum filia Augusti a Silvestro episcopo.

at that time built, according to the request of his daughter, the basilica of the holy martyr St Agnes and the baptistery in that place where also her sister, together with the emperor's daughter, was baptised by Bishop Sylvester.

If Nikulás drew on this text, however, it is likely that he did so through the tradition of Bede's *De temporum ratione* 'On the Reckoning of Time', which is a treatise, very popular throughout the Middle Ages, on methods for calculating time and subdividing it into units, and which also includes different views of the cosmos. Its last section is a world chronicle structured on the 'Six Ages of this World', a solemnisation, as Faith Wallis observes, of 'the link between chronology and computus' (1999, 353). Bede used several sources for this chronicle. He 'combed for items of general ecclesiastical interest the *Liber Pontificalis*, but building projects exercised a disproportionate fascination for him' (Wallis 1999, 366). In fact, Bede uses the *Vita* of Pope Sylvester I in the *LibPon*, omitting the list of the donations made by Constantine to the single basilicas, but listing Constantine's churches 'in loving detail' (Wallis 1999, 366):

Constantinus fecit Romae, ubi baptizatus est, basilicam beati Iohannis baptistae, quae appellatur Constantiniana. Item basilicam beato Petro in templo Apollinis, necnon et beato Paulo, corpus utriusque aere cypro circumdans quinque pedes grosso. Item basilicam in palatio Sosoriano, quae cognominatur Hierusalem, ubi de ligno crucis Domini posuit. Item Basilicam sanctae martyris Agnae ex rogatu filiae suae, et baptisterium in eodem loco, ubi et baptizata est soror eius Constantia cum filia Augusta. Item basilicam beato Laurentio martyri via Tiburtina in agro Verano. (Bede 1977, 509)

Constantine had the basilica of the blessed St John the Baptist built in Rome. He was baptised in this basilica, which is called *Constantiniana*. Also the basilica in honour of the blessed Peter on the temple of Apollo, and also [one] in honour of the blessed Paul, enclosing the body of each of the two in [sarcophagi of] five-foot-thick Cyprian copper. Also the basilica which is called *Hierusalem*, in the Sessorian Palace, where he put a piece of the wood from the True Cross. Also the basilica of the holy martyr St Agnes, in accordance with the request of his daughter, and a baptistery, in the same place, where also his sister Constance was baptised together with the emperor's daughter. Also the basilica of the blessed martyr Lawrence on the *Tiburtina* in the field of Verano.

The list of Constantine's basilicas, including the reference to the legend of the building of Sant' Agnese, is reported in *Silvesters saga* (*HMS*, II 255 l. 19–256 l. 3, 255 ll. 29–33). This saga, which is handed down in manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth century (Widding 1963, 332), is based on a *Vita Sancti Sylvestri* (Mombritius 1978, II 508–31). In *Silvesters saga*, after the narration of the first deeds performed by

Constantine after his conversion, we find an adaptation of the passage of *De temporum ratione* quoted above. It is not present in the Mombricitus version of the Latin *vita*. This could mean that it was added by the Icelandic author of *Silvesters saga* or that it was included in the Latin version of the *Vita Sancti Sylvestri* at his disposal, thus confirming both the importance given to Constantine's building activity and the circulation in Iceland of Bede's *De temporum ratione*. It is possible that the world chronicle was known also as a separate work, since the 'Six Ages of This World' formed 'a thematically distinct section' in *De temporum ratione* and, 'as a result, from very early on in the manuscript tradition, there was a tendency to detach this section from the rest of the book' (Wallis 1999, 363). In the *Vita Sancti Sylvestri* Constantine ends the speech that he makes after his conversion by saying:

Ut autem notum sit universo orbi romano vero Deo et Domino Iesu Christo nos inclinare cervices, intra palatium meum ecclesiam Christo arripui construendam ut universitas hominum comprobet, nulla dubietatis in corde meo vel præteriti erroris remansisse vestigia. (Mombricitus 1978, II 514 ll. 21–24)

In order to make known to the whole city of Rome that we bow our heads to the true God and to the Lord Jesus Christ, I have agreed that a church should be built within my palace in honour of Christ, so that everyone might accept as true that no doubt or trace of past error remains in my heart.

After these words the people present exclaim, *Qui Christum negant male depereant* 'May those who deny Christ perish miserably' (Mombricitus 1978, II 514 l. 25). This passage is followed very closely in *Silvesters saga*, where Constantine concludes his speech with these words (*HMS*, II 255 ll. 14–16):

hefir (ek) til þess latid kirkiu gera vid holl mina, at allr romaborgar lydr viti þat vist, at ek þiona Kristi sialfum sönnum gudi, sva at eingi ifi ennar fornu villu er eptir i hiarta minu.

I have given orders for a church to be built inside my palace so that all the people of Rome may know for certain that I serve Christ and the true God, and that no doubt of past error is left in my heart.

The people reply much as in the *Vita Sancti Sylvestri*: *Fariz þeir aller, er Kristi neita* 'May all those who deny Christ perish' (*HMS*, II 255 l. 19). Significantly, the author of *Silvesters saga* takes Constantine's reference to the building of St John Lateran *intra palatium meum* and extends it by inserting the passage quoted above from Bede's *De temporum ratione*. He gets some names and places mixed up, integrates the list of churches given by Bede with ordinal numbers, and about St Agnes he says (*HMS*, II 255 ll. 29–33):

Enn let hann giöra ena fiordu kirkiu til dyrdar enni helgu meyiú Agnete. Þessa kirkiu let hann giöra at bæn dottur sinnar, þeirar er Constancia nefnd. Sia kirkia var gior eptir skim dottur hans ok i þeim enum sama stad, sem hon var skird.

And he [Constantine] had a fourth church built to the glory of the virgin St Agnes. He had this church built at the request of his daughter, who is called Constantia. This church was built after the baptism of his daughter and in the same place where she was baptised.

The statement that Constantine had the church built ‘at the request of his daughter, who is called Constantia’ is in agreement with *Leiðarvísir*. The corresponding passages of *Leiðarvísir* (18 ll. 5–6) (*ok bad hon [Constantia] leyfis ath lata gera Agnesar kirkiu*) and of *Silvesters saga* (*at bæn dottur sinna*) both seem to be modelled on the Latin *ex rogatu filiae suae*. In *Silvesters saga* we also find that ‘the church was built after the baptism of his daughter, in the same place where she was baptised’, which corresponds to Nikulás’s statement that Constantina ‘accepted’ the Christian faith before the emperor (18 ll. 4–5). Nikulás’s final remark (18 ll. 5–7) that Constantina ‘asked leave to have the church of Agnes built, and the king gave her leave to build it outside the city on the advice of Pope Sylvester’ is a way of including the figure of St Sylvester, who is indissolubly related to the legend of Constantine. The expression *ath radi Silvestri pafa* appears to be modelled on the Latin *ex suggestione* rather than *ex rogatu* (*Silvestri episcopi*). In the *Vita* of Pope Sylvester in the *LibPon*, however, we find both expressions when the author narrates the building of the basilicas of St Peter and St Paul (*LibPon*, 178). The source of *Leiðarvísir* must have been very close to that of *Silvesters saga* and the different words and constructions used to render the original Latin in the two texts strongly indicate that they drew on it independently. This source was most probably the world chronicle of Bede’s *De temporum ratione*. The diffusion and circulation in the Icelandic tradition of *De temporum ratione*, and in particular of the passage enumerating the churches built by Constantine, is confirmed by the fact that this is used also in *Veraldar saga* (1944, 59 ll. 3–11):

Hann let kirkiv gera i Latran Joani baptista ok Johanni postvla. þar er pafa stoll. Petrs kirkiv let hann ok gera i þeim stad sem Petr var crosfestr. pals kirkiv let hann gera fyrir vtan Latran þar sem hann var hoggvin. i Rvmaborg let han gera þa kirkiv er heitir Iervsalem ok þar let hann vera kros drotins vars. Constantinvs let gera Agneskirkiv at bon Constancie d(ottvr) s(innar). lavrencius let hann kirkiv gera.

He [Constantine] had a church built in the Lateran in honour of John the Baptist and John the Apostle. The throne of the pope is there. He also had the

church of Peter built in the place where Peter was crucified. He had the church of Paul built outside the Lateran, in the place where he was killed. In Rome he had that church which is called *Jerusalem* built and he ordered the Cross of our Lord to be kept there. Constantine had the church of Agnes built in accordance with the request of his daughter Constantina. He had the church of *Laurentius* built.

It is noteworthy that the phrasing *at bon [Constancie]* is used here, as in *Silvesters saga*. Stefán Karlsson has demonstrated how this passage of *Veraldar saga*, as it has been handed down to us, is based on two sources (1977, 125–30). The first is *De temporum ratione*, which was probably used indirectly through the mediation of a more detailed version of *Veraldar saga*; the second is *Silvesters saga*. Extremely significant is the presence in *Veraldar saga* of a reference to the *pafa stoll* in St John Lateran, as this occurs in *Leiðarvísir* (17 l. 19) but not in *De temporum ratione* nor in the *Vita* or the saga of St Silvester. This hints at a possible common source for *Leiðarvísir* and *Veraldar saga* when they describe St John Lateran.

The legend of St Agnes is also handed down in one of the *vitae sanctorum*, the *Vita Sanctae Agnetis* (Mombritius 1978, I 40–44). *Agnesar saga meýjar*, the translation into Icelandic of the *Vita Sanctae Agnetis*, is first attested in a fragment (AM 238 fol. fragm. I) from c.1300 (*HMS*, I ix; Widding 1963, 298). In this *Vita* we find the story of how Constantina, daughter of Constantine, suffering from wounds, went to the tomb of St Agnes and was cured by an apparition of the saint exhorting her to ‘act constantly’ (*Constanter age Constantia*) and to accept Christianity (Mombritius 1978, I 44 ll. 6–8); after being healed, Constantina *patrem et fratres augustos rogat ut basilica beatae Agnetis construeretur et sibi illic mausoleum collocari præcepit* ‘asked her father and brothers to have the basilica of St Agnes built, and she instructed them to place there a mausoleum for herself’ (Mombritius 1978, I 44 ll. 12–14). *Agnesar saga meýjar* is a close translation of this *Vita Sanctae Agnetis*. After being healed—as in the *Vita*—Constantina *bad fodur sinn ok breðr, at þeir lofadi kirkio at gera til dyrdar Agnesu, ok let hon ser i þeiri kirkio grauf gera* ‘asked her father and her brothers to give leave for a church to be built to the glory of Agnes, and she had a grave made for herself in that church’ (*HMS*, I 21 ll. 27–28). In the *Vita Sanctae Agnetis* (and in *Agnesar saga meýjar*), as in *Leiðarvísir*, there is a reference to the legend of the building of the basilica of Sant’ Agnese, but Constantina asks not only Constantine to build the church, as she does in Nikulás’s itinerary, but also her brothers; in addition, in the *Vita* she also asks them to build a mausoleum for her, which is not mentioned in

Leiðarvísir, the *Vita Sancti Sylvestri*, *Silvesters saga* or *Veraldar saga*. These differences lead one to believe that the author of *Leiðarvísir* did not use the *Vita Sanctae Agnetis* for his description of the Constantinian basilica.

The topographical information given by Nikulás is similar to that reported in other medieval pilgrim guides about the church built by Pope Honorius. He says (as quoted on p. 52 above) that Sant' Agnese is 'two miles east from there [i.e. from the church of Sts Stephen and Lawrence]'. The *Liber Pontificalis* says in the life of Pope Honorius that the church was built *miliario ab urbe Roma III* 'three miles outside the city' (*LibPon*, 323). Another topographical point comparable to that given in *Leiðarvísir* is in the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*, where we find the indication that the (seventh-century) church of Sant' Agnese comes after St Emerentiana, which is *ad orientem* 'to the east' (VZ, II 78), as the *Agnesar kirkia* is *austr.*

Possible Written Sources for the Description of the Church of Sant' Agnese

As we have seen, Nikulás also tells us (18 l. 3) that 'the church of Agnes is the most splendid in all the city'. This observation can be interpreted otherwise than simply as an aesthetic assessment based on Nikulás's personal experience. It is relevant that a similar judgement on the visual impact of the Honorian church is present in the tradition of the pilgrim guides: in the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae* the church is called *formosa* 'beautiful' (VZ, II 79); in *De locis sanctis martyrum quae sunt foris civitatis Romae*, Sant' Agnese is said to be *mirae pulchritudinis* 'of extraordinary beauty' (VZ, II 115). It is thus not implausible that Nikulás's judgement on the splendour of Sant' Agnese could find its explanation not in his personal and direct experience of the church, or not in this alone, but in evaluations that were common in the tradition of written sources. This would be in line with his use, in narrating the legend of Constantina, of a tradition which was well disseminated in Iceland, as is proved by the fact that *Veraldar saga* and two of the *heilagra manna sögur*, for the most part translated from Latin and with a rich manuscript diffusion, mention the story of Constantine building the church of Sant' Agnese on the advice of Pope Sylvester and on the request of his daughter Constantina. There are, in addition, noteworthy correspondences between the topographical information about Sant' Agnese in *Leiðarvísir* and indications of the position of the Honorian basilica available in the pilgrim guides. In these the same basilica often receives the epithet 'splendid'.

Two hypotheses can be put forward to explain the fact that the reference to the Constantinian basilica is historically incongruent with the traditional dating of *Leiðarvísir* and that the information about Sant' Agnese is in all probability taken from written sources. The first possibility is that Nikulás himself visited the *basilica ad corpus* of Sant' Agnese, but, once he had gone back to Iceland from the Holy Land, he turned to written sources to rekindle his memory and to reinforce it with their authority. He could then have found, in the sources at his disposal, topographical information about the Honorian basilica, which he correctly used to locate the basilica existing in the twelfth century, and information about the building of the Constantinian basilica, which he confused with the seventh-century basilica that he actually saw and recollected. It is also possible that Nikulás was simply the author of the topographical information in *Leiðarvísir* and that the legend of Constantina's foundation was added to it later. This possibility is linked to the second plausible hypothesis, that the description of the basilica of Sant' Agnese is based not on personal experience but exclusively on written sources. The use of written sources could be made by the author of *Leiðarvísir* or, totally or partly, by a later scribe who wanted to enrich the version he was copying.

The hypothesis that the description of Sant' Agnese in *Leiðarvísir* is based on written sources is reinforced by the historical incongruity in the text describing the Constantinian basilica, which has been highlighted here. Relevant analogies with written sources belonging to the same traditions as those identified for Sant' Agnese can be found also in other passages of the Roman itinerary of Nikulás, as will now be explained.

The Pantheon

The church of All Saints, that is, the Pantheon, is mentioned after Santi Giovanni e Paolo: *Þá er allra heilagra kirkia, micil og d[yrlig]* 'Then comes the large and splendid church of all saints' (18 ll. 13–15). Even though there is no church in Rome of this name today, as Magoun points out (1940, 283), we should bear in mind that the name is often explained in the sources with reference to the Christianisation of the temple. Bede, in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, explains how the Pantheon was converted into a church (1969, 148):

Hic est Bonifatius quartus a beato Gregorio Romanae urbis episcopo, qui inpetravit a Focate principe, donari Ecclesiae Christi templum Romae, quod Pantheon vocabatur ab antiquis, quasi simulacrum esset omnium deorum; in

quo ipse, eliminata omni spurcitia, fecit ecclesiam sanctae Dei genetricis, atque omnium martyrum Christi, ut exclusa multitudine daemonum, multitudo ibi sanctorum memoriam haberet.

Boniface was the fourth bishop of Rome after the blessed Gregory. He succeeded in his request to the Emperor Focas, that a Roman temple should be donated to the Church of Christ: it was called Pantheon from ancient times, as if it were a simulacrum of all the gods. Wherein he, after all the filth had been turned out of doors, made a church in honour of the holy mother of God, and in honour of all the martyrs of Christ, so that, when the multitude of devils had been shut out, a multitude of saints could be remembered there.

Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon on 13 May 609 to Mary and the martyrs, and the dedication date of the church was celebrated as the Feast of All Saints until this was moved to 1 November (Bede 1969, 148). Bergr Sökkason, who became abbot in Munkaþverá in 1325, explicitly quotes the passage mentioned above from Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* about Boniface IV and the Pantheon in his *Nikolaus saga erkibyskups* (HMS, II 53 ll. 27–54 l. 5). Bergr Sökkason used the *Vita beati Nicolai episcopi* of Johannes Barenensis (John of Bari), significantly enriching the original with other sources, which were analysed in their complexity by Ole Widding (1961; see HMS, I xv–xvi). The passage in *Nikolaus saga* explains how Boniface considered it opportune to consecrate the Pantheon to the Holy Trinity, to Mary and *i gofgan allra guds heilagra* 'in honour of all the Saints of God' (HMS, II 54 ll. 2–3). The name of this church is explained also in the *Mirabilia*, where the Pantheon is dedicated to Mary, *mater omnium sanctorum* 'Mother of All the Saints' (VZ, III 35); in Magister Gregorius's *Narracio*, written probably in England in the twelfth or thirteenth century (2000, 277), it is called *omnium sanctorum ecclesia* 'the church of All the Saints' (2000, 293). The explanation is also present in Bede's *Martyrologium* (PL, XCIV 913, 1087). It is very likely, however, that the source for Nikulás's denomination of the Pantheon as *Allraheilagrakirkja* could again be the world chronicle of *De temporum ratione*, where we find two references to the Pantheon, both of them giving an explicit explanation of its name. In the first passage Bede explains how the Pantheon was considered originally *omnium deorum . . . habitaculum* 'the dwelling-place . . . of all the gods' (1977, 499). In the second it is again connected with Pope Boniface IV (Bede 1977, 523):

Idem [Focas] alio papa Bonifatio petente iussit in veteri fano, quod Pantheum vocabatur, ablatiis idolatriae sordibus ecclesiam beatae semper virginis Mariae et omnium martyrum fieri, ut, ubi quondam omnium non deorum, sed daemoniorum cultus agebatur, ibi deinceps omnium fieret memoria sanctorum.

This same [Focas], responding to another request of Pope Boniface, ordered that, after all the filth of idolatry had been removed, a church should be founded in the ancient temple which was called Pantheon, in honour of the blessed and ever-virgin Mary and of all the martyrs, so that the memory of all the saints would be kept from then on in that same place, where once the cult not of all the gods, but of all the demons was practised.

Interestingly, the same passage is used in *Veraldar saga*, where it is stressed that the new name of the church is in honour of Mary and *allra heilagra* (1977, 66 l. 16–67 l. 3):

Focas var kei(sari) viii. ár. hann gaf Bonifacio pafa blothus þat er Pantheon het. hann rensadi þat af blotvm ok gerdi at Mariv kirkiv ok allra heilagra. þáþan af hofz allra heilagra messo halld.

Focas was emperor for eight years. He gave to Boniface a heathen temple, which was called Pantheon. He cleansed it of idols and turned it into the church of Mary and of all the saints. From this arose the observance of the feast of All Saints.

Nikulás adds that the Pantheon is *opin ofan sem Pulkro kirkia i Hierusalem* ‘open on top like the Church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem’ (18 ll. 14–15). This reference to the dome’s opening is usual in the *Indulgentiae*: *Habet in medio centri in cacumine aperturam rotundam magnam, nec habet aliam fenestram* ‘It has a round opening in the middle of the top and has no other window’ (VZ, IV 82).

The Catacombs

The next item of the itinerary after the Pantheon, namely the church of St Paul, is to the west outside the city: *Vestr fra borg[inni] er Pals kirkia, þar er munclifi ok borg um utan, er gengr or Rom[m]a. Þar er stadr sa, er heitir catacumbas* ‘To the west outside the city is the church of Paul. There is a monastery there, and round about it a suburb that extends out from Rome. The place called *catacumbas* is there’ (18 ll. 15–17). The *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae* gives the same topographical information, that the church is *ad occidentem* ‘to the west’ (VZ, II 89). The phrase *stadr sa, er heitir catacumbas* is clearly a translation of the common Latin formula *in loco qui dicitur catacumbas* (Werlauff 1821, 46; Magoun 1940, 284–85). Kristian Kålund observes that Nikulás is referring here to the catacombs nearby on the Via Appia, where there was a locality once called *ad catacumbas*, the ancient name for the underground cemetery of the church of St Sebastian (1913, 77). In the *Acta Sancti Sebastiani*, of uncertain authorship, it is, in fact, narrated how Diocletian ordered that St Sebastian be beaten to death and his body thrown in the Cloaca

Maxima, so that the Christians would not worship him as a martyr. After his death, however, St Sebastian appeared in a dream to Lucina indicating where she could find his body and asking her to bury it *ad catacumbas*, close to the relics of the Apostles (Mombritius 1978, II 476 ll. 41–43):

In cloaca illa quæ est iuxta circum inuenies corpus meum pendens in gunfo.
Hoc itaque dum tu leuaueris perduces ad catacumbas: et sepelies me in initio
criptæ iuxta uestigia apostolorum.

In that sewer which is beside the circus, you will find my body hanging from a hook. After you have lifted it down from that, bring it to the catacombs, and bury me just inside the crypt, beside the remains of the Apostles.

Bede reports the same version of the story in his *Martyrologium* (PL, XCIV 817–18) but he also refers briefly to the catacombs in two passages of *De temporum ratione*. In the first he narrates how Pope Cornelius (251–53), since he was asked by Lucina to do so, removed the body of the Apostle Paul *de catacumbas* ‘from the catacombs’, and put it on the via Ostiense (Bede 1977, 505); in the second it is reported that Pope Damasus (366–84) decorated the basilica *in catacumbas* (Bede 1977, 511), that is, the church of St Sebastian. The source for both passages is, again, the *LibPon* (150, 212).

In *Sebastianus saga*, an adaptation of the *Acta* quoted above, St Sebastian says to Lucina (*HMS*, II 234 l. 36–35 l. 3):

Leitadu líks mins, ok muntu finna þat hanga a staur i gang nockurum, ok hefir
þat eigi nidr fallit i saur; þat skalltu færa i stad þann, er Catacumbas heitir, ok
grafa hia fotum Petri ok Pauli guds postola.

Search for my body, and you will find it hanging from a stake in a certain passage, and it has not fallen down in the dirt; you shall bring it to the place which is called *catacumbas*, and bury it at the feet of Peter and Paul the Apostles of God.

The wording *i stad þann, er Catacumbas heitir*, is very close to that of *Leiðarvísir* (*Par er stadr sa, er heitir catacumbas*). This passage of *Sebastianus saga* reinforces the identification of the locality in Nikulás’s itinerary with the catacombs on the Via Appia, as already proposed by Kålund, but it should also induce us to consider that Nikulás again used a written Latin source, probably close to that of *Sebastianus saga*, to enrich his description of Rome.

The Tiber

After writing of St Paul’s and the catacombs, Nikulás observes that all parts of the city described so far are ‘beyond the Tiber’: *Petta er alt fyrir*

utan Tifr, hon fellr i gegnum borgina Roma, hon hét fordum A[lbul]a ‘All this is beyond the Tiber. It flows through the city of Rome and it was formerly called Albula’ (18 ll. 18–19). The Icelandic *fyrir utan Tifr* is formed from the Latin *Transtiberim*, a very common expression which also appears at the beginning and end of the *Mirabilia* (VZ, III 17, 64). Nikulás then gives the ancient name of the river. Although Kålund completes the manuscript lacuna as *Albana* (18 l. 19; 1913, 77), Magoun’s reading *Albula* must be the correct interpretation. Magoun argues that this name, attested in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (VIII. 332) and in Ovid’s *Fasti* (II. 389; IV. 65; V. 645) and *Metamorphoses* (XIV. 324), would have been known to Nikulás from either of these sources or communicated to him in Rome (1940, 285). *Albula* is also attested in other classical sources, such as Livy’s *Ab urbe condita* (I 3, 5) and in Plinius Maior’s *Naturalis Historia* (III 5, 9). The old name of the Tiber is, however, present in several medieval sources with which the Icelandic Benedictine world could have been familiar. Significantly, we find it again in Bede’s world chronicle at the end of *De temporum ratione*: *Tyberinus Sylvius annis VIII, a quo et fluvijs appellatus est Tyberis, qui prius Albula dicebatur* ‘Tyberinus Sylvius reigned eight years. And the River Tiber, which was once called Albula, gets its name from him’ (1977, 477). The sentence *hon hét fordum A[lbul]a*, found in *Leiðarvísir*, is very close to the Latin relative clause *qui prius Albula dicebatur*.

Conclusions and Connections

From this analysis of the descriptions of four important sites included in *Leiðarvísir* we can conclude that its quality and nature are not fully accounted for by the traditional, and limiting, reading of it as a journal based on the direct and intimate experiences of an individual (Magoun 1940, 267). These parts of the Roman itinerary of Nikulás of Munkaþverá appear instead to be elaborate and erudite texts, composed with material chosen from written sources available in Iceland at the time, which contained important topographical and historical information on the city of Rome. The use of Latin and particular Icelandic terms interpreting Latin, as well as the correspondences between *Leiðarvísir* and sources on Rome, strongly suggests a reliance on these texts.

On the basis of the correspondences identified in the present analysis, we can attempt to identify and group together the possible written sources on which Nikulás might have based these descriptions. In the first place, Bede’s world chronicle in *De temporum ratione* seems to have played an important role in the composition of the Roman section of *Leiðarvísir*,

as it did for *Veraldar saga*. Nikulás seems to have made use of *De temporum ratione* especially when narrating the story of St Agnes and her basilica, when referring to the Pantheon as the ‘church of All Saints’ and when mentioning the ancient name of the Tiber. Further evidence from Bede’s work of the familiarity of the Icelandic Benedictine world with textual material on Rome is that the world chronicle in *De temporum ratione* is also used in the Icelandic version of the *Vita sancti Sylvestri* to recall the importance of the building activity of Constantine in Rome, and that the corresponding passage is also present in *Veraldar saga*, showing interesting parallels with the story of St Agnes narrated in *Leiðarvísir*. The insertion in *Veraldar saga* of a reference to the ‘throne of the pope’ in St John Lateran, which is present in Nikulás but not in Bede, shows a remarkable correspondence between *Leiðarvísir* and *Veraldar saga*, and might be taken as evidence for the existence of a written source common to these two texts.

Secondly, Nikulás appears to have made use of the *Vitae Sanctorum*, which was an obvious source for those who wanted to describe the holy places in Rome where saints had been martyred. There is a probable reference in *Leiðarvísir* to the *Vita Sancti Sebastiani* when Nikulás mentions the catacombs on the Via Appia, and there are remarkable analogies with the *Vita Sanctae Agnetis* and the *Vita Sancti Sylvestri* in the passage of *Leiðarvísir* about Sant’ Agnese. The analogies between the Icelandic versions of these *Vitae* and Nikulás’s itinerary reinforce the likelihood that he too was making use of a Latin model when he inserted the description of Sant’ Agnese in his text. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that Nikulás reports the legend of the foundation of the Constantinian Basilica of Sant’ Agnese, which at the time of his journey had been in ruins for centuries.

Medieval descriptions of Rome are a third group of possible written sources which Nikulás might have used for his Roman itinerary. It is difficult to determine specifically which of the texts belonging to this third group were used in the Roman section of *Leiðarvísir*, mainly because our knowledge of the availability in Iceland of the ‘medieval guides’ to Rome is still inadequate. The diffusion of these texts in the Benedictine world, to which several of the authors or compilers of these guides and descriptions of Rome belonged, makes it credible that some of these could have been available to Abbot Nikulás. Directions and distances within Rome can be found in several well known sources with a large manuscript tradition, as, for instance, in the *Notitia ecclesiarum urbis Romae*.

I have cited a variety of sources on Rome in my analysis. Some of them, in fact, like the *Stationes ecclesiarum*, the *Indulgentiae* and the *Mirabilia* already appear together in manuscripts in the second half of the twelfth century, as is the case with MS BL Cotton. Faustina B.VII (see p. 47 above). Both the extent of the diffusion of these works and the frequency of their inclusion in a single manuscript emerge clearly from the catalogue of the Latin manuscripts containing the *Mirabilia*, *Stationes* and *Indulgentiae* provided by Miedema (1996, 24–95). This means that Abbot Nikulás could conceivably have drawn from several sources, even with relatively few books to hand, with the purpose of composing a rich and accurate account of the city of Rome, in which the levels of topography, history and literary tradition are closely intertwined.

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A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF GREENLAND

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1. Introduction

THE TEXT TRANSLATED HERE is a report, written (or possibly dictated to a scribe) in the mid-fourteenth century, by the Norwegian priest Ívarr Bárðarson. It begins with sailing directions to Greenland from Norway and Iceland; it lists the fjords of Greenland's southern Norse settlement, the farms, churches, land ownership, and hunting rights; it also includes some general comments on plants, animals and minerals. In addition, it describes a voyage from the southern to the northern of Greenland's two Norse settlements, the latter by then found to be deserted.

Acting as the bishop of Greenland's spiritual or administrative representative, or possibly both, Ívarr spent about twenty years in Greenland. He wrote this report on his return to Norway, presumably either on the expectation or on the specific request of a bishop (either Hákon of Bergen, or Jón of Greenland, who never visited his see; see Section 5).

This translation is based on a compilation from a number of manuscripts published in 1930 by the Icelandic philologist Finnur Jónsson under the ambiguous Danish title *Det gamle Grönlands beskrivelse* 'The old description of Greenland' or 'The description of old Greenland'. Here it will be referred to as the Description.

Few historical facts are known about the Norse colonisation of Greenland, so this document is very valuable as our main source of information. It seems that the only previous English translation was published in 1625, and rendered indirectly, probably via German and Dutch. It is therefore surely time for a new and direct translation.

2. Background: The Norse Colony in Greenland

During the past century, archaeologists have confirmed that a Norse settlement was founded in medieval Greenland about a thousand years ago (most recently and most accurately Arneborg et al. 1999 and 2002). Several hundred farms were established, more than a dozen churches were built, and there was a bishop's seat with a cathedral and a large and prosperous farm. The remains of a building complex have also been found at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, with artifacts that clearly

identify the site as Norse. So we know that Norse colonists settled in Greenland, and possibly also established a settlement in the New World (Ingstad 1977). For further information we must turn to medieval sources, mainly Scandinavian, in which there are a number of references to the discovery, exploration and colonisation (or attempted colonisation) of Greenland and North America, and to events that took place there.

The first known reference to Greenland is in a letter from Pope Leo IX to Adalbert, bishop of Bremen and Hamburg, dated 6th January 1053, relating to the conversion of the Scandinavian countries (Grønlie 2006, 22, note 53; *DI* I, 18). Adam of Bremen, writing in the eleventh century, appeared to think that Greenlanders were so called because they had pale green skin coloured by the surrounding seawater (Ólafur Halldórsson 1978, xi; Adam of Bremen 2002, 218).

According to *Eiríks saga rauða*, a Norwegian, Eiríkr rauði (the Red), having been banished for killings, first from Norway, then from Iceland, sailed to Greenland and spent three years exploring the country from about 980 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 193–237; trans. Kunz 1997). During this time he seems to have made an astonishingly detailed survey of the west coast. Both this saga (ch. 2) and *Íslendingabók* (ch. 6; Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 13; trans. Grønlie 2006, 7) mention that he named the country *Grænland* in the hope that a good name would attract settlers (*grænn* was used to mean ‘good’ or ‘hopeful’ as well as the colour green (Cleasby et al. 1957, 218)). In fact, much of the southwest coast of Greenland would have appeared at least as green from an approaching ship as many parts of the Icelandic coast.

Landnámabók states that Eiríkr led a fleet of twenty-five ships, of which fourteen reached Greenland, and of those remaining, some were driven back, some lost (Jakob Benediktsson 1986, 132). Both this source and *Íslendingabók* place the date at ‘fifteen years before the conversion (of Iceland)’, i.e. 984 or 985; advanced radiocarbon dating techniques confirm this date to within ± 15 years (Arneborg et al. 1999 and 2002). The first colonists probably numbered several hundred; at its peak the colony built up to between two and six thousand people (estimates vary: Guðmundur Guðmundsson 2005, Pringle 1997, 924); they lived by sheep and cattle farming, supplemented by hunting and fishing, much as they had in Iceland.

There were two areas of colonisation: the ‘Western Settlement’, centred around present-day Nuuk, and the ‘Eastern Settlement’, whose centre lay between the present-day towns Qaqortoq and Nanortalik. The settlements might with greater accuracy be described as northern and

southern; there is considerable ambiguity in medieval Norse use of compass points (see Section 7). The ruins generally accepted as those of Eiríkr rauði's farmhouse at Brattahlíð (in the Eastern Settlement) are close to the present-day sheep station of Qassiarsuk.

Both *Eiríks saga rauða* and *Grænlandinga saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 195–269; trans. Kunz 1997), now popularly known as the Vínland sagas, state that within Eiríkr's lifetime, his son Leifr sailed to the New World in the hope of founding a colony in a warmer and more fertile country than Greenland. There are many differences and indeed contradictions between the two sagas, but both agree that colonisation was impossible because of conflict with the natives. If it were not for conflict with these indigenous people, the European colonisation of America might have begun five centuries earlier than it did. Both sagas also name Vínland, an area in North America as yet unidentified, as the home of wild grapes. Some scholars, notably Helge Ingstad, who discovered the Norse settlement in Newfoundland, have claimed that the name should be Vinland (with short i), denoting pasture land (see Perkins 2004 for a thorough analysis of the Vínland sagas). But Wineland the Good has gripped the imagination of Scandinavians, especially Icelanders, for a thousand years.

The Vínland sagas describe several events, notably the rising of a newly-dead corpse to speak, and the appearance of a one-legged creature, a uniped or *einþættingr*, which most modern readers would dismiss as superstition or fantasy. A more mundane viewpoint might be that death is not always easy to recognise (the mirror in *King Lear* comes to mind); and that the writer could not resist showing off his erudition by introducing the Uniped, a staple of the medieval genre of travel writing. But superstition was probably very real to people of that time, pragmatists as they were in so many ways. And their realistic descriptions of the American coast make it very difficult to deny that the sagas probably contain a considerable kernel of truth.

Conflict, or at least tension, between Norsemen and natives may also have occurred in Greenland; the Inuit, like the native Americans, were known as *Skrælingjar*, probably a derogatory term (Section 9, note to line 125). The Inuit, although perhaps not numerous in that harsh terrain, were better adapted and probably more numerous than the Norse; so some accommodation may have been reached with them, although they have never appeared to be warlike in temperament.

By the mid-1360s the Western Settlement, according to Ívarr, had been abandoned, leaving behind 'neither Christian nor heathen', only farm animals to run wild. (This surely suggests that the abandonment

had been recent; cattle would have been lucky to survive a winter in the wild.) The Eastern Settlement, however, appears to have flourished for about another century. We know of a wedding that took place there on 16th September 1408 at Hvalsey Church between Þorsteinn Ólafsson, Greenlander, and Sigríður Björnsdóttir from Akrrar at Blönduhlíð, Skagafjörður in Iceland; this suggests significant prosperity (*DI I*, No. 632). The last letter known to have been delivered from Greenland before a communication gap of more than three centuries, and dated 19th April 1409, relates to this wedding, and is an affirmation by two priests, Eindriði Andrésson and Páll Hallvarðsson, that the banns had been called and witnessed on three successive Sundays (*DI I*, No. 597).

We then have few further reports about Greenland. They include accounts of a visit to the south of the country in 1578 by the English explorer Martin Frobisher, who did not land (Mills 2003, 247–50); that of John Davis in 1585 whose musicians entertained the natives (Mills 2003, 174–78) and that recorded by a Dane, Björn Jonssen, of an Ice-lander known as Jón Grænlendr, storm-driven aboard a German trader onto the Greenland coast, finding on an island in a fjord the corpse of a man, lying face downward in well-made clothes, with a much-sharpened knife (*GHM III*, 514). The dead man may have been the last of the Greenland Norsemen, but was more probably just the last victim of a local famine, disease or dispute. There appear to be no further useful records between then and the arrival there in 1721 of Hans Egede, the Danish-Norwegian missionary; he found only Inuit people who seemed to have inherited no historically reliable recollections of the Norse colonists (*Meddelelser om Grønland* 1925, 3).

Within the last decade or so, research has shown that in some abandoned farms, the remains of flies show that the inhabitants may have died of starvation in their bedrooms. These are isolated sites; this translator suggests that they should not be taken as evidence that the colonies as a whole died out because of starvation (Buckland et al. 1996; Barlow et al. 1997).

Archaeological investigations at the bishop's farm at Garðar show that the intensive manuring and irrigation which account for the farm's considerable prosperity ended suddenly at some time between 1290 and 1400 (Buckland et al. 2008). Given that the last known communication from the Eastern Settlement was dated 1409 and indicated prosperity at that time, again there is a suggestion of an abrupt end to the colony. Of course, it sheds no light on whether this is due to starvation or emigration. The exact circumstances surrounding the extinction of the colony may never be known, but a number of reasons have been suggested for it:

1. Deteriorating climate, with a 'Little Ice Age' beginning in about 1300, and a twenty-year cold snap leading to abandonment of the Western Settlement in about 1350.
2. A social structure which perpetuated a farming economy unsuited to the terrain.
3. Damage to the local vegetation by farm animals, resulting in widespread soil erosion.
4. Religious prejudice which prevented the colonists from adopting Inuit hunting methods.
5. Conflict with the Inuit leading to the sacking of settlements, or epidemics introduced by traders.
6. Disastrous raids by European pirates.
7. Abandonment by the mother country as produce from Greenland became less valuable abroad.

Most writers tend to favour a single cause, and there appear to be conflicting views; if we accept a combination of causes then the apparent conflict largely disappears. Let us consider the above seven points.

1. It is true that the climate became colder (Pringle 1997), and that twenty years of cool summers may have made life especially difficult in the Western Settlement. It seems unlikely, however, that everyone there would have simply accepted starvation without sending an expedition south to ask for help or shelter; yet Ívarr's expedition seems to have been completely taken aback to find the Western Settlement abandoned.
2. It may be that Greenland, like Iceland, was ruled by chieftains (of whom Eiríkr would have been the first), who needed supporters, in the form of farmers dependent for land or stock, to help them protect their wealth. Dairy farming carried a prestige that sheep farming lacked (Orri Vésteinsson et al. 2002, 4), and it was probably important for chieftains to impress both their friends and their enemies; but would an entire community have allowed itself to perish in the pursuit of prestige?
3. Great damage was undoubtedly caused to the local vegetation by farm animals, especially pigs in the early days of settlement, and also by caprines (Orri Vésteinsson et al. 2002, 4). In some parts of Iceland, for example, 40% of topsoil has been lost. In addition, iron-smelting must have depleted the sparse woodland (Ingstad 1966, 70), if indeed it was possible at all on any useful scale.
4. The Greenlanders were undoubtedly devout Christians; by Ívarr's time they had allowed the church to take over almost all of the farmland

and hunting and fishing areas in the country. (Eiríkr rauði had no love of the church, and one can imagine him turning in his grave at the thought of its owning Brattahlíð.) But that they should cast aside all common sense and refuse on principle to learn from the Inuit is surely not credible. An oft-quoted passage in *Egils saga* (e.g. Orri Vésteinsson et al. 2002) describes how Egill's father Skallagrímr founded a farm and exploited all possible sources of income so that his living 'stood on many footings' (*Stóð þá á mǫrgum fótum fjárafli Skalla-Gríms*; Nordal 1933, 49; trans. Scudder 1997, 50). Doubtless more is sometimes read into it than the author intended; he simply appears to be noting with approval that Skallagrímr was a resourceful and pragmatic man who was ready to exploit to the full any opportunity that life offered—a description of any successful Norse settler.

Recently, advanced carbon-dating techniques on human and animal remains in Greenland have shown that over their five centuries on the island, the colonists adapted their diet from 80% terrestrial, 20% marine to the exact opposite—80% marine, 20% terrestrial (Arneborg et al. 1999 and 2002). So they were evidently prepared to learn, whether from the Inuit or from their own experience. And it is clear that those in the Western Settlement did not starve to death, given that Ívarr and his companions found large numbers of farm animals running wild there.

5. If the Inuit had sacked the Western Settlement, as Ívarr apparently expected to find, they would have taken the farm animals, and he would have found the bodies of at least some of the inhabitants, as he would also have done if they had been the victims of an epidemic. His account gives every impression of bewilderment at what he found.

6. Hans Egede's son Niels wrote in his diary a story told to him by an Inuit *angakok* (shaman) describing an attack by pirates which left a settlement deserted (Krogh 1967, 122). Helge Ingstad draws attention to a letter from Pope Nicholas V in 1448 to the bishops of Iceland describing how a fleet of pirate ships had attacked the Greenlanders, captured a number of them and destroyed many churches (Ingstad 1966, 326; *DN* VI, No. 527).

7. It is certainly true that voyages to Greenland gradually ceased, and that as far as we know, no ship landed there between 1410 and 1721. The availability of elephant ivory in Europe would have rendered walrus ivory much less valuable. Luxuries from the mainland would no doubt have been sadly missed, but the settlers could smelt iron (although scarcity of suitable fuel may have made it a rare commodity) and therefore could have survived in isolation.

In summary, the Greenlanders' life was a hard one, and may have further deteriorated due to a number of different causes as time passed. If conditions had become intolerable, could they, or at least a substantial number of them, have left Greenland?

The obvious answer is that they could if they had ships. With only driftwood, plus the scant tree growth in Greenland (section 9, 64; probably even more scant after more than three centuries' depredation by the settlers and their animals), there is no possibility that they could have built or even maintained seagoing vessels. They could have imported sufficient timber from Norway to build small boats for fishing and for crossing fjords, but scarcely in the quantities needed for shipbuilding. It seems unlikely that they would have had the wealth needed to commission ships to be built in (say) Bergen and sailed to Greenland. However, according to *Grœnlendinga saga* (Ch. 2), the first voyage that they made to Markland (probably Newfoundland or Labrador) took place during Eiríkr rauði's lifetime, and there is some evidence that this traffic was maintained. The Greenlanders must have been well aware of the fragility of their links with Iceland and Norway, and may have realised that the unlimited timber of Markland (plus their own ability to smelt iron and therefore make ships' nails and other fittings) would enable them to maintain their own fleet. A community of perhaps 5,000 people would surely have been able to preserve a link vital to their own existence, subject to anything less than a disastrous number of shipwrecks.

The Description itself says of Ívarr's return from the Western Settlement (section 8, 98–99) that 'They took of these (farm animals) as many as the ship would hold, and sailed home; and Ívarr was with them.' It seems that Ívarr and his expedition made the journey in a ship of reasonable size, if it could carry a number of farm animals as well as a body of men deemed large enough to defend the settlement.

Documents cited by Helge Ingstad also suggest that in Bergen, the mainland port most closely associated with Greenland, many items of cargo generally believed to be of Greenlandic origin had actually been imported by the settlers from Newfoundland or Labrador. In particular, the Danish zoologist Herluf Winge quotes from records collected by Archbishop Erik Walkendorff of Bergen around 1516. Recorded as extant in Greenland are elk, lynx, wolverine, wolf, brown bear and otter (*Meddelelser om Grønland* XXI, 322). Of course, none of these animals exists in Greenland, but they are all native to North America. As Ingstad points out, officials recording cargo landed in Bergen were not likely to have been concerned about exactly where it came from.

3. Preservation of the Text

The original text of the Description was probably written down in the late 1360s in Norway, soon after the author's return from Greenland where he had spent the best part of twenty years. Ívarr had previously held a clerical appointment in Bergen, so he probably wrote or dictated in the mid-fourteenth-century Norwegian of that area, perhaps influenced by his long exposure to the possibly more archaic dialect of Greenland.

The earliest known version of the text that has been preserved is a Danish translation dating from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. All of the known manuscripts were compared by Finnur Jónsson, who compiled his best estimate of the original text, which he published with his own notes in Danish in 1930 as *Det gamle Grønlands beskrivelse* (= *DGB*). It is on this text of Finnur's that this translation is based. The accompanying notes also owe much to Finnur's own notes. He describes the manuscripts as follows (see Kålund 1889–94, 197):

AM 777c 4to is a good copy, probably from the seventeenth century, consistent and with good spelling, where names are not as much mishandled as in others. It was purchased by Árni Magnússon in a Rostgaard auction, and it was used as the basis of Finnur's text.

AM 777a 4to is the only complete and accurate copy, more recent than 777c. The title can be translated as 'A short description of Greenland. On sailing and on a description of the country.' This manuscript belonged to Þormóður Torfason; he gave it to Árni, who was his guest in October 1712.

AM 777b 4to is a curious manuscript, perhaps the oldest of all. There is severe confusion, as if pages have been switched, but it alone has the correct Danish spelling Bardersen.

Finnur goes on to list a number of other manuscripts of which he makes more limited use, including AM 777d 4to, a copy of 777a, with small corrections by Árni himself. He also lists later translations into Danish as well as German, Dutch, Latin and English. The English translation was included in a series of twenty volumes published for the editor Samuel Purchas in 1625 under the title *Hakluytus posthumus, or, Purchas his pilgrimes: contayning a history of the world in sea voyages and lande travells by Englishmen and others* (Purchas 1905–07, XIII 163–68). According to Purchas, the text was 'translated out of the norsh language' into High Dutch in 1560, and then into Low Dutch by William Barentson of Amsterdam, chief pilot, and finally into English by William Stere, merchant. Finnur interprets 'High Dutch' as High German (*Hochdeutsch*), and 'Low Dutch' as Dutch.

4. Content

The author begins with directions for sailing to Greenland from Norway, with or without landing in Iceland, and rounding the southern tip of Greenland to reach the easternmost settlements. He then lists the fjords of the Eastern Settlement, and the farmhouse and land ownership around each of them. Almost all property appears to belong either to the local church or to the cathedral; sometimes ownership is split equally. The farmhouse at Brattahlíð, probably the successor on the site to the original farmhouse of Eirík the Red, is now occupied by the lawman, the importance of whose office would seem gradually to have been overtaken by that of the bishop's (*Grænlandinga þátr*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 273–92, trans. Krogh 1967, 167).

It was the lawman who asked Ívarr to lead an expedition to the Western settlement to drive out the original Greenland natives, who, it seems, were believed to have invaded the colony. When the expedition arrived, they found no human occupants, 'Christian or heathen', only farm animals that had run wild.

Ívarr mentions several unmistakable landmarks; a large lake, an island with a hot spring, and the cathedral. He describes the wildlife which was of trading value to the inhabitants: polar bears, falcons, walrus and fish. He mentions minerals: soapstone, used for cooking and storage vessels, and silver ore. He also mentions a 'forest', and crops: grass, wheat and edible fruits as large as apples. These latter are the only completely incredible items in his account (see Section 9, notes to lines 138–47).

The document ends with a summary 'All of this described is told to us by Ívarr Bárðarson . . .' which leads some scholars, including Finnur, to suggest that the use of the third person indicates dictation to a scribe.

5. The Author and his Mission

The earliest known reference to Ívarr Bárðarson is a letter of recommendation, dated 8th August 1341, written by Bishop Hákon in Bergen, intended as a passport (*DN V*, no. 152). This letter bade men help *Ivarus Barderi* on his passage as 'priest of our diocese' on 'the bishop's and the church's business over the wide and stormy sea'. Presumably Ívarr sailed to Greenland as soon as possible after the issue of the bishop's letter, in 1341 or soon after, depending on weather conditions and trading voyages from Bergen. He seems to have stayed in Greenland for about twenty years.

He returned to Norway, probably between the appointment of the new bishop in 1365 and his arrival in Greenland in 1368, and presumably wrote or dictated his Description soon afterwards. He describes himself as

‘Greenlander’, an epithet that his twenty-odd years’ stay may well have earned him on his return. He also describes himself as having been director or steward of the bishop’s estate or court at Garðar. Since the bishop’s seat included a large and prosperous farm, his remit could presumably have ranged from managing the farm to undertaking the bishop’s clerical duties in his absence.

There were probably twenty-nine bishops of Greenland (*DN* XVIII, 283–86) between 1112 and 1537, most of whom actually went there; the last recorded as visiting the country is Anders who travelled there in 1406. It was thought in Norway that Árni, the Greenland bishop appointed in 1314, had died, and so a new bishop, Jón Eiríksson skalli (the Bald), was appointed in 1343 by Archbishop Páll in Niðarós. Whether this misapprehension was due to some convincing rumour we do not know; nor do we know whether it prompted Ívarr’s mission. It would seem strange to appoint a new bishop soon after sending Ívarr, without awaiting his news. We do not know what news (official or unofficial) Ívarr sent and received during his long stay in Greenland, but sailings from Norway were probably common at the time. It is recorded that Bishop Jón never visited Greenland, although most of his predecessors and many of his successors did so. It is difficult to see how his appointment benefited either the Greenlanders or the church. The arrival in Norway of the Black Death in 1350 and its recurrences in 1361–63 (*Brit*, s.v. *Black Death*) may have impeded any later plans he had to go there, but did not prevent his successor Álfr from sailing to Greenland in 1368. Records indicate that in fact Árni probably lived until about 1349, spending his last year in the Faroes. It is possible, then, that Ívarr assumed stewardship of the diocese from this time onwards, relinquishing it when Álfr arrived in 1368. This would explain why he returned to Norway; if he had been employed solely as farm manager, he would presumably have stayed on.

A letter dated 25th June 1364 names Ivarus Bardenij as ‘priest of the twelve apostles in Bergen’. Whether this is the same Ívarr is uncertain; the name cannot have been uncommon (see *DN* IV, no. 442). If so, then Ívarr may not have stayed in Greenland until the arrival of bishop Álfr in 1368; this adds further uncertainty as to the terms of his appointment.

Our knowledge of Ívarr Bárðarson is therefore far from complete. He was Norwegian, a priest, probably from Bergen or nearby. He probably sailed to Greenland in 1341 or soon after. He may have been appointed manager of the bishop’s large farm, or steward of the bishopric, or both. He probably returned from Greenland between 1364 and 1368, and may have been appointed ‘canon of the twelve apostles’ at Bergen in 1364.

6. Value as an Historical Document

Ívarr's Description of Greenland gives every impression of having been written as a factual report, with the exception of two passages. At the beginning, as previously noted, the sailing directions to Greenland are evidently partly based on *Landnámabók* or a common source, and at the end the description of exotic fruits and cereals is clearly pure fantasy. In between, the writing appears realistic and to the point.

What could have compromised its accuracy? There would appear to be three possibilities:

1. We have no reason to suppose that Ívarr was other than an honest man. But he may, consciously or subconsciously, have wished to please his audience, who probably included bishops Hákon of Bergen, Jón of Garðar and archbishop Páll of Niðarós. His report mentions nothing of which they could disapprove, but there is, of course, no means of checking for discreet omissions.

2. The author's accuracy of recollection seems not to have been perfect. The description of the fjords of the Eastern Settlement appears to be mostly correct, but slightly incomplete, and with several errors that would scarcely concern the bishops, who had almost certainly never been there. As a bishop's representative, Ívarr would have had to travel around the diocese (at least to judge by the lives of other bishops such as Guðmundr of Hólar in Iceland). But reasonable familiarity does not necessarily imply precise geographical recollection. On pages 92–94, Map 1 shows Old Norse fjord names as they might be deduced from the Description, Map 2 as many modern scholars identify them (Finnur Jónsson 1930, maps; Helge Ingstad 1966, 48–49; Ólafur Halldórsson 1978, maps). Map 3 shows the modern Greenlandic names (see *Atlas*). Ívarr's most surprising error is his misplacing of the hot spring, correctly shown on Maps 2 and 3 (*Vandrekort Sydgrønland*).

3. Given that the text has been translated at least once, and probably copied several times, we cannot rule out scribal errors or embellishment. The sailing directions are partly based on *Landnámabók* or a common source; a priest who had made one return journey to Greenland would scarcely be familiar with a range of sailing routes unless the subject were of special interest to him. It seems probable that this information was added by a later scribe. The same applies to comments about crops, such as 'the best wheat imaginable' and 'fruit as big as apples, and good to eat'. Certainly a cereal, possibly barley, has been grown in Greenland in modern times (Krogh 1967, 75), but the

growing there of apple-like fruits is quite beyond imagination (Section 9, notes to line 147).

All in all, there seems to be no reason to doubt that the text available to us was originally intended by Ívarr as an accurate description of fourteenth-century Greenland.

7. Note on the Translation

The intention has been to preserve the meaning of the original text while rendering it into everyday English. Placenames have been left in their original (and sometimes erratic) spelling, with the exception of well-known names such as Greenland and Bergen.

In the commentary that follows (Section 9), Finnur Jónsson's reconstructions of the original Norse names are given, with English translations, and modern Greenlandic equivalents where these are known.

The commentary also provides information on any topics mentioned in the text which may not be well known, e.g. soapstone, white falcons.

8. Translation

A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF GREENLAND

Ívarr Bárðarson (Ivar Bårdssön)

Knowledgeable men who are born in Greenland, and who later travel abroad, say that from Stad in western Norway it is seven days' sailing due west to Horns in south-east Iceland.

From Sneffelznes in Iceland, which is closest to Greenland, it is two days' and two nights' sailing west to Greenland, and Gunbiernerskier lies right on the course between Greenland and Iceland. That was true of sailing in the old days, but now ice from the far north comes so near to Gunbiernerskier that no one can sail the old course after the arrival of the sea ice without risk to his life.

From Langeland at the furthest north-east of Iceland near Horns it is two days' and nights' sailing to Sualberde in the far north.

Those who wish to sail from Bergen directly to Greenland and not land in Iceland, should sail due west until they come to southern Iceland at Røckesnes; and after twelve more shifts at the oars on this western course they will come under the high land of Greenland, which is called Huarff. A day later they should reach a second high mountain called Huitserck, and between these two mountains, Huarff and Huidserck, is a headland called Herioldzness, and there lies a harbour called Sand, used by Norsemen and merchants.

Sailing from Iceland, one should set out from Sneffellssness which lies
in Iceland a dozen rowing shifts north-west of Røckeness, and sail one 21
day and night south-west to avoid the ice at Gunberneskeere, then a day
and night due north-west, and so arrive at the highland Huarff in Green-
land, which Hærioldznes and Sandhaffn lie under, as already described. 24

Østerbij in Greenland lies a short distance north-east of Herioldsnes
and is called Skagafiort; it is a large settlement.

A long way east of Skagefiord there lies a fjord that is not inhabited, 27
which is called Bærefiord, and further into the fjord is a long reef diffi-
cult to pass, so that no large ships can come in there against the strong
current. When this current runs, there run also countless whales in the 30
fjord, and there is never a lack of fish there; and in the fjord there are
whalers, hunting by common whaling rights but with the bishop's per-
mission; this fjord belongs to the cathedral. In it there is a large pool 33
called Hualshøøl; when the tide goes out, all whalers go to that same
pool.

East from this fjord lies a fjord called Allumlenger; it is narrow at the 36
mouth and much broader inside; it is so long that its end is unknown,
and it is full of small islands; there are many birds and eggs; the land is
flat on both sides, with good grass for as long as men have travelled 39
there.

Further east towards the ice cap lies a harbour called Fimbuder, so-
called because in Saint Óláfr's time a ship was wrecked there which had 42
sailed one day out from Greenland. On this ship was an emissary of Saint
Óláfr, and he drowned there with others; the survivors buried the dead
there, and raised a large stone cross over the graves, which stands there 45
today.

Yet further east towards the ice cap lies a large island, called Kaarsøø.
Here there are usually hunters looking for polar bears; they must have 48
the bishop's permission as the game belongs to the cathedral. There is
nothing further east that can be seen except snow and ice on both land
and water. 51

To return to the matter of the settlements in Greenland, we have men-
tioned that Skagefiord is the southernmost habitation there, south of
Herioldzness. 54

West of Herioldsness lies Kedelsfiord which is fully inhabited; and
on the right side, when one sails into the fjord, there is a large estuary
out of which runs a great river; by it stands a church which is called 57
Aurooskircke, which is dedicated to the Holy Cross; it owns all the land
out to Heriolsness: islands, islets and driftwood right into Petthersvigh.

60 At Petthersvigh is a large farm called Verdzdall; nearby is a large lake,
three miles broad and full of fish. Petthersvigh church owns all of
Verdzdall farm.

63 In from this farm lies a large monastery inhabited by *canonici regulares*,
which is dedicated to Saints Óláfr and Augustine; the monastery owns
all the land on both sides of the bay.

66 Next to Kiedeltzfiord lies Rampnessfiord, and a long way into that
fjord lies a sister monastery dedicated to Saint Benedict; this monastery
owns everything to the end of the fjord and out from Vage church, which
69 is dedicated to Saint Óláfr the king; the church owns all the land to the
end of the fjord on both sides. In the fjord are many islets, and together
with the cathedral, the monastery owns them all. On one of these islands
72 is a very hot spring which in winter is so hot that no one can bathe in it,
but in summer is less hot, so that people may bathe there; and many are
cured and restored to health.

75 Next lies Eijnerfiord, and between it and Rampnessefiord there is a
large farm which belongs to the king; the farm is called Foss, and there
stands also a costly church dedicated to Saint Nicholas, which the king
78 holds to rent. Nearby is a large island with huge fish, and near it a great
lake. When rains come water flows in and out; there are countless fish
lying on the sand.

81 When one sails into Eijnerfiord there lies on the left a bay which
is called Tordzualsviigh, and further into the fjord on the same side is
the little promontory which is called Kleinengh, and further still a bay
84 called Grauevigh. Further still is a large farm called Daler which belongs
to the cathedral, and on the right side, as one sails into the fjord to
the cathedral, which is at the end, there is a large forest that belongs
87 to the cathedral, and that provides all of its income, both large and
small. The cathedral owns all of Eijnersfiord, and also the large island
which lies off the fjord and is called Renøe, so-called because in autumn
90 countless reindeer run there; hunting is by common rights, but not with-
out the bishop's permission. On this island there is the best soapstone,
which in Greenland is of such good quality that it is used to make pots
93 and pans. It is so consistent that fire does not damage it, and it is made
into vessels large enough to hold ten or twelve tuns. Further from land
lies an island called Langhøø, and on this island are eight large farms;
96 the cathedral owns all of the islands except the tenth, which belongs to
Hualzør church.

Next to Eijnerfiord lies Hualtzøør fjord; there is a church called Hualzøør
99 fjord church; all of the fjord belongs to it, and also all of Ramstadefiord

which adjoins it; in this fjord is a large house which belongs to the king and is called Thiødhijllestad.

Next to this lies Erichsfjord, and at the mouth of the fjord lies an island 102 called Henø; it belongs half to the cathedral and half to Dijvrenes church, which has the largest parish of any church in Greenland; this church lies on the left as one enters the fjord. Divreness church owns all of the land 105 to Mitfjord, which branches out to the north-west from Erichsfjord, and further into this fjord lies Solefieldz church. It owns all of Mitfjord. Further into the fjord lies Leijder church; it owns everything to the end 108 of the fjord, also along the other side to Burfeldz; everything out from Burfeldtz belongs to the cathedral. There lies a large farm which is called Brattelede where the Lawman lives at the farmhouse. Now it is said of 111 reaching the islands: that further west from Langøø lie four islands called the Lambøør; between them is Lambøesund; further into Erichsfjord lies another sound called Fossasund. These four islands belong to the cathe- 114 dral. Opposite Fossasund is the mouth of Erichsfjord.

North of Erichsfjord lie two bays called Ijdrevigh and Indrevigh; ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ according to their positions. 117

Further north lies Bredefjord, and off it is Mijouafiord; further north lies Eijnerfiord; then Burgerfiord, then Lodmunderfiord, and next, and west from the Eastern Settlement, lies Isefiord; none of the islands is 120 settled.

From the Østerbijgd to the Vesterbijgd it is twelve shifts of oars; it is completely unpopulated, and in front of Vesterbijgd stands a large church 123 which is called Stensnes Church; this was for a time the cathedral and bishop’s seat. Now the natives have all of the Vesterbijgd. There are many horses, goats, cows and sheep, all wild, and no people, Christian or 126 heathen.

All of this described here is told to us by Ívarr Bárðarson, Greenlander, who was in charge of the bishop’s farm at Garðar in Greenland for many 129 years, and has seen all of this, and was one of those selected by the Lawman to go to Vesterbijgdt among the natives and drive them out. When they came there, they found no one, Christian or heathen, only 132 many wild cattle and sheep. They took of these as many as the ship would hold, and sailed home; and Ívarr was with them.

Further north from the Vesterbijgde lies a large mountain called 135 Hammelradzfeld, and further than this no man may sail who values his life, for there are great waves on all the seas.

In Greenland there is much silver ore, many polar bears with red flecks 138 on their heads, white falcons, whale tusks, walrus hides and all kinds of

fish, more than from any other country; also marble of all colours, fire-
 141 proof soapstone from which the Greenlanders make pots, pans, tubs and
 vessels large enough to hold ten or twelve tuns. There are also many
 reindeer.

144 There are never great storms in Greenland.

Snow comes to Greenland in great quantities; it is not so cold as in
 Iceland or Norway. Fruits grow there in high hills and low valleys, which
 147 are big as apples and good to eat, and the best wheat imaginable also
 grows there.

9. Commentary

The notes are identified by the corresponding line numbers in the translated text. Old Norse placenames are all based on the interpretations of Finnur Jónsson. Where no source is cited, the comment is that of the translator.

Compass points: modern (approximate) directions are quoted here, followed in brackets by the Danish of Finnur's text, with its English equivalent. Use of the four compass points in medieval Scandinavia was very variable, and depended on the location of the user's home, especially before the arrival of the first primitive magnetic compass, the lodestone, in about 1300. Indeed, the archaic use has persisted in Iceland into modern times (Stefán Einarsson 1953).

2 **from Stad:** the text reads *norden aff Stad* 'north from Stad'; *útnorðr* (Cleasby et al.) may mean north-east or simply 'away from the coast'.

Stad: possibly a promontory on the northwest Norwegian mainland, today called Stad or Stadlandet.

3 **west:** *vester* 'west'.

Horns: this placename was introduced following the preposition *til* 'to' which in Old Norse takes the genitive case, requiring a final *s*; this convention was already in decline in seventeenth-century Danish. The translator should therefore have written *Horn*. The location is probably somewhat west of modern Jökulsá í Lón (*DGB*, 33); possibly modern Hornafjörður, just west of Höfn in south-east Iceland.

south-east (*østerst* 'easternmost'): the nearest part of Iceland to west Norway.

4 **Sneffellznes:** ON *Snæfellsnes* (*DGB*, 33). The westernmost point of Iceland.

5 **Gunbiernerskier:** ON *Gunnbjarnarsker* 'Gunnbjörn's Skerries'; they lie somewhere off Greenland's east coast, probably around Amassalik (*DGB*, 33). According to *Eiríks saga rauða*, they were discovered by

Gunnbjörn Úlfsson, who is said to have sailed far west and become the first Scandinavian to be recorded as having sighted Greenland.

10 **Langeness**: ON *Langenes* ‘Long Headland’ (*DGB*, 33); the north-easternmost point of Iceland.

Horns: again ON *Horn*, but the preposition *for* has never taken the genitive (*DGB*, 33). A common name, but there is no modern location called Horn near Langenes.

11 **Sualberde**: ON *Svalbarði* (*DGB*, 33). Modern Norwegian Svalbard. Sailing times quoted suggest somewhere much closer, perhaps Jan Mayen Island (*KL*, s.v. *Opdagelsesrejser*, 2).

13 **west**: *vesther* ‘west’.

14 **Röckesnes**: ON *Reykjanes*, the south-westernmost point of Iceland (*DGB*, 34).

shifts at the oars: the distance that a crew of oarsmen could row at one sitting, or in some cases in one thousand strokes. Danish *uge søs*, ON *vika sjávar*; a medieval Scandinavian measure of distance at sea. As might be expected, it varied widely with the ship, the conditions and (presumably) the fitness of the oarsmen. Estimates vary even more depending on source: 1.5 Danish *mil* ‘leagues’; about 11.3 km (*DGB*, 52); a mile or sea mile (1.6 or 1.9 km; Cleasby et al. 1957, s.v. *vika*). Deduced from many voyage descriptions in Denmark, Norway and Iceland, estimates vary between 7.4 and 14.8 km. An average is around 8.3 km or 4.5 nautical miles (*KL*, s.v. *uge søs*).

western course: *vesterlede* ‘western course’.

15 **Huarff**: ON *Hvarf*. ‘A place where there is a sudden turning, so that what is behind it disappears’; a peak or high rock (*DGB*, 34, 40). The word may be related to ON *hverfa*, to turn or be lost to sight. Possibly Uumannarsuaq, Kap Farvel, Cape Farewell, at the extreme south of Greenland.

16, 17 **Huitserck, Huidserck**: ON *Hvítserkr* ‘white shirt’; probably a realistic name for a mountain whose upper slopes were often or always covered with snow. As a personal name, *Hvítserkr* would have been familiar as that of a son of Ragnarr loðbrók (Hairybreeches).

18 **Herioldzness**: ON *Herjólfssnes* (*DGB*, 34).

Sand: ON *Sandr* ‘Sand’ (*DGB*, 34).

21 **north-west**: *vester* ‘west’.

24 **Sandhaffn**: ON *Sandhǫfn* ‘Sand Harbour’ (*DGB*, 34).

25 **Østerbij**: possibly written in error for *østerst bye* ‘most eastern (probably meaning southern) habitation’ (*DGB*, 53). (See under 122 below).

26, 27 **Skagafiort, Skagefiord**: ON *Skagafjörðr* (*DGB*, 34).

28 **Bærefiord**: ON *Berufjörðr*; *bera* ‘she-bear’ (*DGB*, 34).

- 32 **common rights**: the Danish adjective *allmindeligh* corresponds to ON *almennigr* ‘areas of land or water belonging to “all men”’; the concept was universal in Scandinavia by Ívarr’s time (*KL*, s.v. *Alminding*). Whether common-law rights followed the Norwegian or Icelandic pattern is not known; by then Greenland had been under Norwegian rule for a century. However, the differences are not great. The rights applied to hunting, fishing and gathering of wood and other plant resources on land or water that was not under private ownership. However, Ívarr’s Description suggests that in Greenland the power of the church was so exceptionally great that it owned all of the land that might normally be considered common, and that the bishop’s jurisdiction extended to what in the rest of Scandinavia was regarded as common land or water.
- 34 **Hualshøol**: possibly ON *Hvalshylr* ‘whale-hollow’. ON *hylr* is a deep place in a river or fjord (*DGB*, 53; Cleasby et al., s.v. *hylr*).
- 36 **Allumlenger**: ON *ýllumlengri* ‘longer than all’ (*DGB*, 34). In fact the ‘fjord’ is a channel or strait stretching to the east coast of Greenland and now known as Prins Christian Sund or Ikerasarsuaq.
- 43 **Fimbuder**: ON *Finn(s)búðir* ‘Finnr’s booths’. A *búð* was a stone building without a roof which could be occupied for the duration of a meeting such as a *þing* by covering it with cloth or hides. *Hemings þátr* (in *Flateyjarbók*) throws some light on the original Finn; it describes how during King Haraldr harðráði’s voyage to England with his fleet in 1066 a man came to him who was known as Líka-Loðinn (*lík* is ‘corpse’); he had ferried the corpses of Finn fegin (‘Happy’) and his shipmates from Finnsbúðir south from the glaciers in Greenland on the request of King Óláfr the Saint. Finn was the son of Ketill kálfr (‘Calf’) from Ringnes and of Gunnhildr, Óláfr’s sister (Jensen 1962, cxxx). Finnsbúðir is also mentioned in *Íslenzk annáll* for the year 1189 (*DGB*, 34).
- 47 **Kaarsø**: ON *Krossey* or *Krosseyjar*. Either an island with a cross, or four islands in a cruciform; the location not clear (*DGB*, 35).
- 55, 66 **Kedelsfiord, Kiedeltzfiord**: ON *Ketilsfjörðr* ‘Ketill’s fjord’ (*DGB*, 35).
- 58 **Aurooskircke**: ON *Árósskirkja* ‘River mouth church’ (*DGB*, 35).
- 59 **Petthersvigh**: ON *Pétrsvík* ‘Pétr’s Bay’ (*DGB*, 35).
- 60 **Verzdall**: ON *Vatzdalr*, *Vazdalr*, *Vatnsdalr* ‘Lake Valley’ (*DGB*, 36).
- 63 **canonici regulares**: also known as regular clerics, religious clerics, cleric-canons, Augustinian canons, black canons, or monxcanons; these are an order of clerics living under the teaching of St Augustine, which places them between monks and ‘secular’ clerics (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v.).

66 **Rampnessfiord**: ON *Hrafnsfjörðr* (DGB, 36).

68 **Vage**: ON *Vágakirkja* 'Bay Church' (DGB, 36).

75 **Eijnerfiord**: ON *Einarsfjörðr* (DGB, 36).

76 **Foss**: 'waterfall'.

77 **Saint Nicholas**: almost certainly Nicholas of Myra, known also as Nicholas of Bari. No records exist, but tradition has it that he was bishop of Myra in Lycia, Turkey in the third century. He was credited with miracles during and especially after his lifetime; the first signs of a cult arose in the ninth century. In 1087 his remains were brought by Italian sailors to Bari, and his cult then spread quickly throughout Europe. He became the patron saint of Russia and Greece, and was revered also in Scandinavia. The best-known anecdote about him is that he threw a lump of gold through a window so that the householder could provide a neighbour's daughters with dowries, thus saving them from prostitution. His popularity eventually waned, except in Holland; in the nineteenth century Dutch (and German) emigrants took his cult to New York, leading to his near-worldwide rehabilitation as Santa Claus (KL, s.v. *Nicolaus av Myra*, and Brit, s.v. *Saint Nicholas*). In medieval Iceland alone, fifty-seven churches were dedicated to him, and his life was recorded in *Nicholas saga*, where he is described as archbishop of Myra (Oleson 1957).

82 **Tordzualsvigh**: ON *Þorvaldsvík* (DGB, 36).

83 **Kleinengh**: ON *Klíningr* (DGB, 36). Possibly indicates a sticky clay soil.

84 **Grauevigh**: ON *Grafárvík* (DGB, 36). Possibly named after a deep-cut riverbed.

Daler: ON *Dalr* (sing.) or *Dalir/Dalar* (pl.) 'Valley(s)' (DGB, 36).

86 **a large forest**: Probably an area of tree species such as birch, willow, rowan and dogwood, mostly growing as scrub, mixed with other plants such as willow herb, where animals could have foraged, as indeed they do today. Over the centuries, climatic changes may have altered the distribution of scrubland. Today in south-west Greenland some birches reach 7m in height, so Ívarr's term *skoff* 'forest, woodland' seems a reasonable one for a 'Greenlander' to use (Böcher 1979). Interestingly, the Danish name for the neighbouring fjord Tunulliarfik is Skovfjorden.

89 **Renøe**: ON *Hreinaey* or *Hreiney* 'Reindeer Island' (DGB, 37). Reindeer have existed in Greenland since early Holocene times (i.e. for about ten thousand years), and have been hunted by the Inuit people ever since their own arrival in the country. The animals are excellent swimmers, and local islands would have been easily within their reach. (Bennike et al. 1989, and 'The propagation of reindeer in Greenland').

- 91, 141 **soapstone**: Danish *thiellesteen* or *telligje stien*, ON *talgusteinn*, *telgisteinn*, *telgjestein* ‘stone that can be cut by a knife’ (*DGB*, 54). Soapstone or steatite: a solid form of talc, $3\text{MgO}, 4\text{SiO}_2, \text{H}_2\text{O}$, often with other impurities. This is a soft and extremely workable stone, which, like talc, feels slippery; hence its English name. It is common in Greenland and Norway (*KL*, s.v. *Kleberstein*, and Durrant 1952, 339).
- 94 **tuns**: Danish *tønde*, ON *tunna* ‘tun’. In medieval Denmark, a measure of 200 litres or greater (Hjorth et al., *V*, s.v. *tønde*). The contents alone of such a vessel would weigh more than two tonnes; the vessel would weigh perhaps the same again. It seems unlikely that such vast containers would have been either necessary or convenient, so the definition of *tønde* seems unclear. The largest vessel whose remains have been found (Ingstad 1966, 270) is about 1m in diameter, and presumably might have been about 0.5m deep. This would give it a capacity of about 400 litres, perhaps suitable for storage, but scarcely likely to be placed over a fire to heat the contents.
- 95 **Langhø**: ON *Langey* ‘Long Island’ (*DGB*, 45).
- 98 **Hualzøor fiord**: ON *Hvalseyjarfjörðr*. The fjord encloses an island, which may have acquired its name after a dead or stranded whale (*DGB*, 45). ‘Whale Island Fjord’ is the site of Greenland’s most famous medieval church ruin (Krogh 1967, 98, 99).
- 99 **Ramstade fiord**: possibly ON *Hramnstaðaffjörðr*, not *Hrafnsfjörðr*. Another possibility, perhaps more likely, is *Kambestaðaffjörðr*, now called Kangerluarsuaq (*DGB*, 46). Inland of the fjord’s inner end is a mountain ridge still called Killavaat or Radekammen ‘comb’ (*Atlas*).
- 101 **Thiødhjillestad**: This has long been assumed to be ON *Þjóðhildarstaðir*, from the woman’s name Þjóðhildr. According to *Eiríks saga rauða*, this was the name of Eiríkr’s wife, who, unlike him, was converted to Christianity, and indeed built a little church ‘not too near to the farmhouse’. Perhaps her break with Eiríkr was so complete that she set up a nearby farm of her own (although no such event is mentioned in the saga). More probably, this Þjóðhildr was a later descendant of the family (*DGB*, 46).
- 102 **Erichsfiord**: ON *Eiríksfjörðr* (*DGB*, 46); now called Tunulliarfik or Skovfjorden ‘Woodland Fjord’. (See note under 86 above).
- 103 **Henø**: This is obscure in all the manuscripts, but its position corresponds exactly to Eiríksey in Eir (*DGB*, 46).
- Dijvrenes kircke**: ON *Dýrnes kirkja* (*DGB*, 46). A church presumably named after a promontory where domestic or game animals abounded; probably very close to present-day Narsaq.

- 106 **Mitfiord**: ON *Miðffjörðr* or *Miðfirðir* ‘Mid Fjord(s).’ A north-west branch of Eiríksfjörðr. There are three fjords, Strandafjörðr, Miðfjörðr and Kollufjörðr, now called Tásiasuk, Tasiuarsuk and Kangerdluak. This means that they branch north-westwards south of Dýrneskirkja, into Ísafjörðr, now called Nordre Sermilik, and were collectively known as Miðfirðir (*DGB*, 47).
- 107 **Solefieldz**: ON *Sólarfjöll* or *kirkja undir Sólarfjöllum* ‘Church under Sun Mountains’ (*DGB*, 47).
- 108 **Leijder kircke**: possibly ON *Hlíðar kirkja* or *Brattahlíðar kirkja* (*DGB*, 47). Brattahlíð means ‘steep hill’.
- 109 **Burfeldz**: possibly ON *Búrfell*, where *búr* means ‘food storehouse’ and *fell* ‘mountain’. The final *z*, like the *s* in *Horns*, is derived from the ON genitive (*DGB*, 48).
- 111 **Brattalede**: ON *Brattahlíð* (*DGB*, 62). (See under 107 above.) Brattahlíð is believed to be the farm of Greenland’s first Norse settler, Eiríkr rauði.
- Lawman**: Danish *laugmader*, ON *lögmaðr*. Greenland and Iceland fell under Norwegian rule at almost the same time (1262 and 1264 respectively), about a century before Ívarr’s Description. We have no information on lawmen in Greenland, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that from that time onwards they followed a similar remit to those of Iceland, with the lawman chosen by the general assembly, but whose appointment had to be ratified by the king. It seems therefore probable that Norwegian law prevailed in Greenland by Ívarr’s time, although sparse communications may have made it difficult to impose.
- 112–13 **Langøø, Lambøør, Lambøesund**: ON *Lambeyjar* (*DGB*, 39, 48). These two notes of Finnur’s are inconsistent; the most probable interpretation is as follows. **Langøø**: ‘Long Island’, as above under 95. **Lambøør**: four ‘Lamb Islands’ off Eiríksfjörðr, probably so-called because sheep grazed there. **Lambøesund**: ON *Lambeyjarsund* ‘Lamb Island Sound’.
- 114 **Fossasund**: ‘Strong Current Sound’. According to Finnur, the name is not of Icelandic origin (*DGB*, 39).
- 116 **Ijdrevigh and Indrevigh**: ON *Ytrivík* and *Innrvík* ‘Outer Bay’ and ‘Inner Bay’ (*DGB*, 39).
- 118 **Bredefiord**: ON *Breiðafjörðr* ‘Broad Fjord’ (*DGB*, 39).
Mijouafiord: ON *Mjóvafjörðr* ‘Narrow Fjord’ (*DGB*, 39).
- 119 **Eijnerfiord**: ON *Eyrarfjörðr* ‘Fjord with sandy or gravel beach’ (*DGB*, 39).
Burgerfiord: ON *Borgarfjörðr* ‘Cliff Fjord’ (*DGB*, 39).

- Lodmunderfiord:** ON *Loðmundarfjörðr* 'Lodmundr's Fjord' (*DGB*, 39).
- 120 **Isefiord:** ON *Ísafjörðr* (*DGB*, 39), corresponding to modern Greenlandic Sermilik 'Ice fjord'.
- 122 **Østerbijgd:** ON *Eystribyggð* (*DGB*, maps). (See under 25 above). The Eastern (or more accurately Southern) settlement in Greenland. (See also Map 1.)
- Vesterbijgd, Vesterbijgde:** ON *Vestribyggð* (*DGB*, maps). The Western (or more accurately Northern) settlement in Greenland.
- 124 **Stensnes:** ON *Steinsnes*. Probably a headland on which there was a large rock (*DGB*, 39).
- 125 **natives:** Danish *skrelinge*, ON *skrælingjar*: the original Inuit natives of Greenland; also applied in the *Vínland* sagas to native Americans. The word is probably derogatory, and may be derived from *skrælna* 'to be shrivelled by the sun'. Modern Icelandic *skrælingi* means 'barbarian' (Sverrir Hólmarsson et al., 1989).
- The statement that 'the natives have all of the Vesterbijgd' seems not to imply that they had taken it over, rather that it was abandoned by the Norse, and occupied by no one.
- 136 **Hammelradzfeld:** possibly *Himinhrjóðsfjall* 'Field of Heaven Mountain' (*DGB*, 40).
- 138 **Silver ore:** Finnur Jónsson's text gives *solffbiergh*; a runestone from Bryggen (in Bergen), believed to date from the 1330s, gives *silfrberh*. Jakob Benediktsson et al. (1964) read the runestone's form as ON *silfrberg* 'silver ore' or 'buried silver treasure'. *Silfrberg* is also translated as 'silver ore' in Cleasby et al. 1957. According to *KL* (s.v. *silver*), silver in Scandinavia was mostly imported before the opening of the Norrbärke mine in Sweden in 1354, ten to fifteen years before the probable date of Ívarr's text. Rare deposits of metallic silver have been found in Norway, but none appear to have been discovered in Greenland; however, it may be to such deposits that Ívarr refers.
- Actual silver ores, compounds such as silver glance, Ag_2S , pyrrhotite, AgSbS_3 , and horn silver, AgCl (see Durrant 1952, 588), even if they, unusually, occurred in relatively pure form, do not in any way resemble the metal, and would not be recognisable to anyone unfamiliar with silver smelting. So it is very unlikely that such ores would have been recognised by a Norwegian like Ívarr so soon after silver smelting reached Scandinavia.
- Curiously, modern Icelandic *silfrberg* has been translated as 'Ice-land spar', a birefringent crystalline form of calcite (Sverrir Hólmarsson et al. 1989). This would appear to be a mistake.

138–39 **polar bears with red flecks on their heads:** ON *rauðkinnar* ‘red-cheeks’, young bears with reddish fur (*DGB*, 55). There appear to be no other references than Finnur’s to non-white polar bears at any stage of their development.

139 **white falcons:** The gyrfalcon, *falco rusticolus*, the largest falcon in the world, is common in Arctic regions including Greenland. Its plumage varies widely in colour, and the relatively rare white specimens were prized in medieval times. *Króka-Refs saga* ch. 18 mentions a ship with a valuable cargo including five polar bears and fifty falcons, fifteen of them white (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959, 157; trans. Clark 1997, 622). Most of the events in the saga are extremely improbable, but it is interesting that to create an impression of wealth the author mentions these items by number, with only a desultory reference to the remaining cargo. A single live polar bear was a rarity on the mainland, so the number of falcons, like that of the bears, may well be exaggerated for effect. On mainland Europe, falconry was subject to strict laws governing the type of bird that a person of given status was allowed to fly, ranging from gyrfalcons for kings (*Brit*, s.v. *gyrfalcon*; Larson 1917, s.v. *falcons*; *KL*, s.v. *falkar*; Cleasby et al. 1957, s.v. *fálki*), to goshawks for yeomen. Both birds and bears would therefore have been status symbols as well as luxury goods, not only valuable in barter, but an encouragement to traders to risk the hazardous journey to Greenland in the first place. The medieval Icelandic law-book *Grágás* states that one should not intentionally fly a falcon to capture game on a neighbour’s land (*KL*); this implies that at least some well-to-do farmers in Iceland (and perhaps also in Greenland) had leisure to practise falconry with less consciousness of rank.

whale tusks: presumably walrus (or possibly narwhal) tusks.

walrus hides: these were cut to make extremely strong ropes, used for ships’ rigging and no doubt many other purposes, and were of great value (Larson 1917, 140).

145–46 **not so cold as in Iceland or Norway:** modern records certainly do not bear this out; eight-year averages show Nuuk to be colder than either Oslo or Reykjavík in summer and winter by between about 5° and 10° respectively (see *Climate*).

147 **fruits as big as apples and good to eat:** the growth of such fruits in Greenland in historical times is really inconceivable. This is the first complete deviation of the text from reality. Perhaps in a moment of mental aberration a scribe has inserted a recollection from the Vínland sagas or of some story from southern Europe.

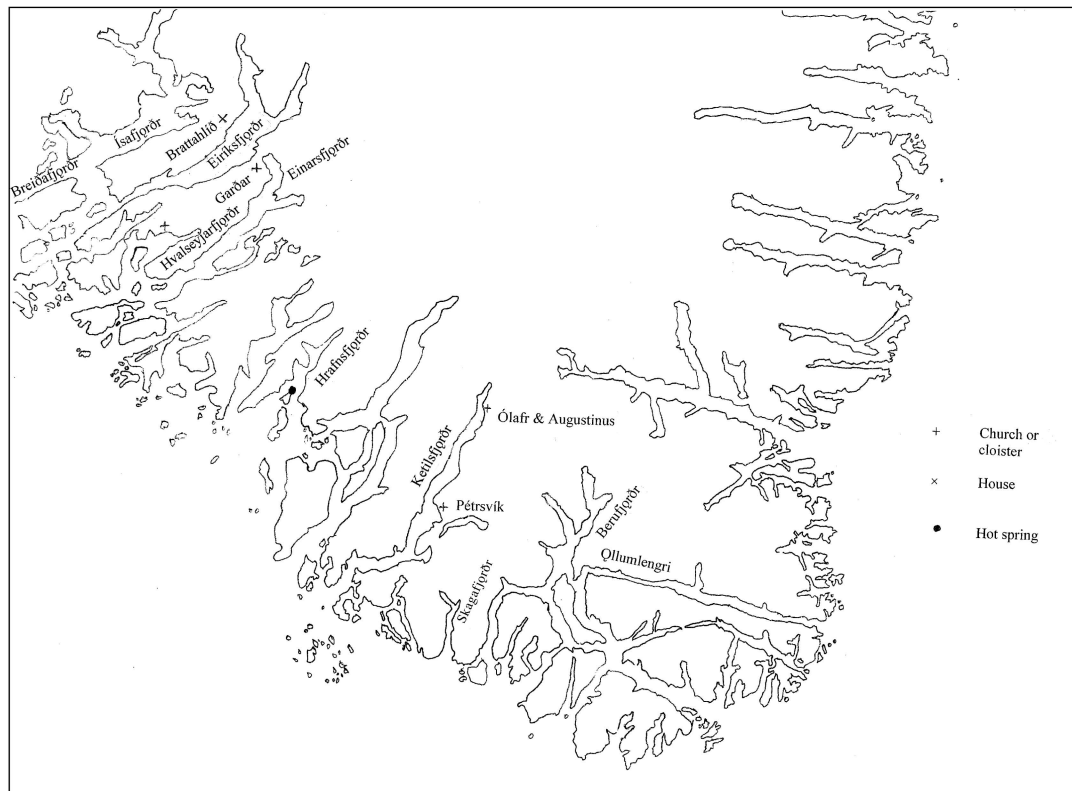
the best wheat imaginable: It is unlikely that wheat was ever ripened in Greenland in historical times. However, Krogh shows a monochrome photograph of what looks like barley growing in Eiríksfjörður in 1964, described as ‘corn’ (1967, 75). So if we interpret ‘wheat’ as ‘cereal’, cereals such as barley or rye may have been grown in medieval Greenland.

Note: I would like to acknowledge my thanks to Professor Richard Perkins for suggesting this project, and for his great help and guidance in completing it.

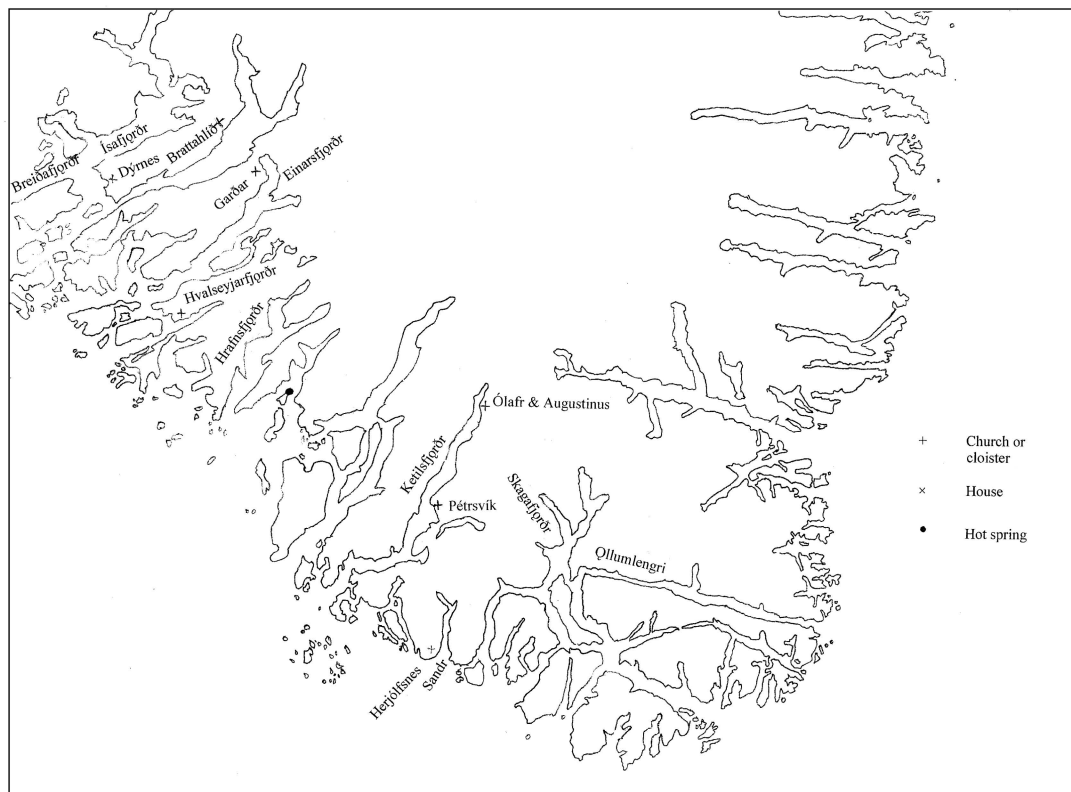
Bibliography and Abbreviations

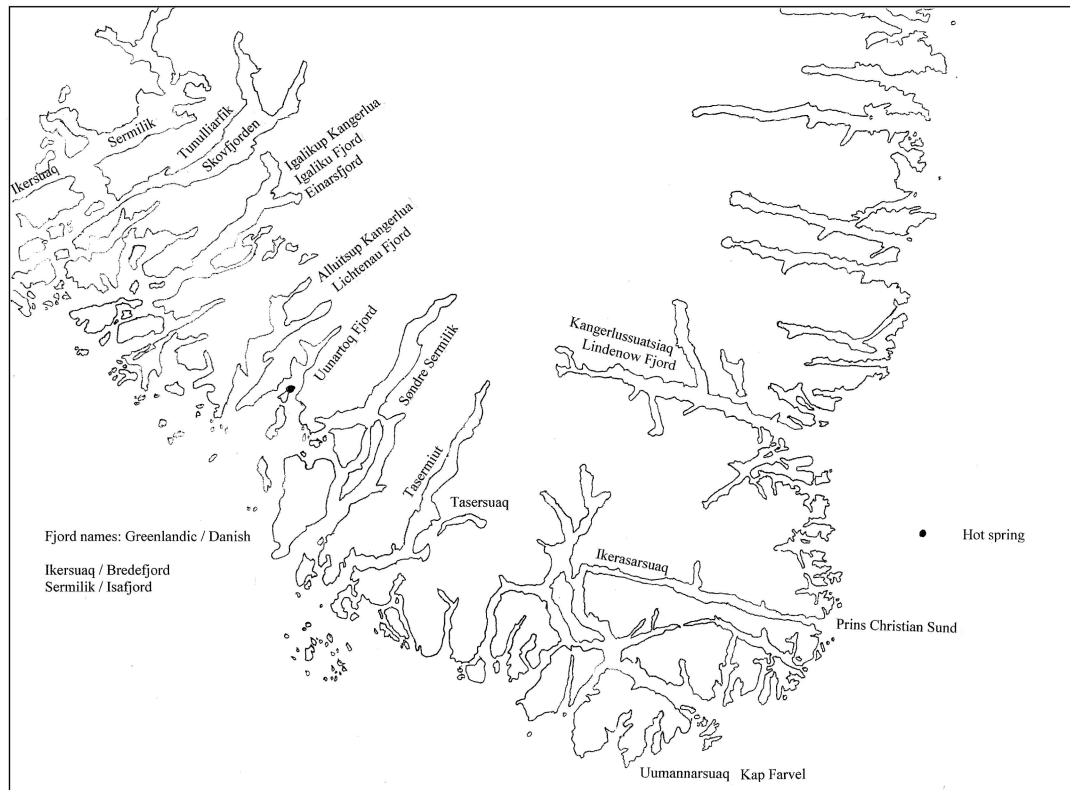
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Map 1





Map 3

ALAN LAWRIE BINNS

In preparation for her 1990 crossing from Norway to *Vinland* in the replica Viking *knörr Gaia*, Judy Lomax headed for the village of Dannewerk on the inland waterways of the far western reaches of the Baltic. Her purpose was to consult with Alan Binns, best known to Lomax as technical adviser and crewman on the dangerously unstable Gokstad replica *Odin's Raven*, which in 1979 famously made an 1,800-mile round trip across the North Sea from the Isle of Man. Some years later, Lomax recalled that:

Retirement from his lectureship at Hull University had not suppressed Alan's natural energy. Although he looked like a youthful archetypal eccentric professor, his mind was far from absent, especially on the subject of boating technicalities, whether Viking or non-Viking. He talked knowledgeably and at length, hardly pausing while he donned an efficient-looking apron, poured wine, laid the table and prepared to serve stew. . .

After supper, Alan drew diagrams to demonstrate Viking sailing technicalities. 'You must take account of the "water keel" of bubbles surfacing just under the rudder,' he enthused. 'The turbulent water below the keel creates an extra keel, giving depth below the physical keel, which is almost non-existent—this makes a Viking ship comparable to a Dragon [a racing yacht].' His ideas and opinions bubbled along like the extra water keel he described. We were sometimes lifted along on it, sometimes left floundering in its wake, but appreciated his infectious enthusiasm and his ability to look at things from a viewpoint untainted by awe. (Judy Lomax, *The Viking Voyage* (London, 1992), 6–7)

This telling anecdote is wholly consistent with many similar tales of encounters with Alan Binns, for he was that rare individual who seamlessly combines scholarship with technical know-how, cutting-edge research with dramatic adventure: a man of ideas and action.

Born near Manchester in 1925 to Frank, a tax inspector, and Jeannie, at one time a librarian, he attended Stand Grammar School, where he proved to be a precocious student, entering Manchester University two years ahead of his age group. Evidently unhampered by his relative youth, he soon became editor of the student magazine and gained membership of the Union Committee. His enthusiasm since early childhood for all things maritime clearly influenced his academic studies; in his final year he specialised in Old English and Old Norse, initiating his lifelong interest in early medieval sea-voyages, in particular those made by the Vikings. He graduated in 1944, promptly joined the Intelligence Corps and was given a posting to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where he was to learn Chinese.

In 1947, he married Kay by whom he had two sons, Matthew and Thurstan. He was married a second time in 1970 to Amei and had another son, Martin. Once the war was over, Alan became set on a career in academia and in the late 1940s gained a lecturing post at the University of Hull, where he was to remain until his retirement in 1981. Alan's leadership qualities, also apparent in the campaigns he orchestrated on behalf of the Association of University Teachers, led to his appointment as Head of the English Language curriculum. He is remembered as a fierce advocate of technical training in English grammar and compulsory Anglo-Saxon, and he strenuously argued the case for the practical benefits that these subjects could have for students in English departments. He is also remembered as someone who encouraged loyalty from his junior colleagues, even to the point of obliging new recruits to undergo a form of *rite de passage*. One account tells of him taking a recent appointee out for a day's sailing in his coble, which was moored alongside his home by the Humber Estuary. The story runs that it was a stormy experience and that when the propeller fouled, Alan unhesitatingly dived overboard to free it, neglecting to warn his nervous landlubber companion that the sails had been configured in such a way as to swing into the wind and bring the boat to a halt. Others recall Alan's soirées, where he would treat his colleagues to Swedish cuisine (much to the alarm of those of conservative tastes) and round off the evening with a medley of sea shanties sung in several different European languages and accompanied on his accordion. All informants remember Alan Binns as a genial, lively, highly industrious colleague whose conversation and wit were a mirror of his energy and erudition.

Between 1953 and 1981 Alan published widely on Old Norse topics, contributing to *Saga-Book* as both an essayist and reviewer, and regularly attended Viking Society meetings, where, it is said, he participated in vigorous debates with his contemporaries, allegedly giving as good as he got. He had a particular interest in the Viking legacy in Yorkshire, producing studies of the region's Viking art, the relations between Old English and Old Norse culture, the influence of Old Norse on the small language community of Humber fishermen, as well as a detailed examination of descriptions of East Yorkshire in the Icelandic sagas, and the evidence for the tenth-century founding of Scarborough by Viking marauders. He also produced a fine translation from the Swedish of Holger Arbman's *The Vikings* (1961), and throughout his time at Hull participated in archaeological digs, including that of one of the earliest vessels found in Europe, the Ferriby boat. His most important and lasting

contribution to Viking-Age studies, however, resulted from his expertise in maritime technology. His investigations into Viking navigation techniques entailed not only research in manuscript libraries but also establishing practical proof of his and others' hypotheses, a combination of theory and practice which is compellingly and entertainingly described in his *Viking Voyagers: Then and Now* of 1980. His considerable expertise in this area drew the attention of Hollywood film makers, and he was employed as a technical consultant by the makers of Richard Fleischer's *The Vikings* (1958). As a result of his, in that company, unique mastery of Latin, he was given a speaking part as a bishop, intoning baptismal Latin over the infant Prince Einar. The ornate gold helmet worn by Kirk Douglas as the (adult) prince remained in Alan's keeping.

Alan's passion for the sea led him to follow in the wake of every major voyage of exploration known from the Viking Age, including some of those made east of the Caspian Sea where, apparently to his disappointment, he got no further than Samarkand. What he was able to establish continues to be regarded as bedrock research into this complex and difficult area and few in recent decades have entertained publishing on this subject without consulting Alan's expertise beforehand. Often, Alan's related observations are made almost *en passant*, such as his remarks in his study of Viking-Age voyages round Britain's coastline concerning the shipwreck of Egill Skallagrímsson off the mouth of the Humber. He notes that *Egils saga* precisely describes the intricate tidal flows and submerged hazards that exist there to this day. In this respect, Alan's insights are significant for the issue of the historicity of the sagas.

After his retirement, Alan moved to northern Germany where he continued to explore the seas in his extensively restored 60ft Humber keel *Hope*, and later spent time in Namibia. In the latter years of his life, he returned to East Yorkshire and settled in Withernsea, where he could look out across the North Sea from his living room. Even at the age of eighty the urge for adventure had not deserted him, and he undertook a single-handed journey by quad bike to collect wine from his vineyard in the Loire Valley. He died on 4th July 2009.

By any standard, Alan Binns led an extraordinary and highly productive life. Yet, if the stories that have recently surfaced can be credited, there was more to Alan's life than academia and Viking adventures, for some have claimed that he continued to have a relationship with British Military Intelligence long after the end of World War II. Certainly there is no disputing that he served as a liaison officer aboard the battle-class destroyer *Trafalgar* in 1958 during the first Cod War, and that he was

seconded, often at short notice and for some months at a time, to work for British Council offices in Moscow and Cairo during the 1960s. But colourful characters attract colourful tales, including those of Alan's encounters with KGB agents in Moscow, a Red Army colonel who stopped a night train with the sole purpose of searching Alan but who also took the opportunity to discuss with him the merits of alliterative poetry, and Alan's role monitoring the tank-carrying capacities of Warsaw Pact shipping toing and froing past the windows of his house by the Humber. Alan Binns has been described by one colleague who knew him well as having a sardonic and, sometimes, a mischievous sense of humour. As an old salt, he may well have delighted in such tall tales.

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REVIEWS

CORPUS OF ANGLO-SAXON STONE SCULPTURE. VIII: WESTERN YORKSHIRE. By ELIZABETH COATSWORTH. *Oxford University Press for the British Academy*. Oxford, 2008. xvi + 514 pp. 17 figures, 783 black-and-white photographs. ISBN 978-0-19-726425-6.

The eighth volume in the British Academy *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, covering the large inland region of the historic West Riding of Yorkshire, completes the publication of the material from Yorkshire in this series. The distribution of sculpture here is largely to the east of the Pennines: manifestly influenced by the practical network of communications but—a little surprisingly, perhaps—scarcely marking out key cross-country routes between York and the North Sea, and the Irish Sea zone to the west. The area has a distinctive history in the centuries between the departure of the Romans and the coming of the Normans, and the sculpture proves in fact to be of particular interest in relation to Norse–Viking studies because of, rather than despite, the limited degree of Scandinavian character and influence found in the considerable collection of material dated from the late ninth century to the early eleventh.

The historical background is well reviewed in a dedicated chapter. The small British ‘kingdoms’ of Craven and Elmet had survived into the seventh century, and the Anglian conquest and annexation of the area coincided quite closely with the conversion of first Northumbria and then Middle Anglia and Mercia to Christianity. The region is of especial interest in Middle Anglo-Saxon history for the great ecclesiastical multiple estates created there in the seventh century, especially that of Wilfrid at Ripon—which probably included the Otley area, with its outstanding sculpture. The sculpture alone identifies another important estate around Dewsbury, Wakefield and Thornhill. The remarkable set of inscriptions at the latter site may be a perfect illustration of how attitudes to the native runic tradition changed radically after the Viking Conquest in the 860s.

The region is ideal for supporting a sculptural tradition: local sandstone was readily available for use, and just one piece, possibly the earliest of all at Ripon, is of a stone that must have been brought to the site from a little further afield. The range of types of monument is dominated strikingly by free-standing crosses throughout the Anglo-Saxon Period, with just a few grave-slabs or -markers, and a handful of hogbacks at sites on the fringes of North Yorkshire where the type is much more plentiful. Yet there appears never to have been any unity of practice and output in the West Riding of Yorkshire; a division between northern and southern zones is apparent from the outset, the latter possibly incorporating a Northumbrian–Mercian borderland. A counterpart to the northern influence represented by the hogbacks is the occurrence within this southern zone of various types of Viking-period cross-head at the eastern end of a distributional range that has its roots across the Pennines in the north-west. With those, it also proves generally realistic to link the locations of the Yorkshire specimens with trans-Pennine routes.

The greatest source of influence on Viking-period sculpture in the region, however, was the existing local traditions. This is evidenced in types of decoration—

particularly interlace and the deeply symbolic Christian plant ornament—and special monumental forms such as the round-shaft derivative free-standing cross. The many cross-fragments from St Peter's Church in Leeds constitute an assemblage that exemplifies this continuity particularly strongly, including both types of decoration just noted, plus the Anglo-Scandinavian (probably originally Irish) ring-head cross, together with an iconographic use of the legendary Norse character Vǫlundr. It has been suggested, indeed, that Sigurðr may also be depicted at Leeds; a surer example of that character is found on Ripon 4. There is correspondingly little Scandinavian-influenced zoomorphic decoration of any style in the region prior to some Mammen-related tendril motifs. However, a deep-rooted local figural tradition supports a couple of familiar Anglo-Scandinavian skirted warrior figures on Otley 6 and Weston 1.

The close dating of sculpture on stylistic grounds is always difficult, and this aspect of the evidence concerning the Anglian to Anglo-Scandinavian transitional phase in the second half of the ninth and very early tenth centuries is likely to be the subject of continuing analysis and debate. At Collingham, north of Leeds, a clear case can be made for certain pieces in the sculptural assemblage showing the preservation of traditional—even 'archaic'—Anglian features well into this phase: this can be argued on the basis of combinations of specific motifs and techniques characteristic of the two periods. In some instances here, conversely, the argument is rather that 'heavier handed', 'flattened' and 'stylised' execution of potentially much earlier designs is itself evidence of a later date. In the case of the stones at another site, Kirkheaton, including a runic inscription in perfect Old English, such 'clumsiness' seems to be the only criterion for dating the material to this phase. This is not as conclusive as one would wish, and in light of the wider implications of the dating, that really does matter.

It is conceivable, then, that some examples identified in this corpus volume as, in effect, transitional sculpture actually represent an even more substantial pre-Viking tradition than is already recognised for the West Riding. If so, however, that would only reinforce an inference to be drawn that is of much wider significance in the analysis of Viking-period Scandinavian settlement in England and its consequences: that there is a direct connexion between the local density and character of Scandinavian settlement in an area and the depth and complexity of cultural influence and hybridisation that result. The latter are greatest in the leading centres: Leeds and Otley, and at Ripon. The real significance of this proposition is that it demonstrates how—contrary to usual categorisations—in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England the sculptural remains really are a crucial element of the archaeology of settlement and social history. They are thus most certainly worth the care and attention they are receiving in the British Academy Corpus.

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THE NORTHERN CONQUEST: VIKINGS IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND. By KATHERINE HOLMAN. *Signal Books*. Oxford, 2007. viii + 272 pp. 3 maps, 12 photo illustrations. ISBN 978-1-904955-34-4.

As Holman notes in her introduction, with the exception of Julian Richards's colourful TV spin-off *Blood of the Vikings* (2001), there has been no full-length study of Britain and Ireland's insular Viking Age since Henry Loyn's *The Vikings in Britain*, first published over thirty years ago. What Holman sets out to do is to 'provide readers with something that lies between' these two and, in short, to bring matters fully up to date with discussion of important current debates, along with 'more information on particular topics elsewhere' (p. 5). This, in itself, is a very welcome undertaking.

The approach of the book is thematic; in other words, it does not follow a standard, detailed historical chronology of Viking attacks, although there is plenty of guidance on this, especially in the helpful 'Key Dates' toward the end of the book. The opening chapter, 'Uncovering the Past', sets out to evaluate the basis of our knowledge of the period. Holman notes the unreliability and/or partiality of much of the written evidence, highlighting, however, the particular value of the Domesday Book for evidence of the impact of Scandinavian settlement, and rightly asserting that it is from archaeological, linguistic and place-name evidence that the relationship between the present and the past, and between Scandinavians and indigenous peoples, can best be discerned. Chapter 2, 'Raiders from the North', offers a brief and well-balanced overview of the main events of the Viking Age in Britain and Ireland. The author raises the fundamental question why eighth-century trading relations with Scandinavia were transformed, by the end of the century, into violent attacks with, thereafter, increasingly ambitious aims, leading ultimately to the incorporation of Britain into Cnut's North Sea Empire in the first decades of the eleventh century. Greed, desperation and opportunity are, of course, the simple answers, but Holman resists such reductiveness, remarking on the political and ideological complexities and pressures that clouded relations between the pagan north and the Christian south and west of Europe.

These contexts having been provided, Chapter 3, 'Colonists', examines the material and linguistic evidence for Scandinavian settlement, drawing attention to the wealth of archaeological finds across a number of key regions—for example, Orkney, York and Dublin—and so giving a relatively detailed picture of domesticity and enterprise in Viking-Age communities. Holman goes on to provide a useful overview of estimates of the size of Viking armies and subsequent settlement, weighing the arguments of Sir Frank Stenton (substantial forces and settlement), Peter Sawyer (highly sceptical about the numbers involved) and Gillian Fellows-Jensen, whose study of place-names has led to a greater understanding of internal migrations and land distribution. This chapter sheds considerable light both on everyday life in the settlements and on the scholarly controversies that continue to circulate as a result of the partial nature of our understanding of what Holman refers to as 'too many variables' (p. 88).

Chapter 4 turns its attention to 'Viking Kings', how they exercised power and how they acquired power in the first place. Holman begins by tracing the career of Cnut Sveinsson, about which, given his extensive relations across Europe and his

relatively late position in Viking-Age history, a great deal is known. The chapter then considers the more shadowy careers of earlier Viking kings. Subsections are offered concerning the kings of York and Dublin from the line of Ivar the Boneless through to Erik Blood-Axe, the subsequent royal complexities in Dublin through to the death of Brian Boru and somewhat beyond, and the equally interrelated dynasties of Man and Orkney, concluding with a consideration of the post-Viking-Age grip that Norwegian monarchs maintained over the Northern Isles.

'Pagan meets Christian' (Chapter 5) and 'Scandinavian Society' (Chapter 6) examine the processes of conversion and give an account of Norse paganism, in as much as our post-Conversion written sources combined with contemporary, alarmed Christian sources, and material evidence, such as grave sites, will allow. The latter chapter is a particularly useful assessment of runic, eddic and legal perspectives (including legalities in both the Scandinavian homeland and in England) on the period. Surveys of administrative and tax arrangements, and Viking art, including monuments, reveal the processes of Scandinavian integration with the Anglo-Saxons in the Danelaw settlements, and, indeed, the processes of Anglo-Saxon integration with the Scandinavians.

The final chapters, 'After the Norman Conquest' and the brief 'Legacy of the Vikings', which reviews the inconclusive genetic research, underscore Holman's concern with aftermath as much as with immediate impact. Holman begins by assessing the impact of Stamford Bridge and William of Normandy's invasion some three weeks later, and the continuing, if hopeless, ambitions of Scandinavian kings to arrogate Britain for some decades beyond the Norman Conquest. Attention is given to the Harrying of the North and to the continuance of an Anglo-Scandinavian sense of difference and the extent to which there was 'an attempt to define those differences and actively construct an identity' (p. 187), as may be seen, for instance, in the *Lay of Havelock the Dane*. The use by the Church, however, of the Scandinavian runic alphabet long after the Conquest leads Holman to judge that matters were 'never so simple as English v. Norman' (p. 192), not at least in northern England. Holman then returns in some detail to the vexed situation in Scandinavia, a miasma of rivalries which, by the later Middle Ages, had sunk into obscurity and irrelevance in the wider European scene due to climate change, plague and economic decline.

The Northern Conquest is a finely presented book, helpfully illustrated with maps and photographs, some of which are original, such as the Stamford Bridge pub sign of a horned-helmeted Viking warrior defending the bridge against the English. The 38 pages of chapter-by-chapter suggestions for further readings and notes, followed by an annotated select bibliography, constitute the best guidance to readers on this subject currently available. This is a book written in lively and engaging prose that nevertheless does not sacrifice scholarly rigour for popular appeal. It is sure to become set reading for all those studying the period. Judith Jesch's assessment of Holman's achievement on the back cover as 'a fresh, original and stimulating contribution to the existing literature on Vikings and the Viking Age' is wholly justified.

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LES MAGICIENS DANS L'ISLANDE ANCIENNE. ÉTUDES SUR LA REPRÉSENTATION DE LA MAGIE ISLANDAISE ET DE SES AGENTS DANS LES SOURCES LITTÉRAIRES NORROISES. By FRANÇOIS-XAVIER DILLMANN. *Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi* 92. Uppsala, 2006. 768 pp. 2 maps. ISBN 91-85352-63-2.

The volume under review is an exhaustive study of a precisely delimited topic: magicians in ancient Iceland, as portrayed in the Sagas of Icelanders and *Landnámabók*. Under the heading 'magician' Dillmann includes everyone to whom those sources attribute magical knowledge (by designations such as *ffjolkunnigr* or *margkunnandi*) or the practice of magic. Pages 145–55 contain a list of these individuals (women first, then men), accompanied by a brief statement of the reason for the attribution and references to relevant passages in the *Íslensk fornrit* series. Among them are individuals not usually considered magicians, such as Egill Skallagrímsson (on the strength of his use of runes for supernatural purposes). Prescience, when treated as a natural ability, or the ability merely to read runes, does not qualify a character for inclusion. Magic itself is broadly defined, and not separated from religion: Dillmann's study covers all aspects of 'magico-religious belief and practice', including sacrifice. These sensible decisions as to subject matter, supported by the meticulous scholarship that has gone into the volume, make it an indispensable point of departure for all future work on these topics.

Any scholar of the Family Sagas and *Landnámabók* must take a position on the accuracy of their presentation of the Saga Age. Dillmann notes several times that he is not trying to study the beliefs and practices of that period, but rather their representation by thirteenth-century authors: only basic attitudes like those towards honour and vengeance can be assumed to have survived. Nonetheless, he accepts certain details as factual; for example, he considers that the account of the Greenland prophetess in *Eiríks saga rauða* is more likely to reflect a tradition passed down in Guðrǫr's family than observations of contemporary practice in Norway, and a tacit acceptance of the accuracy of oral tradition pervades the volume. Wherever the reader stands on this question, Dillmann's study provides additional evidence that the Family Sagas plus *Landnámabók* reflect a coherent, common viewpoint, in contrast not only with *fornaldarsögur* but also with *konungasögur*.

What does this study reveal about the sagas' representation of Icelandic magicians—and magic? In them, magic is portrayed as specialised knowledge, a learned skill requiring exceptional intellectual gifts; a magician is in this sense comparable to a skald or legal expert. The ethnicity of magicians reflects that of the Icelandic population as a whole, as does their social class—with a single exception. Magical knowledge is not attributed to male slaves. Dillmann suggests this is because, as represented in the sagas, male slaves exhibit qualities such as cowardice and foolishness that are antithetical to those associated with magicians (pp. 319, 460). Female magicians are only slightly more common than male (54% v. 46%, see pp. 145–57).

Magic itself was neutral, and could be used to positive or negative ends. Only in a very few cases do magicians seem to specialise in 'harmful' magic, and just over a dozen magicians (about a sixth of the total) are portrayed in a negative fashion. These conclusions are supported by careful textual and philological analysis,

covering different versions of the sagas in question as well as relevant legal provisions. Readers may not agree with all of Dillmann's interpretations, but cannot afford to ignore them.

A short review cannot do justice to this volume, or to the different topics Dillmann examines. The best guide is the ten-page table of contents. Among other points of interest is a learned discussion (with illustrations) of the term *hrosshvalr*, explaining why, in *Kormaks saga*, Þórveig should appear in precisely this form. Of interest to social historians is Dillmann's observation that there are no references to magic used for fertility; the miracle collections of the Icelandic saints also lack this topos. The concept of magic as a learned skill, one in which men are prominent, foreshadows the Icelandic witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century, where the conviction of (predominantly male) witches was often based on written magical material. The geographical density of magicians (and of sagas about them) in the Vestfirðir also connects the Middle Ages with the seventeenth century.

The strength of this volume is its meticulous analysis of the saga corpus. Its weakness (not a major one, considering the expressed goal and the amount of energy that has been expended upon it) is its treatment of material other than the works under examination. Dillmann frequently refers to Germanic magic/religion as if it were a known (and uniform) whole; he believes that the settlers of Iceland, with the exception of a handful of Christians, must have had a homogeneous set of magical-religious practices and beliefs (p. 16). This assumption flies in the face of current research, which emphasises the variability (to the extent that we can know anything at all about them) of practices and beliefs not only in the pre-Christian Germanic world but in Scandinavia itself. The evidence Dillmann cites from Norwegian and Swedish law-codes shows considerable variety in terminology (and thus, one presumes, in practice). The law codes have not, in general, been evaluated as carefully as the sagas. The interesting comment on p. 101 that enchantment of cattle—prohibited in *Grágás*—is not attributed to the pre-Christian period is taken no further. A discussion of the relevant provisions of *Grágás*, *Jónsbók* and Norwegian legislation on magic and paganism would have been useful as indications of what offences were actually considered worth punishing at the time the sagas were written.

The theoretical literature on magic and magicians that forms Dillmann's point of departure is a century old: Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert's 'Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie' published 1902–03, and Jules Michelet's *La Sorcière* from 1862. Michelet is something of a paper tiger, whose generalisations have been superseded by more recent work, as Dillmann himself remarks; it would have been more appropriate to omit the outdated references. I doubt that Michelet's image of the sorceress is held by many scholars today; that it is found in medieval literature translated into Icelandic (pp. 405–06) is another matter, and serves to emphasise the contrast between the saga-world and that of other literary genres. I hasten to add that recent literature on magic, such as that of Kieckhefer, Mitchell and Tolley, is included in the bibliography; it is the social/anthropological theory that is lacking, and here Dillmann's conclusions will themselves provide data for future research.

Treatment of the Christian literature known in Iceland at the time the sagas were written is respectable (pp. 465–93). To analyse this topic thoroughly would have required another volume the size of this one. It is revealing, however, that this section falls under the discussion of ‘public opinion’; although saints’ lives and other Christian sources are mentioned in the discussion of magicians and magic, they are not considered as possible lenders of material or motifs. The story of Flóki’s ravens is treated under divination, but the obvious biblical parallel is not mentioned.

There are numerous aids to scholarship and to navigation through the volume itself. A 110-page bibliography (we are warned that it is not exhaustive!) incorporates scholarship up to 2004 and indicates the initial date of publication of reprinted works. There is an index to works cited (in the text or in footnotes) and an index of words that contains not only Old Norse–Icelandic terms pertaining to magic and religion but many others as well. More general concepts such as ‘divination’ and ‘shamanism’ can be located using the running headers and table of contents. An index of names includes all saga characters treated at any length. While there is no index of places, a ‘Répertoire des lieux d’habitat’ identifies the locations of homes of magicians, or others with magico-religious knowledge, which are to be found on the map that follows it. Each location is followed by the names of the practitioners who lived there, with references to the volumes of *Íslenzk fornrit* in which the association is made.

Professor Dillmann is to be congratulated on this magisterial work, and the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy is to be praised for its willingness to publish a volume of this length. It is to be hoped that an equally far-seeing press will undertake for it to appear in English.

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WHEN THE NORNS HAVE SPOKEN: TIME AND FATE IN GERMANIC PAGANISM. By ANTHONY WINTERBOURNE. *Fairleigh Dickinson University Press*. Madison, WI, 2004. 187 pp. ISBN 0-8386-4048-6.

With reservations, this book, which is really a long philosophical essay divided into an Introduction and six chapters, may be recommended to anyone interested in Old Norse mythology. Although the author has little Old Icelandic (offering forms such as ‘Oðin’, ‘Balðr’, ‘Havamal’), and the book shows startling gaps in reference to modern critical commentary, it has a lot to offer on the conceptual level. The discussion is learned and lucid. There is much subtlety of thought as well as an abiding good sense. There are also some intriguing comparative references to Middle Egyptian, Lithuanian and West African mythologies as well as to those nearer home. Despite the omissions noted above, it is no disadvantage that the author was trained in philosophy rather than in Old Icelandic literature or Germanic mythology or archaeology. While the occasional literary misjudgements are no doubt proof of some patchy assistance with Old Norse literature, the conceptualisations of the essay, written in the mercurial style of a philosophical

discipline, act as a powerful stimulant to thought. Ambitiously enough, Winterbourne wishes to treat time and fate in the Eddas not as the constant lurking background of all those stories we know and love, but as subjects for analysis in the wider search for an understanding of Germanic paganism, effectively the mentality of pre-Christian north-western Europe over more than a thousand years.

The author discusses 'Germanic' time and fate as they appear in Old Norse and other mythologies of the world with the aim of severing, or at least loosening, a connection between these two entities that most of us probably take for granted. I think he succeeds in this aim. He shows that the mythic time-fate problem is more complex than it seems, as a 'three-body' problem of causality, fate and time in which no satisfactory theory of a relationship between all three has yet emerged. Winterbourne laudably sets out to remove the need for one. In Chapter One, 'Paganism in Myth and Cult', he rehearses the conceptual problem of how to define Germanic religions in the context of Christianisation. In Chapter Two, the engine for the book, he discusses 'Mythical Space and Time' with a climactic quotation of *Völuspá* 20, concerning the three Norns Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld. Regrettably, this is accomplished with the aid of Lee M. Hollander's *The Poetic Edda*, a translation reissued in 2001 but originally published in 1962. Chapter Three, 'Cosmogony and the World-Tree', shifts the discussion further into Norse mythology, showing with the aid of geometric diagrams, and with quotations from Hollander's version of *Völuspá* 17, 56 and 58, how hard it is to integrate time into the conception of Yggdrasill at the centre of the universe. This part exposes the potential disarray between cyclical and linear notions of time not only in *Völuspá* but also in works from other mythologies. Chapter Four, 'Spinning and Weaving Fate', moves from time to fate by illustrating the activity of the Norns in relation to that of the Greek Moirai and Graeco-Roman Parcae. Chapter Five, 'the Logic of Fatalism', gives an engaging philosophical argument, complete with the author's précis of an illustrative parable (Richard Taylor's story of 'Osmo', a mid-Western Finn unlucky enough to find a complete present-tense narration of his life in a book in the library), on the status of fate as a truth based on logic rather than time. Winterbourne's conclusion in Chapter Six, 'From Pagan Fate to Christian Providence', is that Norse ('Germanic') fate became time-based during Christianisation through its synthesis with Doomsday, the end which heralds fixed eternity. From this time on, it is argued, the Vikings lost their heroic notion of each person living up to his or her preordained end, because they could now (at least to some extent) choose a fate for themselves in heaven.

If this conclusion is convincing, however, it is more so in shape than in details. My chief reservation is that this essay suffers from a tendency to treat literature as the message, never the medium. There are few dates in this book for Norse works or arguments for these, nor any attempt to fathom the literary purposes of either tenth-century poets or the writers of thirteenth- or fourteenth-century prose. Skaldic poetry is missing, nor does Winterbourne make his sensible discussion of paganism versus Christianity, in Chapters One and Six, more particular to Scandinavia and the British Isles by sketching the relevant literary-historical developments. His substitute for literary context is an over-reliance on etymology, sometimes plausible (cognate Old Icelandic *verða* and Latin *vertere*), sometimes not (Old

Icelandic *Yggr* and Greek *hygra* 'sea'), through which a collective mentality is too easily constructed over great distances and time. Here and there the essay lets slip bizarre notions about *Völuspá*, such as that it was influenced by Hesiod's *Theogony* (p. 56), or by Gnostic ideas brought to Iceland by 'Paulicians' from Armenia (p. 136), or that the lines on Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld in *Völuspá* 20 are an interpolation made with knowledge of the Graeco-Roman Parcae (p. 57). In addition, while Winterbourne refers to Ursula Dronke's chapter on 'Eddic Poetry as a source for the history of Germanic Religion' (in *Germanische Religionsgeschichte: Quellen und Quellenprobleme*, ed. H. Beck (Berlin, 1992), 655–84), he makes no use of her edition of *Völuspá*, in *The Poetic Edda* II (Oxford, 1997). This is the oddest omission. The three Norns of *Völuspá* are the most fully developed, and Dronke's thorough notes would have helped Winterbourne broaden his narrow discussion of their names (p. 87), for there is no doubt, as Dronke indicates (1997, 128, n. 20/5–8), that the names Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld allude respectively to past, present and future aspects of time through the association of two of them with Old Icelandic *verða* 'to turn out' and the other with *skulu* 'shall, must'. Winterbourne's case is not threatened by this obvious temporal allegorisation, because the time allotted here is personal to each man rather than fixable on a linear scale: individual determinism rather than fate based on a general calendar. But had he focused more on lots or portions rather than spinning or weaving, then who knows? Winterbourne might have opened up the discussion with the terms Old Icelandic *(ó)gæfumaðr* 'man of (bad) fortune', along with the Greek *eu-* or *kakadaimōn*. This notion of a man's fate as a predetermined but personal truth, which is common enough in the sagas and is in keeping with *Völuspá* 20, does not conflict with what Winterbourne is saying.

Instead of something like this, the book tries to link the Norns with distaff or loom, presumably to make them look more like their Mediterranean cousins, the Parcae. Why this consistency of metaphor is needed was not clear to me, whilst it is clear this book could have made proper use of Gerd W. Weber's *Wyrð: Studien zum Schicksalsbegriff* (Bad Homburg, 1969). The Norns in *Völuspá* 20 are seen scoring men's fates on shides or slips of wood. In the *Pulur* (*Skáldskaparmál*, ed. A. Faulkes, London (1997) I, verse 437) it is said that *Nornir heita þær er nauð skapa* 'Norns they are called who shape necessity'. Norns 'shape' or 'create' fate according to the implication of *scop norna* in *Fáfnismál* 44 and the verb *skapa* used of a Norn in *Reginismál* 2. In *Fáfnismál* 12 the Norns are given as birth-helpers almost like fairy godmothers. There is a rune on a Norn's nail in *Sigrdrífumál* 17. Without mention of spinning or weaving, Snorri Sturluson paraphrases much of this within *Gylfaginning*. In *Hamðismál* 30, possibly the oldest of the poetic references and apparently the source for the subtitle of Winterbourne's book, fate is fixed as *kviðr norna*, a noun-phrase which allows that the Norns may also 'speak' the fates of men. None of the necessary textual quotation is in the book, nor any accompanying references to Old Icelandic *hljóta* and the Germanic use of 'lots' in Tacitus' *Germania* and elsewhere. Instead, a link between Norns and spinning or weaving is pursued through the *Darraðarljóð* from *Njáls saga* (ch. 157), in Robert Cook's translation of 2001, although this poem may be from as late as c.1290, whereas *Völuspá* is likely from c.1000. Yet

the spinning-weaving identification would have been stronger with other evidence not cited in the book, with Old English *wyrd*, cognate with Old Icelandic *urðr*; *parcae* : *uuyrdae* in the *Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (ed. J. D. Pheifer, Oxford, 1974); *me þæt wyrd gewæf* 'fate wove this for me' in *The Riming Poem*, line 70; *wefen wyrdstafun* 'woven with the staves of fate' in *Guthlac B*, line 1351; and probably *wigspeda gewiofu* 'a woven destiny of battle-victories' in *Beowulf*, line 697. These examples, or others of this kind, would have given the discussion what it needs, a better foundation in primary texts. I include Greek tragedy in the latter, having missed any mention of Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, the tale of a man moving closer to his fate with every effort he makes to escape it. Is fatalism, the belief in fate, a man's way of avoiding responsibility for his own actions? What does this story say about Greek views on determinism, in comparison with Frigg's Norse efforts to avert the fate revealed to Baldr? But that is no matter: questions are sometimes more important than answers, and overall I believe the ability to stimulate mythological questions is where this book has its greatest strength.

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HOLY VIKINGS: SAINTS' LIVES IN THE OLD ICELANDIC KINGS' SAGAS. By CARL PHELPESTEAD. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 340. *Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. Tempe, 2007. x + 274 pp. ISBN 978-0-86698-338-4.

This book has seven chapters, of which the first two are introductory and in the last two of which conclusions are drawn. Structurally, it is something of a triptych, like part at least of its main subject matter (see p. 33): its three central chapters, 3, 4, and 5, deal respectively with *Orkneyinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*, and *Knýtlinga saga*. Its first chapter discusses these works in relation to the traditions of hagiography and historical writing in which their authors worked, and under the heading 'Three triptychs' shows (pp. 33–35) that in the first and third of the sagas just listed the lives of St Magnús of Orkney and St Knútr Sveinsson of Denmark are, respectively, psychologically and physically central, the central placing of Knútr Sveinsson's life in *Knýtlinga saga* being almost certainly influenced by that of St Óláfr's life in the structure of *Heimskringla*.

The second chapter introduces the book's main argument: that these three sagas, concerned as they are with secular rulers who became saints, and hence combining, among other things, elements of Kings' Saga and hagiography, make an appropriate springboard for discussion of certain of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas in relation to Icelandic saga literature generally, since these sagas may be seen as hybrid or 'host' texts, combining the characteristics of different genres in ways that lend themselves to discussion in terms of what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia. Phelpstead introduces this term on pp. 65–66, but defines it perhaps most helpfully for present purposes on p. 203, where he states that it 'reflects the "mixed" generic form of the sagas, juxtaposing different viewpoints embodied in different genres'. Where there is interaction between the different generic elements in a hybrid text, he explains on p. 66, each of them is 'heteroglot' in relation to the other

or others, and the relationship between them is 'dialogic'. In this review I shall concentrate mainly on heteroglossia in relation to the three sagas under discussion, but would note that Phelpstead also takes over from Bakhtin the term 'polyphony', which he defines as 'dialogue between equals' (p. 66) and reserves for the articulation by characters in a literary work of 'their own independent and potentially valid views' (p. 67), the relationship between which may also be described as dialogic; and the term 'carnival' (pp. 72–73), which involves the turning upside down of conventionally expected norms, in this case in a literary text.

Phelpstead does not mention what seems to me the classic case of heteroglossia in Old Icelandic literature, occurring in ch. 157 of *Njáls saga*, where the prose text portrays the battle of Clontarf as a victory for the Christian Irish over the partly pagan forces of the Norsemen, whereas the poem known as *Darraðarljóð*, quoted just after the account of the battle, presents it as a victory for the Norsemen. This discrepancy effectively underlines the tension in the post-Conversion part of the saga between Christian and pre-Christian values, raising for the reader the troubling question of whether Christianity does finally triumph (as some readers have suggested it does) in *Njáls saga*'s world of ideas. The author of *Njáls saga* might, it is true, defend this apparent contradiction on the grounds that, as his prose account indicates, he is only reporting here what Þorruðr saw and heard when experiencing, on the day of the battle, a vision in Caithness of some women reciting the poem. The general impression given, however, is that the poem is being quoted, however illogically, as a source for the information given in the prose; there is certainly no comment from the narrator on the discrepancy between the two accounts. Indeed the narrator remains reticent (to borrow a term used by Phelpstead, p. 212; compare pp. 202, 210) in relation to the contradiction between them, a fact which suggests that the author is here raising the question of how Christian the post-Conversion world he is describing has really become.

Only in three cases—one in each of his three central chapters, as it happens—have I had reservations about Phelpstead's argument. All of them relate to the concept of heteroglossia, of which, it seems to me, he makes too much in the first two cases, and in the third, too little. In the first of them, in ch. 3 (pp. 103–07), he seems to be working towards the view that in *Orkneyinga saga* there is a tension between, on the one hand, the poetry in praise of a woman (Ermingerðr) composed by Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson (later Saint Rognvaldr) and his companions when en route to the Holy Land, and, on the other, the purpose of their journey, a Christian pilgrimage: a tension that one might expect to find reflected in a dialogic relationship between the prose account of the pilgrimage, couched in hagiographic terms, and the secular poetry in praise of Ermingerðr. Phelpstead points out a contradiction, as he sees it, between the prose account in ch. 85 of the saga, in which Eindriði ungi encourages Rognvaldr to go on the pilgrimage, and the stanza (no. 56) in which Rognvaldr, in ch. 86, attributes to Ermingerðr the wish that he should do so. If this is a contradiction at all (why should they not both have encouraged him?), it is hardly one of 'heteroglot' proportions, as Phelpstead seems to suggest (p. 105, note 120), and indeed he goes on to argue that the prose account of the pilgrimage shows very little influence of hagiography, presenting

it in largely secular terms, which the verses in praise of Ermingerðr tend to underline rather than contradict.

My second case has to do with the stanzas of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Erfidrápa* quoted in the course of the prose account, in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga*, of the battle of Stiklarstaðir, and discussed by Phelpstead in ch. 4 (pp. 126–27). The stanzas to which Phelpstead points in this connection (on p. 127, note 43) are those (nos 145–47) quoted in chs 212, 213 and 224 of the saga as edited in *Íslensk fornrit* 27 (his reference to ch. 234 in this context cannot be correct, since the verses quoted there are by Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld Bersason). Phelpstead finds it 'particularly ironic' (p. 127) that Sigvatr was not present at the battle of Stiklarstaðir, and that his *Erfidrápa*, from which stanzas are quoted as sources for this event, was not composed until some thirteen years after the battle took place. If there is irony here, it is apparent rather in agreement than in disagreement between the prose text and its poetic source, raising the question of how reliable the account of the battle is overall. Stanza 145, for example, quoted in ch. 212 and confirming the statement in the prose that Þórðr Fólason carried Óláfr's battle-standard, is at variance with the prose account only to the extent that it anticipates (with the past tense *þreifsk*) the increasing severity of the fighting, which according to the prose has not yet begun, though it does begin soon afterwards (in ch. 224). The poet's statement *frák* 'I heard' might just possibly raise suspicions about the accuracy of the overall account, but is hardly enough to make the stanza heteroglot in relation to the prose. In ch. 213, st. 146, which relates how Óláfr, intent on victory, fought bravely with Swedes alongside him in the thick of battle, is admittedly somewhat at variance with its immediate prose context, which describes Óláfr's accoutrements, but not with the prose of ch. 198, where it is told that he acquired Swedish allies, or with that of ch. 226, where it is told how he fought with his chosen allies in the front ranks. This latter chapter in fact gives further quotations from Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa* to which Phelpstead does not refer, perhaps unsurprisingly, since they are of little help to his argument: one of them does contain the statement *frák* (and another the statement *hykk* 'I think'), it is true, but in general they confirm rather than contradict what is said in the prose. The same may be said of the stanza quoted in ch. 226, which laments the fact that Óláfr's army is only half the size of that of his opponents, the impressive size of which (14,400 men) is given in the prose. There is indeed, as Phelpstead notes, a marked contrast in lexis and syntax between these verse passages and the prose, even accounting for the fact that Sigvatr's poetry is less complex in these respects than much other skaldic verse, and this, according to Phelpstead (p. 127), is enough to make the chapters in question examples of heteroglossia. But heteroglossia, as he indicates elsewhere (p. 203), and as we have seen, involves 'juxtaposing different viewpoints' as well as stylistic differences, and differences of viewpoint between verse and prose do not seem to me especially marked in these chapters.

It is not always the mixing of prose and verse that is involved in heteroglossia, of course, and my third case, ch. 31 of *Knýtlinga saga* (discussed in ch. 5, pp. 169–70) is perhaps a better example of it than either of the two just discussed. This exclusively prose account tells how Knútr Sveinsson, later St Knútr, attempts to

seduce the wife of a priest—unsuccessfully, however, because the wife resists him, reminding him of his moral responsibilities as a king and as a Christian. Phelpstead sees this as an example of carnival, exemplified in this case by a reversal of the roles of saint-to-be and temptress that are characteristic of hagiographic narrative. It is arguably also an example of heteroglossia, however, if not a very striking one, in that it gives the impression, albeit faintly, of mixing the genres of hagiography and fabliau. It may be compared with my own example from *Njáls saga*, given above, to the extent that it raises the question (as Phelpstead points out, p. 170) of what kind of person becomes a saint, much as the *Njáls saga* example raises the question of what it means to be converted to Christianity.

In his penultimate chapter (the final one is very brief), Phelpstead places the development of Old Icelandic prose narrative in the context of the history of Christian narrative literature generally, as viewed by Bakhtin. In this view, the ‘novelistic discourse’ (Bakhtin’s term; see Phelpstead, pp. 65, 67–68, 216, 220, 223) that culminates in the polyphonic novels of Dostoevsky has its prehistory in the earliest Christian literature, as exemplified in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, which passed on to subsequent Christian narrative a dialogic tendency inherited from Menippean satire, a literary form influenced by Socratic dialogue and carnival and characterised by a mixing of verse and prose and a generous hosting of different genres. Phelpstead sees the development of saga-writing in Iceland as comparable to this overall development, arguing that hagiographic narrative—particularly when brought into relation with other literary forms, as in the sagas he discusses—did indeed teach Icelandic writers ‘how to say’ things, as Turville-Petre (*Origins of Icelandic literature* (Oxford, 1953), 142) long ago suggested, but also, more specifically, how to think as well as write dialogically.

This is the first extended treatment of Bakhtin in relation to Old Norse–Icelandic literature; earlier, briefer treatments are documented on p. 74, in note 143. Phelpstead is not quite the first to discuss Menippean satire in relation to this body of literature: Franz Rolf Schröder did so in relation to *Lokasenna* in an article (in *ANF* 67 (1952), 1–29) which Phelpstead does not seem to have used. What is especially interesting about Phelpstead’s approach is the way he follows Bakhtin in giving particular emphasis to Christian literature in the literary development he is discussing. It is arguable that a potentially dialogic relationship lies at the very heart of Christianity: the relationship between the first two Persons of the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son. Phelpstead finds echoes of Christ’s words in Gethsemane in three of the texts he discusses (pp. 86, 175), and it is of course in Gethsemane, as well as at Calvary, that those two Persons come as close as they ever do to being in conflict, with Christ praying for the chalice to pass from Him (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36), and asking why His God has forsaken him (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). A Trinitarian approach to medieval literature can sometimes be revealing, as James W. Earl has recently suggested with reference to *The Dream of the Rood* (in *Source of Wisdom*, ed. by Charles D. Wright et al. in honour of Thomas D. Hill (Toronto, 2007), 63–79), and as Daniel Paul O’Donnell (*Cædmon’s Hymn* (Cambridge 2005), 179–86) has recalled in the case of Cædmon’s *Hymn*. This approach has not yet, however (so far as I am aware), engaged with the idea of a tension between the roles represented in literary texts by Father and Son figures which, if

it is to be resolved, requires the presence of some kind of representative of the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, such as the missionary work of conversion might provide. It is arguable, for example, that the tension in *Njáls saga* between the roles represented by Njáll (a Father figure) and Gunnarr (a Son figure) is not resolved because the world they inhabit, albeit converted to Christianity in the course of the action, never fully absorbs the Christian message, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism would greatly assist such an argument, and it is noteworthy that D. S. Cunningham, in his *These three are one* (Malden, MA, 1998), 155–59, has discussed Bakhtin's concept of polyphony in relation to the Holy Trinity. A question not answered by Phelpstead, and not quite by Cunningham, is whether or how far, in his development of these concepts, Bakhtin, a religious man brought up in the Russian Orthodox Church (see p. 120 of Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), to which Phelpstead refers) was influenced by the Orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. I cannot say whether that doctrine allows for a dialogic relationship, in anything like a Bakhtinian sense, between Persons of the Trinity, but it is well-known that Eastern Orthodoxy, in not accepting the *Filioque* as part of the Creed, gives more emphasis than the western Churches to the diversity of the Trinity's individual Persons, without denying the unity of the whole ('God is not only a unity but a union', see Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London, 1997), 209; and Charles Lock, 'The space of hospitality: on the icon of the Trinity ascribed to Andrei Rublev', *Sobornost* 30:1 (2008), 21–53). Phelpstead's book thus raises interesting questions not only about other works of medieval literature than those he has chosen to discuss (not least *Njáls saga*), but also about Bakhtin himself. As for Menippean satire, there is surely a case (not considered by Phelpstead) that Snorri's *Edda* is an example of this, showing as it does practically all the characteristics of the genre as described above.

While we may regret that Phelpstead stops short of discussing Bakhtin in relation to other genres of Old Norse literature than sagas of saints and rulers, there can be no doubt of the gratitude due to him for taking his discussion as far as he does in this admirably lucid and stimulating book. To the debate which it is likely to provoke we may expect Phelpstead himself to be a lively and valuable contributor.

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THE LOST VELLUM KRINGLA. By JON GUNNAR JØRGENSEN. Translated by SIÂN GRØNLIE. *Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana XLV. C. A. Reitzel*. Copenhagen, 2007. xxviii + 366 pp. ISBN 87-7876-514-5.

Like so many other medieval Icelandic manuscripts, the manuscript of *Heimskringla* and *Skáldatal* now known as Kringla was lost in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. In addition to a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century transcriptions, a single leaf is still extant, as it had been sent to Sweden. (It has since been returned to Iceland and now bears the shelfmark Lbs. fragm. 82.) In *The Lost Vellum Kringla*,

Jon Gunnar Jørgensen presents the results of detailed analyses of almost every aspect of the manuscript, which was a magnificent vellum probably consisting of at least 150 leaves. The history and provenance of Kringla itself, its contents and transmission, the current state of research, the institutions that produced the transcripts, the transcripts, their textual relationships and their quality are all treated. Errors and oversights here are almost nonexistent. 'A fine toothcomb' (p. 53) should be 'a fine-toothed comb', and a quotation from Árni Magnússon (p. 266, note 161) lacks a translation. In a work of almost 400 pages in all, this is a high standard of proofreading indeed.

Jørgensen not only provides a most interesting history of a very important manuscript but also manages to answer some of the many open questions remaining. For example, even though such eminent scholars as Finnur Jónsson and Jonna Louis-Jensen had expressed opinions about the identity of the scribe of Holm. papp. 18 fol., fols 1–20 (designated as 18(1)), Jørgensen re-examines the problem for himself. Given that this transcript of the entire text of Kringla was made in Copenhagen and that most of it was produced by Jón Eggertsson, Jørgensen suggests that the reason why Jón did not also write the beginning of the transcript was because he was in Iceland from the spring of 1682 until the autumn of 1683, which meant that someone else had to be hired for the work. Assuming that 18(1) must have been written after the spring of 1682, Jørgensen thinks it likely that its scribe is to be found among the Icelandic students and academics who were in Copenhagen then. Of the eleven possibilities, Jørgensen shows that the hand of Þórður Þorkelsson Vídalín best matches that of the scribe of 18(1), and there is even a flourish at the end of 18(1) that can be interpreted as 'TW' (i. e. 'Theodorus Widalinus').

Most usefully, Jørgensen's survey draws together a number of significant conclusions and suggestions that should be more widely known. Some have to do with the prologue to *Heimskringla*: Kringla may have contained the prologue originally, for the prologue is found in related manuscripts. However, the prologue has not left any textual traces in Kringla, and if Kringla did originally include it, it must have disappeared before Ole Worm used the manuscript in 1633. Other suggestions concern the date and redactor of the manuscript. Information in *Skáldatal* establishes the *terminus post quem* for Kringla as 1258, and the *terminus ante quem* is around 1270. Stefán Karlsson argued that the dating could probably be narrowed to 1263/64, and he suggested that the manuscript may have been written at Reykholt by Snorri Sturluson's grandnephew Þórarinn kaggi Egilsson (d. 1283). An alternative suggestion, deriving from a significant similarity between Kringla and *Knýtlinga saga*, came from Jonna Louis-Jensen. She suggested that Snorri's nephew Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson (d. 1259), who is believed to be the author of *Knýtlinga saga*, could have produced the Kringla redaction of *Heimskringla*. Because Óláfr died the year after the *terminus post quem* for Kringla, his involvement could have been with Kringla's exemplar, if there was one, but there is nothing to exclude the possibility that he edited Kringla itself.

The unity of *Heimskringla* is also called into question by the study of Kringla. The manuscripts of *Heimskringla* fall into two classes, x and y, and Kringla is the

main manuscript of the x-class. It is generally considered to be the manuscript that best preserves Snorri's text, and it has been used as the base text for most editions of *Heimskringla*. Nonetheless, it is possible that the unified structure found in Kringla, which is commonly associated with *Heimskringla*, was not an original feature. There is much to suggest that the *Heimskringla* redaction of *Óláfs saga helga* is a secondary version of the *Separate saga of St Óláfr* that was reworked for inclusion in Kringla. Moreover, *Heimskringla* falls into three parts (*Ynglinga saga* to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*; *Óláfs saga helga*; and *Magnúss saga góða* to *Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*), and the transmission confirms that this threefold division—not the unified version found in Kringla—was the usual one. The manuscripts show that each of the three parts of *Heimskringla* was to a great extent transcribed and transmitted independently of the other two. Of the medieval manuscripts, only the lost vellums Kringla and Jöfraskinna contained all three parts, but their versions of *Óláfs saga helga* were different. The tripartite transmission and the secondary reworking of the *Separate saga of St Óláfr* suggest that *Heimskringla* did not become a unity until all three parts had been written, perhaps not until the making of Kringla itself. As Jørgensen (p. 315) points out, it also follows that it is misleading to depict the genealogy of *Heimskringla* in a single stemma. Instead, a separate stemma should be developed for each part.

All this leaves the student of Old Norse literature with much to ponder. If Kringla was edited by Þórarinn kaggi, would that emphasise the local, Icelandic relevance of *Heimskringla*? If it was edited by Óláfr hvítaskáld, would that invite a more international perspective on the work? And what would be the significance of replacing a unified *Heimskringla* with three separate groups of Kings' Sagas? On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge what Snorri in fact did, and it is interesting to think about the three sections as individual productions. On the other hand, it only took a few decades for the sections to be combined. This in turn suggests a change in point of view after Snorri's time. The object of the Kringla redactor seems to have been not the creation of textual unity but rather the creation of something to indicate the vast sweep or the sheer weight of the history of the Norwegian monarchy. Such a goal would not be at all surprising for an Icelander working right around the time at which his country gave up its independence.

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EGILS SAGA SKALLAGRÍMSSONAR. BIND III. C-REDAKTIONEN. Edited by MICHAEL CHESNUTT. *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ Series A 21*. C. A. Reitzel. Copenhagen, 2006. lxviii + 204 pp. ISBN 978-87-7876-490-4.

This volume, which contains the so-called C-version of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, is the third in a planned three-volume edition of the saga in *Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ*. It is, however, the second to appear, following on from the publication in 2001 of the volume dealing with the A-version, namely the textual tradition of *Möðruvallabók* and related manuscripts (EA series A, vol. 19). The edition of the B-version, represented by the famous Wolfenbüttel manuscript of

Egils saga (Cod. Guelf. 9.10. Aug. 4to), is yet to be published. The foundations for the project were laid more than half a century ago by Jón Helgason, who in 1956 published a ground-breaking study of the manuscript tradition of the saga, in which in particular he examined some of its later paper manuscripts ('Athuganir um nokkur handrit Egils sögu'. In *Nordæla. Afmæliskeðja til Sigurðar Nordals sjötugs. 14 september 1956* (Reykjavík, 1956), 110–48). His study revealed that some of the late copies were of incontestable textual significance in that they contained readings original to the archetype of preserved manuscripts. Although the driving force behind Jón Helgason's research was, naturally enough for the time, the quest for original readings, he did not envisage creating one archetypal saga text. His plan was, rather, to produce an edition of each of the three main versions, based on the principal manuscripts (Möðruvallabók, the Wolfenbüttel codex and Ketill Jörundsson's two transcripts respectively), but supplementing the main text of each version with the text of all preserved vellum fragments (there are fragments predating the principal manuscripts of all versions), and filling lacunae in the main text using paper manuscripts which preserved original readings of the version in question. Jón and his assistants made considerable progress in preparation for the edition but the plan did not come to fruition in Jón's lifetime. In the late 1980s Bjarni Einarsson agreed to carry out the remaining editorial work on the A-version, but passed away shortly before the work was ready for print. It fell to Michael Chesnutt to see the A-version through press and he has since continued the work on the edition, in accordance with Jón Helgason's plans.

Before publishing his edition of the C-version, Chesnutt did *Egils saga* scholars worldwide the considerable favour of translating Jón Helgason's 1956 article into English and publishing it, along with another short article by Jón on one of the paper manuscripts of *Egla*, in *Opuscula* XII in 2005. In that volume, moreover, was printed the text of the five oldest vellum fragments of the saga (one belonging to the A-version, four belonging to B), each with an introduction detailing significant palaeographical and orthographical characteristics. Four of these fragments were edited by Alex Speed Kjeldsen, the fifth by Chesnutt who also contributed an article on the textual relationships of the manuscripts of the C-version. The article represents the results of the research Chesnutt has undertaken in preparation for the edition, where he was able to refine the preliminary findings of Jón Helgason regarding the relationship of the C-manuscripts.

The C-version is preserved in two vellum fragments (162 fol. A α and ϵ) and ten paper manuscripts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first printed edition of the saga (Hrappsey, 1782) also has relevance for the textual history of C. The principal manuscripts of this version are the two manuscripts written by Ketill Jörundsson, Árni Magnússon's grandfather, in the early seventeenth century, the so-called Ketilsbækur: K¹ and K². (Their existence is well known to most *Egla* scholars since it is to them that Finnur Jónsson and other editors of the saga have had to turn for the text of *Sonatorrek*, as the poem is not preserved in the other versions.) The Ketilsbækur are descended from the fragment α , as are all the other paper witnesses. Jón Helgason reckoned that fragment α was a copy of the other fragment, ϵ . Chesnutt has been able to show that not to be the case, but that their relationship is better explained by placing them on the

same level in the stemma. He has also successfully managed to clarify the relationship between the two Ketilsbækur (by collating them against other primary paper witnesses), coming to the conclusion that K^1 is closer to the archetype represented by α than is K^2 . Chesnutt consequently bases his edition on K^1 , in addition to the text of the fragment α . K^1 , i.e. AM 462 4to, has, however, the disadvantage that some of its leaves were lost and the loss partially made good by the addition of leaves written by an unknown seventeenth-century scribe. These lacunae in Ketill's text are filled in the edition from the other Ketilsbók, K^2 . In addition, the text of fragment ε is printed synoptically, opposite the main text, giving the reader an opportunity to compare it to Ketill's transcript. Such comparison is facilitated by a list of variants in Chesnutt's introduction (xxx–xxxi) showing where ε agrees with the A and B versions against the C paper copies. The comparison reveals that there is in fact very little discrepancy between the ε fragment and Ketill's copies, indicating, first, that the scribes of the two fragments reproduced their exemplar(s) very faithfully, and secondly that Ketill was also a most meticulous copyist. The latter may not come as a surprise since in Ketill's time the sagas were already acquiring a status as 'classical' texts and important sources for the history of Iceland, which meant that those intent on preserving them for posterity by copying them endeavoured to make their copies as accurate as possible (a practice which reached its heights in the work of the scribes who worked for Árni Magnússon). The stability of the text in the fragments—the older of them dated by Chesnutt to c.1450, the younger to the first half of the sixteenth century—may on the other hand provide food for thought for those engaged in the ongoing debate about the creative role of medieval scribes.

The edition does not allow for a similarly easy comparison of the changes made by the post-medieval scribes, other than Ketill, whose copies form a sub-group in Chesnutt's stemma (c^2 -group). This is partly due to the fact that, since all the paper copies are judged to have descended from the codex of which α is a fragment, no variants are produced for the passages that are preserved in α . Furthermore, in the rest of the text, the variant apparatus is on the whole kept to a minimum, giving variants from only one of the manuscripts in the c^2 -group. This has an explanation which will arouse the sympathy of all editors of Old Norse texts, namely that in the course of the editorial work it transpired that two c^2 -manuscripts, which had been thought to be secondary, turned out instead to have the status of primary witnesses. Variants from these manuscripts are therefore provided as an appendix to the edition (Tillæg II). From what can be gauged by this material (and the discussion in the introduction), the c^2 -scribes seem also, on the whole, to have been faithful to their exemplars; deviations consist mainly in different word order and other minor adjustments to the text.¹

Judging by this edition, it seems difficult, therefore, to see in the manuscript tradition of the text of *Egla* C a case of a rewriting or reshaping of the material. But that is not the whole story. As Chesnutt points out, with reference to Stefán Karlsson (pp. lv–lvi), the C-version served as a basis for a set of *rímur*, composed

¹ How the text fared in the later, secondary copies spawned by Ketilsbækur and the c^2 group we cannot learn, since those fall outside the parameters of the edition.

by Jón Guðmundsson í Rauðseyjum and preserved in a single manuscript from 1643. These in turn were used in the composition of the version of *Egils saga* that Árni Magnússon attributed to Gísli Jónsson í Melrakkadal (d. 1670) and which is often referred to as *Vitlausa-Egla*. *Vitlausa-Egla* is preserved in four manuscripts, two in Reykjavík, one in Oslo and one in Stockholm. Both *rímur* and *saga* are clearly cases of rewriting, but any further research into their nature is hampered by the fact that neither work has been edited. The original plan for the edition of *Egils saga* undoubtedly never intended these works to be included. Times have changed, however, and with the recent upsurge in interest and research into the reception of *saga* literature there must surely be a case for a supplement to this volume in which *Egils rímur* and *Vitlausa-Egla* would be edited.

That being said, it must be emphasised that the present volume does not entirely eschew texts which testify to the interest in Egill in later centuries, for it includes, as Tillæg I, the commentary on *Höfuðlausn* (*Höfuðlausnarskýringar* – Hsk.) by Björn Jónsson at Skarðsá, written at the instigation of Bishop Þorlákur Skúlason and published as part of Ole Worm's *Runer Seu Danica Literatura antiquissima* (1636). Hsk. is of consequence for the textual history of the C-version, as Chesnutt lucidly explains, because the text of *Höfuðlausn* on which Björn mainly relied was that preserved in the C-manuscripts. The textual history of Hsk. itself is not without complications, all of which are thoroughly explained in the Introduction. This volume therefore not only brings us the very first edition of the C-version of *Egils saga*, complete with the text of both vellum fragments *in extenso*, but also makes Björn Jónsson's commentary available in print in its original language for the first time. This is a major step forward and will greatly facilitate research on the *saga*. Michael Chesnutt deserves praise for his careful editing and for his admirably clear and concise introduction, but not least for having kept the *Egils saga* editorial project going. The industriousness he has shown in making *Egla* material available raises the hope that we shall not have to wait long for the last instalment: an edition of the B-version.

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Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum

SNORRI STURLUSON AND THE EDDA. THE CONVERSION OF CULTURAL CAPITAL IN MEDIEVAL SCANDINAVIA. By KEVIN J. WANNER. *University of Toronto Press*. Toronto, 2008. xii + 257 pp. ISBN 978-0-8020-9801-6.

Kevin J. Wanner's laudable objective, in *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda*, is to remove literary analysis of the *Prose Edda* from the realm of the transcendental. Wanner wants to break with a scholarship that has 'tended to situate the *Edda* outside of the realm of material, political, or even symbolic interest, preferring to view it as a leisurely labour of scholarly love' (p. 10). Scholars have supported the transcendence of the *Prose Edda* by imagining a paradoxical Snorri: power-hungry politician and aesthetically-motivated scholar. I have not been convinced of the seriousness of this paradox, but Wanner is certainly persuasive about the need to ground the analysis of the production of the *Prose Edda* in society and history.

To this end Wanner uses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, which he summarises in Chapter 1. Bourdieu understands society as a multidimensional social space consisting of several interrelated *fields*: arenas of social interaction in which agents strategically strive to produce, acquire and control specific forms of capital. Bourdieu posits four principal kinds of capital, economic, cultural, social and symbolic; prestige and renown, for example, are forms of symbolic capital; property and goods, forms of economic capital. The position of any given agent within the social space can be defined, according to Bourdieu, by the position he occupies in different fields, or in other words, how much capital of all forms he produces, acquires and controls, and the composition of that capital. Agents are also pre-disposed to perceive and act in a certain manner as a result of their *habitus*, or system of dispositions: that is, the mental structures (for instance those inherited or inculcated through schooling) through which they apprehend the social world.

The theoretical foundations of Wanner's analysis require a social agent, and Snorri Sturluson thus becomes the main focus of his study. Chapter 2 concentrates on the major events of Snorri's life as described in the sources, namely *Íslendinga saga* and *Sturlu saga* (the life of Snorri's father), both from the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* which, alongside *Íslendinga saga*, is attributed to Sturla Þórðarson, Snorri's nephew. The authorial attributions of the *Prose Edda*, *Heimskringla* and *Egils saga* to Snorri are summarily dealt with. Wanner argues that scholarly resistance to the idea of Snorri's authorship of these works, especially of the *Prose Edda*, comes from the paradox discussed earlier in Chapter 1, that is, that the Snorri depicted in the sagas would be at odds with the contents of such works. This is an unfortunate claim, as other scholars have questioned these attributions on the basis of the evidence of medieval manuscript culture and medieval ideas of authorship (see, for instance, Patricia Boulhosa, *Icelanders and the Kings of Norway*, 2005, p. 6).

After a brief discussion of thirteenth-century Icelandic society, including an apt analysis of Icelandic law in Bourdieu's terms (pp. 31–35), Chapter 3 focuses on the activities in Iceland of Snorri and his father, Sturla Þórðarson of Hvammr. Chapter 4 concentrates on Snorri in Norway, and especially on his attempt to convert his cultural capital (his skaldic skills) into economic and symbolic capital (gifts and prestige). Chapter 5 discusses literary fashions in Norway and the decline of skaldic poetry in Hákon Hákonarson's court. In these five first chapters, Wanner builds up the argument which will be the basis of his analysis of *Háttatal* (Chapter 6), *Skáldskaparmál* (Chapter 7), and *Gylfaginning* and the Prologue (Chapter 8). An appendix lists all *kenningar* in *Háttatal* and their respective explanations in *Skáldskaparmál*.

Wanner's convincing argument is that Snorri wrote the *Prose Edda* to protect his cultural capital, chiefly, skaldic poetry. The decline of skaldic poetry in the Norwegian court threatened the Icelanders' ability to convert their cultural capital into material and symbolic capital at home and abroad. Snorri's motivations, then, were less altruistic than has generally been granted. Sometimes, however, Wanner not only is keen to get across this valuable point, but wants it to be the only possible reason behind the production of the *Prose Edda*. He over-emphasises the value of skaldic poetry as 'Icelanders' chief and only truly renewable cultural

resource' (p. 146), at the expense of other literary forms such as sagas. An assessment of the circulation of sagas in manuscripts, and manuscripts as objects, would have been preferable to the brief discussion of written sagas on pp. 77–78, and could have been a useful way of situating the sagas within Icelandic cultural capital.

I have two objections to Wanner's work here (both of which, I am happy to admit, reflect my own inclinations). The view of Snorri Sturluson with which Wanner works emerges from the saga accounts. The objection to using these sources to reveal and analyse Snorri's life is not, as Wanner suggests, that the narratives provide only a partial view of this subject, or that specific events of Snorri's life have been selected by the analyst, or that the events described never took place in reality (pp. 17, 98). These are shortcomings that come with the territory. It is, however, uncomfortable to follow an analysis that delves into the smallest details of the narrative without consistently considering either the motivations of the narrator, or historical data. Wanner notes that neither *Íslendinga saga* nor *Hákonar saga Hákonarson* mentions that Snorri recited poetry to King Hákon Hákonarson during his first journey to Norway in 1218–20, but he does not accept this, and suggests that the narrator (Snorri's nephew, Sturla) omitted the event because the king did not reciprocate Snorri's gift of poetry (p. 73). Wanner later suggests that the narrator never mentions tributes made by Snorri to kings because they all failed to reciprocate (p. 78). These assumptions are important to his argument that Snorri's motivation for writing *Háttatal* and then the other parts of his *Edda* was to overcome his failure to convert his cultural capital into profitable capital abroad (p. 103). However, when Snorri arrived in Norway in 1218, Jarl Skúli Bárðarson was the regent and *de facto* ruler of the country, whereas Hákon Hákonarson was an ambitious fourteen-year-old king. Although King Hákon had, in 1218, the support of a Norwegian bishop (Bishop Guttormr), despite being an illegitimate child, it was only in 1223 that he secured the support of all bishops and countrymen. It is telling that he only obtained the Pope's dispensation for his coronation in 1247 after the rebellious Jarl Skúli had been defeated in battle and killed in 1240–41. When Snorri was in Norway in 1218–20, therefore, he may have calculated that his support—and his poetry—should go to the man who then seemed the strongest in the contest for the crown. It seems that this is the view of the narrator, who goes on to show that Snorri's misjudgement—or his lack of prescience, an attribute that saga narrators often reserve for the most heroic characters—contributed to his fall.

My other objection is Wanner's complete personalisation of the production of the *Prose Edda*. Bourdieu's theories would have been an ideal tool with which to analyse the several agents (compilers, scribes, patrons) who contributed to its production. Such an analysis could have thrown light on the very nature of the work that we call the *Prose Edda*, with its different manifestations across several medieval manuscripts. But that would have been a different proposal, and Wanner's is an apt and overall well-argued one.

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ÞÚ ERT VÍSUST KVENNA. BEATRICE LA FARGE ZUM 60. GEBURTSTAG. Edited by KLAUS VON SEE and JULIA ZERNACK. *Skandinavistische Arbeiten* 22. Universitätsverlag Winter. Heidelberg, 2008. 147 pp. ISBN 978-3-8243-5433-6.

‘You are the wisest of women’: What a charming title for a Festschrift! On the occasion of Beatrice La Farge’s 60th birthday her colleagues at the University of Frankfurt have presented to her one birthday speech (never spoken because of its extraordinary verbosity, as Klaus von See, the (non-)speaker, put it) and six articles accompanied by a number of delightful illustrations of various kinds. The majority of the articles draw a clear picture of the research profile of the Institute for Scandinavian studies at the University of Frankfurt as well as that of Beatrice La Farge herself. La Farge is one of the leading figures in the renowned Frankfurt research project *Edda-Kommentar*, and most of the contributors in the Festschrift are or were involved in that same project. Three of the articles, furthermore, are closely connected to the new Frankfurt research project *Edda-Rezeption* which in many ways continues the efforts of the *Edda-Kommentar*. Accordingly, Klaus von See’s birthday speech, besides rehearsing a number of entertaining anecdotes from the life of the painter John La Farge, Beatrice’s famous great-grandfather, draws special attention to La Farge’s merits in practising and enhancing an American-European cultural symbiosis and stresses her crucial role in the *Edda-Kommentar* project since 1992.

The first offspring of the Edda reception project in the volume is Katja Schulz’s insightful article ‘Eine amerikanische Edda—Von Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha* und anderen eddischen Eroberungen’. She opens with a minute discussion of the usage of the term ‘Edda’ inside and outside Old Norse philology and points out very convincingly that it has been used with varying degrees of vagueness ‘irgendwo zwischen Eigennamen, Titel und Genrebezeichnung’ (p. 24) (‘somewhere between proper noun, title and genre description’). In non-scholarly contexts it has even been applied to phenomena without any connection to Norse mythology, such as in the case of the American bestseller *Song of Hiawatha*, which the author himself called an Indian Edda in his commentary. As Longfellow had detailed knowledge of Norse culture and history—he was a member of the Nordisk Oldskriftselskab and knew Carl Rafn in person—Schulz assumes that by referring to his poem as an Edda he intended to allude to the unknown origin of Eddic poetry in the remote past and thereby to transfer its natural authority to his creation.

Continuing the thread of reception studies Debora Dusse examines the tradition of the Wieland-motif from the Romantic period to the middle of the twentieth century. The motif was discovered as an object of scholarly studies as well as literary and artistic adaptations at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Wieland was especially prominent in Germany, where the blacksmith was perceived as a genuinely German figure. Although the German reception—which drew particularly on the Old Norse tradition of *Völundarkviða* and *Þiðreks saga*—was mainly imbedded in national and national socialist ideologies, there were also non-national adaptations in, for instance, theatre and poetry. Dusse’s article gives a profound survey of the different spectra of reception of the Wieland-motif although the discussion of the reasons behind the reception is brief.

In her article ‘Apollo lehnt geheim an Baldr—Zu einer interpretatio graeca bei Stefan George’, Julia Zernack conducts a remarkably dense and subtle analysis of George’s apocalyptic poem *Der Krieg*, published in 1917. Taking as her starting point the *interpretatio germanica*, the equating of Germanic heathen gods with the ancient Greek pantheon in the Middle Ages, Zernack shows convincingly how the author, especially in the last stanza, generates a ‘mythologisches Assoziationsspektrum’ (p. 69), mentioning only Baldr and Apollo explicitly while leaving the other allusions to Old Norse and ancient gods implicit. Zernack reads the parallelism of Baldr and Apollo as deliberately stressing the roots of German identity in both Greek and Old Norse culture. That very double foundation offers the salvation of German culture, as illustrated in the (non-)death and return of Baldr-Apollo. The Baldr-motif was very prominent in German culture and politics of the early twentieth century, noticeable, for instance, in the equation of Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s death with Baldr’s fateful end. Taking a closer look at the name forms and certain features of the individual gods, Zernack argues, however, that George most probably used Germanic and Old Norse sources (in particular the *Abececlarium Nordmannicum* and the second of the Merseburg incantations) rather than contemporary adaptations of Old Norse mythology.

The last three articles of the volume leave the path of Eddic poetry to discuss other topics of Old Norse philology more or less related to Beatrice La Farge’s own work. In his contribution Matthias Teichert reads *Sigurðar saga þögla* as a departure from the courtly style typical of the translated *riddarasögur*. Looking at the narratological function of the chess game and the rescued lion in the saga, Teichert argues that these two motifs are implemented as mere elements of the fantastic without references to chivalric trials, in contrast to their common usage in the translated *riddarasögur*. This leads him to the conclusion that *Sigurðar saga þögla* in the course of its narration overcomes the genre traditions of the translated *riddarasögur* and moves toward a new genre: the original *riddarasögur*.

Klaus von See—in a somewhat personal reaction to a review by Frederic Amory and John Lindow in 2006—takes up anew the question of the meaning of the German term *Sippe* and its relationship to Old Norse *sif* and *frændi*. The research history dates back to the nineteenth century, closely connected to the revival of the noun *Sippe* in contemporary German at the same time. Over a long period, not least during the Third Reich, *sif*, channelled by the German translation *Sippe*, was thought to refer to corporate, hierarchically structured family clans holding the rights of their individual members. This idea of a stable, clearly outlined family structure in Old Norse society has been questioned for a long time. Von See sees one main root for the continuing confusions around this term in misleading German translations of expressions like *sif*, *sifjungr* and others. Rejecting Amory’s opinion and referring to the usage in late medieval Old Norse law books, he stresses that this word group clearly applies to in-laws instead of relatives by blood. The discussion between Amory and von See on this topic has been going on in a number of publications; the last word may not yet have been said.

Helena Lissa Wiessner, finally, reveals to readers a long-standing correspondence between Andreas Heusler and the Danish folklorist Axel Olrik that she was

able to put together from archive studies in Basel and the Dansk Folkemindesamling in Copenhagen. Her thorough examination of the letters, a selection of which are attached to her essay, discloses on the one hand a close personal friendship, on the other hand discrepancies in the scholarly approaches of the two men which become more and more obvious over time. Wiessner's observations and transcriptions of the letters and postcards are entertaining, but at the same time instructive as to the personalities of these two influential scholars of the early twentieth century.

Overall, this volume offers six individual case studies with a number of intriguing new insights, especially when it comes to the persistent influence of Old Norse literature in modern cultures outside Scandinavia. The essays provide a good overview of the current research profile of the Frankfurt institute and serve as a seemly birthday present at the same time.

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THE VIKING WORLD. Edited by STEFAN BRINK in collaboration with NEIL PRICE. *Routledge*. London and New York, 2008. xxiv + 717 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-3315-3 (hardback), 978-0-203-41277-0 (e-book).

Recent years have seen the publication of many excellent collections of essays on various aspects of the Vikings and the Viking Age. To them can now be added this long awaited, wide-ranging and ambitious volume edited by Stefan Brink in collaboration with Neil Price. It is nothing less than the current state of the art of Viking studies between two covers: with contributions from nearly seventy international scholars, at 717 pages and tipping the scales at 2.1 kg it is a heavyweight in every sense of the term.

Like other comprehensive books on the Viking Age, it is divided into three parts. The first deals with Viking-Age Scandinavia (pp. 11–340). A short presentation of the period that preceded the Viking Age is followed by extensive thematic discussion of peoples and societies in Scandinavia, landscape and settlement, economy and trade, warfare and raiding, pre-Christian beliefs, language, runes, literature and art. The second part (pp. 341–621) covers the Viking expansion and proceeds geographically, working through the component parts of the British Isles first (but why is the contribution on the Isle of Man situated as a sub-topic of the Vikings in England?), followed by Continental Europe, the Mediterranean, the Baltic, Russia and the east, and concludes with the North Atlantic and Vinland. The third part, by far the shortest (pp. 621–74), concerns itself with Scandinavian entry onto the European stage and deals with the coming of Christianity and the development of nation states in Scandinavia. The volume is extensively illustrated with maps, diagrams and illustrations.

The *Viking World* certainly delivers everything one would expect to find in a work of this title and type. One of the highlights and strengths of the work is the inclusion of topics that do not usually find their way, for one reason or another, into such general studies. There are contributions on Sámi and Norse

interactions; sorcery and circumpolar belief; Arabic sources on the Vikings; Norse and natives in the eastern Arctic; and environmental perspectives on the North Atlantic farm—to highlight but a few of the many gems contained herein. This is truly a comprehensive collection that investigates familiar topics as well as laying out newer and more controversial research. This is accomplished by an international team of experts comprising nearly seventy scholars, representing both established authorities as well as younger academics whose work is garnering attention. Moreover, every single discipline that contributes to Viking studies is represented here: archaeology, history, philology, comparative religion, numismatics, cultural geography and environmental history. It is, therefore, difficult to dispute the bold claims made on the back cover that this book is a ‘one-stop authoritative introduction to all the latest research in the field’, as well as the ‘most comprehensive Viking-Age book of its kind ever attempted’.

One of the great accomplishments of the book is that it succeeds in being simultaneously comprehensive and detailed, scholarly and accessible. It accomplishes this in part through what Brink calls ‘two interactive levels of contributions’ (p. 1), where longer articles provide broad overviews of important topics and are supplemented by shorter, more focused pieces that often concentrate on specific sites, regions or materials. Although the pattern is not universally followed throughout, it is effective, as, for example, in chapter 8, where a general overview of ‘the development of urbanism in Scandinavia’ is followed by case-studies of Birka, Hedeby, Kaupang, Lejre and Roskilde, Ribe, ‘Ridanæs’ (Fröjel, Gotland), Sebbesund, Sigtuna, Uppåkra and Lund, or in chapters 41–44 where an overview of North Atlantic expansion is followed by specialised studies of Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, an environmental perspective on the North Atlantic farm, the discovery of Vinland, and Norse and natives in the eastern arctic. Each chapter is well referenced and has its own bibliography, and this, together with the organisational layout, will make this volume of the utmost value to students at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

One area where the claims of comprehensiveness made for the book might be called into question is in the third part dealing with the Scandinavian entry onto the European stage, or what is commonly described as the end of the Viking Age. There is, in fact, a real imbalance in the proportions of the work when the three sections of the book are compared. While some 300 pages are devoted to each of the first two sections dealing with Viking-Age Scandinavia and the Viking Expansion respectively, the third receives a mere 50 pages to cover conversion, Christianisation, state-building and Viking-Age ‘empires’. Although considerations of space may have influenced this imbalance, it is disappointing that these important subjects were not given the same thorough treatment as those in the first two parts of the volume. Treatment is patchy, particularly in the chapters on Christianisation where the two-tier structure of the volume really breaks down: a general discussion of Christianisation and the emergence of the early Church in Scandinavia is followed by only two subsequent pieces on runestones and the Christian missions and the material culture of Christianisation. Coverage is restricted largely to Scandinavia and Iceland, and where, in section two of the

volume, the Scandinavian diaspora in Britain and Europe is covered in depth, little is said of the conversion of Scandinavians in those regions. The late and peaceful conversion of Iceland is mentioned briefly but is not considered at length. Similarly, while coverage of the development of nation-states is adequate and embraces Norway, Denmark and Sweden (briefly), consideration of the so-called 'Viking Empires' of the eleventh century is limited to Cnut the Great's North Sea Empire. It might have been informative to round this out with discussion of other, later, Scandinavian maritime polities such as the earldom of Orkney or even the kingdoms of the Isles which took shape in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Much undoubtedly depends on the opinions one holds on the vexed problem of the date of the end of the Viking Age. But considering the extensive coverage given to the earlier period in this volume, it is to be regretted that the end of the period, in many ways so fascinating and still so little studied, is not more fully represented here.

The publishers, editors and individual authors are to be commended for producing a volume that is generally thorough, readable and valuable, and that will undoubtedly have a long life both as a standard work of reference and as a beacon guiding further research into the Viking phenomenon.

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ALTNORDISCHE PHILOLOGIE. NORWEGEN UND ISLAND. Edited by ODD EINAR HAUGEN. Translated by ASTRID VAN NAHL. *De Gruyter*. Berlin, 2007. 655 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-018486-0.

In 2002, a Norwegian national commission on *norrøn filologi*, that is, the study of Old Norse language and literature, recognising a lack of college teaching materials written in Norwegian 'that pick up where Old Norse grammar leaves off', initiated work on a collaborative *Handbok i norrøn filologi*; this Norwegian version (hereafter abbreviated *N*) appeared in 2004. As the editor, Odd Einar Haugen, put it, there had been no shortage of such texts in other languages, but fewer in Norwegian, and even the Norwegian titles were not always available in libraries, let alone bookstores (*N*, p. 7). With admirable community spirit, then, a project of national scope was brought into being; an advertising blurb emphasises that the eight contributing scholars represent institutions of higher learning from all over the country. Originally, the book was intended for students in Old Norse, Scandinavian (*nordisk*) and the newly established BA programmes in medieval studies, but after the fledgling project was selected to appear in the publication series of *Landslaget for norsk-undervisning*, the national organisation for the teaching of Norwegian, Haugen and his team decided to broaden their targeted readership to include, for example, advanced secondary school pupils (*N*, p. 7). In a poignant note, Haugen mentions that as the book was going to press, the Bologna reforms were creating the greatest upheaval in the history of the Norwegian university system, 'breaking up old disciplines and creating new programmes of study', but he trusted that Old Norse would find a place in the new programmes, even though it stood to lose ground in the old ones (*N*, p. 25; compare p. 30 in the German version, hereafter abbreviated *G*).

The *Handbok* consisted of ten chapters: (1) 'Manuscript and Archive Studies' by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, (2) 'Text Criticism and Text Philology' (i.e. manuscript editing) by Haugen, (3) 'Runology' by Karin Fjellhammer Seim, (4) 'Palaeography' by Haugen, (5) 'Eddic and Scaldic Poetry' by Else Mundal, (6) 'The Saga Literature' by Mundal, (7) 'Syntactic Development' by Marit Christoffersen (who changed her name to Marit Aamodt Nielsen after publication), (8) 'Personal and Place Names' by Inge Særheim, (9) 'Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Language' by Jan Ragnar Hagland, (10) 'Middle Norwegian Language' by Endre Mørck. Scholarly documentation was kept to a minimum, but each chapter closed with a short bibliographical essay. Also included were a foreword and introduction by Haugen, a list of abbreviations and symbols, prefatory notes on the normalisation of the Old Norse texts and the Modern Norwegian forms of medieval personal names, a bibliography including a list of websites, and indexes of persons (historical and mythological), sources (literary works, manuscripts, documents, runic inscriptions), and subjects. In addition, readers were invited to visit the book's own website, which offered a running list of additions and corrections.

The *Handbok* was well received, as it deserved to be, and according to Haugen, a de Gruyter representative made inquiries about a German version just weeks after the Norwegian original was published. The result is the book under review, which was translated and 'adapted to the needs of German readers' by Astrid van Nahl together with an illustrious team of scholarly advisors: Elmar Broecker, Klaus Düwel, James Knirk, Heiko Uecker, Kurt Braunmüller, Thorsten Andersson, Rolf Heller and Heinrich Beck (*G*, pp. 5–6).

The structure of the volume has remained the same, and virtually all the praiseworthy features of the original can be admired in the translation as well. Immediately obvious is the sophistication in typography and layout, which even surpasses that of the original in so far as a single, specially developed font (created in Leipzig but paid for by the University of Bergen) was used to set the entire book in contrast to the original's fifteen-plus fonts (*G*, p. 6). Additional manuscript facsimiles appear, and some illustrations have been replaced with clearer ones (at least part of this new material seems to have been available on the *Handbok* website before the translation was published).

The adaptation of the book to the needs of German readers is evident primarily in the bibliographical essays, but also occasionally in the main text, such as the mention of Modern German paradigms exemplifying Verner's Law (*G*, p. 488; compare *N*, p. 381) or the insertion of a paragraph listing four early black letter typefaces with their German names and contexts (*G*, p. 235; compare *N*, p. 182). Certain additions and improvements are not aimed specifically at a German readership. Where the original had traced the evolution of the Latin alphabet from Old Norse to its Modern Norwegian form (*N*, p. 182), saying nothing about the makeup of the Modern Icelandic alphabet, the German version remedies the oversight with a new paragraph (*G*, p. 232); the information box on diacritical marks in the same chapter has a new selection of comparative examples (*G*, p. 233; compare *N*, p. 181); and so on. In such cases the original authors and the German team have cooperated in a highly successful way. One quibble I have is that,

without explanation, the diplomatic transcriptions in Chapter 9 are now less close than those in Chapter 4 (long *s*, for example, is not indicated). The Norwegian version had been more user-friendly, including an information box on its diplomatic transcription practices (*N*, p. 382), and had for pedagogical reasons (explained in the box) reprinted sample texts from diplomatic editions that followed different transcription standards. At some point the decision was made to use a single standard for all the samples in Chapter 9 (the redone texts are available for Norwegian readers on the *Handbok* website), but the German reader is not warned that the texts as reprinted will not agree exactly with the editions cited as their sources, nor that the transcription standards in Chapters 4 and 9 differ.

Astrid van Nahl has produced a passably accurate translation from the Norwegian (both *bokmål* and *nynorsk* were represented in the original). My spot checks indicate that especially the more 'technical' chapters (1, 3–4, 7–10) are translated as accurately as one could wish. Nevertheless, while the original contributors had received praise for having written 'with verve and *con amore*, in some places even humorously' (Erik Simensen in *Maal og Minne* 2005, p. 212), it cannot be said that the German translation always succeeds in capturing the colour and nuance of the original. Where the Norwegian reader is informed about the *pent bokutstyr og solide innleiingar* of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, the German reader encounters the unimaginative *in solider Ausstattung . . . mit soliden Einleitungen* (*N*, p. 21; *G*, p. 23). Some phrasings are cropped as well as flattened. Where Hagland gives the First Grammarian a good-natured ribbing for his scholarly zeal, writing that *han [er] i stand til å analysera seg fram til 16 konsonanter* 'he manages to round up a total of 16 consonants', van Nahl gives us only *er [analysiert] auch 16 Konsonanten* (*N*, p. 378; *G*, p. 487). Where Mundal defines Byock's 'feudemes' correctly as narrative units that together make up a representation of a feud (*forteljeeiningar som bygger opp framstillingar av 'the feud'*) van Nahl's version is truncated to the point of serious distortion: *Erzählungen, die feud 'Fehde' darstellen* (*N*, p. 280; *G*, p. 361). By this definition, *Njáls saga* would be a feudeme. A similar cropping (and case error: *skiftande vurderingar* is governed by the untranslated *drøftingar av* 'discussions of', not *vurderinga av*) disfigures the sentence *Drøftingar av den estetiske vurderinga av sagalitteratur og skiftande vurderingar gjennom tidene finst i Mundal (1998 og 2003)*, so that it becomes *Ästhetische Bewertungen der Sagaliteratur und ihres Wandels[!] im Laufe der Zeit gibt[!] Else Mundal (1998 und 2003)*; that is to say, according to van Nahl, Mundal 'gives[!] aesthetic judgments about the saga literature and about changes in it[!] over time' (*N*, p. 302; *G*, p. 389).

Distortion also results when individual words are given translations that are either too vague or simply wrong. In sketching Cerquiglini's spiteful view of old-fashioned philology, Haugen invokes the image of *dei dinosaurane som stavar seg av stad der* 'the dinosaurs plodding away there', rendered by van Nahl as dinosaurs *die sich von da erheben* 'rising up (looming?) there', which makes no sense (*N*, p. 84; *G*, p. 103). At the other extreme, van Nahl sometimes translates idioms literally: *smør på flesk* is a popular Norwegian phrase for 'too much of a good thing', but figurative usage of *Butter auf dem Fleisch* is completely unknown in German (*N*, p. 206; *G*, p. 264). Haugen describes a modern typography handbook

as being *i ei uvanleg kresen utforming*, that is, as having an exceptionally beautiful design, but the hopelessly vague translation *auf ungewöhnlich anspruchsvolle Art* (N, p. 214; G, p. 274) will suggest to most German speakers that the book is challenging or difficult to read. *Eit ankepunkt for den nye filologien* is certainly not *Ein Angriffspunkt gegen die neue Philologie* (N, p. 88; G, p. 107), but just the opposite: ‘an argument used by the New Philology’, in this case against the Old. This is hardly an insignificant error, appearing as it does at a central point in Haugen’s programmatic discussion of what philology is. In fact, it is the second of two grave mistranslations in the same section; on page 103, despite Haugen’s careful terminological excursus, van Nahl confuses *den nye filologien* ‘the New Philology’ with *nyfilologi* ‘the study of modern languages and literatures’ and attributes ‘a break with traditional text philology’ to the latter, reversing the meaning of Haugen’s sentence (compare N, p. 84).

In the German translation, Mundal’s paragraph about Theodore Andersson’s contribution to the debate on saga origins has been given a strange new bias. *Eit nytt omslag i sagasyntet* (N, p. 280), where *nytt omslag* could be accurately translated as *Wende* ‘turning point’, becomes something considerably stronger: *Eine eindeutige Abkehr von der bisherigen Sagasicht* (G, p. 360), that is, ‘an unequivocal break with the previous view of the sagas’. The distortion is amplified in the next sentence, where *Dette omslaget* ‘This turning point’ appears as *Die Abwendung von der Buchprosatheorie* ‘The abandonment of the book prose theory’. The closing sentence, referring to the well-known historical anthology of saga criticism edited by Mundal herself, is mishandled in two different ways. *For ei meir utførleg framstilling av endringane i syntet på sagalitteraturen fram til 1960-åra, sjå Mundal 1977* means simply ‘For a more detailed presentation of the changes in the view of the sagas up to the 1960s, see Mundal 1977’. But the translation reads: *Zu[!] einer ausführlicheren Darstellung der veränderten[!] Sicht bis zu den 1960er Jahren siehe Mundal 1977*, that is, ‘On[!] a more detailed presentation of the changed[!] view up to the 1960s, see Mundal 1977’. The initial preposition is logically wrong, since it meaninglessly suggests that Mundal 1977 discusses a presentation; but Mundal 1977 *is* the presentation. Furthermore, German readers will have no choice but to take the mistranslation ‘the changed view’ to refer back to the supposed ‘abandonment of the book prose theory’—itself a fictional event. I assume that the tendentiousness of this translation was not deliberate, and there do not seem to be many mishaps of this kind; still, it is difficult to recommend for college use a book in which elementary knowledge about the history of Old Norse scholarship is presented in a careless and misleading way. The situation is all the more regrettable in that Mundal’s text was above reproach.

What readership is envisioned for this translation? Haugen’s preface to the German version only repeats what he had written about the purpose of the original volume—to serve Norwegian students who had become acquainted with Old Norse grammar and could read simple prose texts (G, p. 5)—and makes no attempt to position the book within the German educational landscape. The back cover blurb, on the other hand, declares that the book is for beginning college students (*Studienanfänger*). Well, one question that must be asked is who will be able to afford it. The Norwegian volume, a subsidised project, sells for the equivalent

of about EUR 60 (NKR 530); the German one, a private-sector publication (which, however, also benefited from Norwegian government subsidies: *G*, p. 6), costs more than three times as much, EUR 198. Clearly, the price-policy makers at de Gruyter envision the book in libraries, not on students' bookshelves.

In both Norwegian and German, the word *philology* is very much alive, designating university departments of language and literature and sometimes a whole faculty or division. Nonetheless, the context of a book like this in the two university systems is not identical. In Scandinavia, although its position in university departments may be weakening, as Haugen warns, the study of Old Norse is still very closely affiliated with the study of the mother tongue; it is a 'mainstream' subject, and such students have the benefit of various resources not available in equal measure to students of Old Norse abroad. One example of this is the simple fact that the original *Handbok* was subsidised and published in an academic series devoted to *norskundervisning*. Other resources traditionally available to students of Old Norse in Scandinavia include rich course offerings in linguistics together with a range of relevant teaching and reference materials in both general linguistics and the history and structure of the Scandinavian languages. In the *Handbok*, which is not overly generous with bibliographical citations, the authors were in the fortunate position of being able to refer to four different book-length histories of the Norwegian language (Seip, Indrebø, Skard and Torp-Vikør).

This is evidently the reason why basic linguistic concepts are ignored in the *Handbok*: knowledge of them is taken for granted, although the book is ostensibly intended for general readers as well as college students. The book patiently defines the word *ink* (*N*, p. 34; *G*, p. 41), for example, but not *Neogrammarian*, *umlaut*, *ablaut*, *allophone*, *realisation*, *minimal pair*, *distinctive*, *plosive*, *sibilant*, *retroflex*, *appellative*, *Indo-European*, *Germanic*, *Old Franconian* or dozens of comparable linguistic terms that confront the reader. Exceptions are few: the central concepts *Old Norse*, *Norden*, *Scandinavia*, *Old and Middle Norwegian* are indeed explained, and brief definitions are supplied for the terms *apical fricative* and *complementary distribution* (why these in particular?). The German translation is of no help here; in fact, while at the first mention of the terms *fonologi* and *morfologi* in the Norwegian *Handbok* Haugen had at least added the glosses *lydlære* and *formlære* in brackets (*N*, p. 18), the German version omits them (*G*, p. 18). *Phonology* is otherwise defined simply as the sound system of language, and *phoneme* as a 'distinctive unit' of language, but *distinctive* is not defined. I doubt whether Hagland's brief summary of the First Grammarian's minimal pair analysis will be understandable to many readers who have not worked with these concepts or read about the *First Grammatical Treatise* before. Nielsen was particularly conscientious in defining the concepts needed for her chapter on syntax, which is based on Diderichsen's field system, the Scandinavian school standard, but German-speaking students of Old Norse are bound to have difficulty with passing allusions such as that on page 395 to *Beiordnung* (compare *N*, p. 306; I believe the more common German term for *sideordning* is *Nebenordnung*, and in any case, an example would have been helpful). One of the most discussed topics in Old Norse language history is surely *i*-umlaut; beginners must recognise it in order to learn the paradigms, and professional scholars debate its origin, dating, phonemic status

and so on. But the only mentions of the phenomenon in this book are half a sentence here and there alluding to its 'products'; *u*-umlaut is mentioned more often. It is true that German speakers have the advantage of commanding more umlaut alternations in the paradigms of their mother tongue than speakers of Continental Scandinavian (or English), but still one wonders whether some definition might not have been in order. Even assuming the German-speaking user of this book will have had a semester of introductory linguistics and begun to translate Old Norse texts, there is no assurance that such a reader will be familiar with the history and structural role of umlaut in Germanic; philological translation in university seminars is often undertaken with the aid of 'compact grammars' that are hardly more than collections of paradigms. Perhaps van Nahl and her team had decided on principle against making substantive additions on linguistic topics, but they might still have done their readers a service by paying more attention to the bibliographical essays. The additional German-language recommendations in the chapters on runology and syntax are sufficient, but the short bibliographical essays in the two general 'language' chapters (9 and 10) were left practically untouched. Evidently, no one was aware that a German edition of Seip's *Norsk språkhistorie* exists (it was published by de Gruyter in 1971); nor is any reference made to Elias Wessén's *Die nordischen Sprachen* (1968) or Einar Haugen's *Die skandinavischen Sprachen: eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte* (1984), which together ought to have occupied a central place in these bibliographies. Noreen's monumental *Altnordische Grammatik* is cited in the chapter on Middle Norwegian but not in the one on Old Norse–Icelandic. Not even Bandle's new encyclopaedia *The Nordic Languages* (2002–05) is mentioned in Chapters 9 and 10, though a general reference to it was added to the German introduction (p. 29).

In Scandinavia, the affiliation of Old Norse studies with the study of the mother tongue renders a comparative Germanic approach less obvious and less necessary, just as in English-speaking countries most students of medieval English and in German-speaking countries most students of medieval German go about their business relatively unaware of the other Old Germanic languages and literatures. Non-Scandinavian students who become interested in Old Norse, however, tend to be more conscious of the fact that Old Norse is, so to speak, vying with the other members of the Old Germanic family for their attention. The comparative Germanic perspective is practically nonexistent in the book under review. To be sure, a comparative *medieval* perspective is brought to bear on the manuscript and palaeographical chapters, in the poetry chapter reference is made to similarities in the heroic legend and the poetic metres of the Old Germanic literatures (*N*, p. 217; *G*, pp. 277, 280), and in the onomastics chapter other Germanic languages are occasionally cited (*N*, p. 346; *G*, p. 444). But would it be too Neogrammarian of me to wish for a section, a paragraph, even a sentence, anywhere in the book, stating that Old Norse is a member of the Germanic language family? Not even the runology chapter does this. Seim does mention that runes were also used by 'other Germanic peoples' than the Scandinavians (*N*, p. 126; *G*, p. 157), but the comparative Germanic perspective ends there; she defines *urnordisk* simply as the language written in Norden in runes and goes on to say that although she intends to cite some of the oldest inscriptions, she is going to treat them 'not

primarily as sources for the history of language, but for the history of writing' (*N*, pp. 120, 121; *G*, pp. 150, 152).

The reason for this neglect may be, partly, that knowledge of the Germanic and Indo-European family tree was taken for granted by the Norwegian team. But it is also rooted in the conception of philology that Haugen presents in his introduction and Chapter 2. With characteristic modesty, he points out that he and the other contributors were all born between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s and thus represent only one particular generation in the long history of philology; 'the next generation may choose to define and teach the discipline in different ways' (*N*, p. 25; *G*, p. 30). In his own case, he makes no secret of his partiality for the New Philology movement of the early 1990s, with its non-normative approach to text editing that seeks to eliminate the tyranny of the manuscript stemma. This is acceptable, since—as far as manuscript editing is concerned—he presents the pros and cons of each method and avoids taking a doctrinaire position. His conceptual and historical sketch of philology, however, is another matter. In the long definition given in the introduction, the study of language is mentioned as one component but otherwise downplayed (*N*, p. 15; *G*, p. 13). Ludvig Holm-Olsen's history of Old Norse philology, *Lys over norrøne kultur* (1981), is cited, but one searches in vain for anything like the statement made there (p. 11) that linguistic study is the philologist's most important tool and that linguistics and philology are often intertwined. The presentation of the history of the discipline, moreover, is marred by two fundamental defects: virtually complete silence regarding the origins of philology in the *comparative* study of language, literature and culture, and confusion of the concepts *philology* and *manuscript editing*. It is typical of this book that it is able to dispense with Rasmus Rask entirely—the only scholar to have been a founding father of both modern philological science in general and Old Norse philology in particular. Instead, for example, a section of Chapter 2 entitled 'Traditional Philology' informs the reader about the achievements of a list of scholars who advanced the science of manuscript editing from the Italian Renaissance to the present (*N*, pp. 85–88; *G*, pp. 105–07). Downright bizarre is a similar list in a paragraph added to the German introduction. This is a Valhalla reserved for Germans, since Haugen now says that his book follows in the philological footsteps of the 'German revival of classical and, increasingly, medieval studies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries': Friedrich August Wolf, Friedrich Ast, the brothers Grimm and August Boeckh (*G*, pp. 14–15). If this paragraph is meant as a thumbnail sketch of the beginnings of philology as a modern (German) university discipline, it is absurdly inadequate, because, among other things, not a word is said about comparative language study. If it is intended to note only the emergence of the *term* in German, it is equally misleading, since German attestations begin already in the sixteenth century. Even Cerquiglini, who never tires of hurling invective at the arrogant, decadent, Prussian philologists, and whose subtitle 'Histoire critique de la philologie' cannot be taken seriously, gives a more informed and balanced picture of philology than Haugen does, since he locates the discipline's origin in comparative studies such as those practised by the early historical linguists (who, as a matter of course, went by the name of philologists): 'Cette philologie [lachmannienne] partage avec les premières recherches indo-européanistes la

methodologie comparatiste, le désir de reconstruction' (Bernard Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante* (1989), 76). And Cerquiglini's Chapter 4 is entitled 'Gaston Paris et les dinosaures' not (only) because philologists were plodding old fogies, but (primarily) because they were emulating the palaeontologists of their day. When Haugen represents Cerquiglini as having equated philologists with dinosaurs, he misses the point Cerquiglini is making about the historical context of Lachmannian textual criticism. The closest Haugen (or Haugen's reader) comes to this historical context is when he characterises the Lachmannian approach as 'archaeological' (N, pp. 88, 90; G, pp. 107, 110). But this is not only a superficial history of philology, it is an exasperatingly confusing one, since over long stretches of his text—though not everywhere—Haugen employs the term *philology* as synonymous with *textual criticism* and *manuscript editing*, without warning the reader of these semantic switches. The translation improves nothing, and in at least one place contributes to the false impression: in a paragraph devoted to textual reconstruction, van Nahl consistently writes *Philologen* where Haugen had written *forskarar*, much the better word (N, p. 89; G, p. 109).

In a foray into the history of philology in English-speaking countries, Haugen notes that the 1979 edition of an English dictionary had described the word *philology* as 'no longer in scholarly use'. The reason for this, he suggests, was that increased scholarly specialisation made traditionally broad philological study appear impractical (N, p. 15; I, p. 13). This is partly true, but the statement as a whole is a *non sequitur*, and the obvious explanation is missing: a central semantic field of the word *philology* was taken over by the new coinage *linguistics*, which made quicker inroads in English than in German or Scandinavian because English had no competing term comparable to *Sprachwissenschaft*. In English, the term *philology* became obsolete because it reminded people of old-fashioned linguistics, while in German and Scandinavian it survived with its broad, nineteenth-century sense intact, undiminished by co-existence with the terms *Sprachwissenschaft*, *Literaturwissenschaft* and so on. Haugen's remarks, astonishingly, indicate his belief that not only the word *philology*, but interdisciplinary study of language and literature itself became obsolete in the English-speaking world, only to 're-emerge, undaunted', in the New Philology movement; he is pleased to report that subsequent editions of the same dictionary deleted the comment about scholarly use, because, after all, 'it will always be necessary to consider linguistic, literary, and cultural phenomena in relation to one another' (N, p. 15; G, p. 13). A sentence added in the German version restates these melodramatic observations: 'even though for a while philology ceased to be a topic of interest in the English-speaking world, it has proved to be amazingly hardy—perhaps because there is no reliable alternative' (G, p. 15). It is to be hoped that students who read Haugen's text will also consult a history of linguistics; happily, several are available in German.

A few omissions in the revised bibliographical essays have already been noted above. Many German-language additions have been made. Most noticeable are the excellent new recommendations in the introduction, which has almost doubled in length. New bibliographical paragraphs have also been added to the runology and onomastics chapters, although here a number of references seem to be beside

the point, such as those to works treating South Germanic, East Germanic, German, Anglo-Saxon and Frisian runic inscriptions (*G*, p. 220). Nor is it clear why one-third of a page is devoted to a description of 'Germanic' rune projects at two German universities (*G*, p. 222), when in another chapter one and a half lines sufficed to mention the new skaldic poetry edition project (*N*, p. 235; *G*, p. 300). For onomastics, the new German reading suggestions consist solely of the *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* (acceptable, since a list of relevant articles is provided) and four of its *Ergänzungsbände* (unhelpful, since they are too specialised for beginners); why was no introductory work recommended, such as Gerhard Koß, *Namenforschung* (2002)? New bibliographical insertions in the main text are rare, and they occasionally seem incongruous, as when, following Mundal's statement 'One must also ask the question what kind of society the sagas are actually portraying', we read in brackets 'cf. Bödl 2005' (*G*, p. 375; *N*, p. 292); I trust Professor Bödl will not take it amiss if I venture to point out that he is perhaps not the first scholar to pose this question. The usefulness of the new bibliographical recommendations is diminished, furthermore, by the fact that at least eighteen abbreviated references are orphans without any corresponding full entry in the bibliography. Also, the editorial coordination of the bibliographical material from one chapter to another is strikingly incomplete. The full page of recommendations (many new) on the subject of Scandinavian mythology in the introduction (*G*, pp. 27–28) stands in stark contrast to a mere three recommendations on the same topic made at the end of Chapter 5 (*G*, p. 339); of these three, only one also appears in the introduction, and one of the other two is an orphan. Likewise, for example, one may ask why the Simek-Pálsson *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur* is recommended in the introduction (*G*, p. 30) but not in either of the literary chapters.

The number of typographical errors in the German volume is very low. I noted the following: *Boekhs* for *Boeckhs* (p. 14), *Island* for *Islands* (p. 23), *Analytical* for *Analytic* (p. 27), *askethisch* (p. 29), *Próndr* (pp. 57, 628), *unten den* (p. 114), *Didrik A.* for *Didrik A. Seip* (p. 221), *Konstraktion* (p. 268), *Kruase* for *Krause* (p. 276), *Nominalhrase* (p. 403), *tyndusk* for *týndusk* (p. 434), *Appelativen* (p. 435), *gjeme* for *gjerne* (p. 443), *ein substantivierten* (p. 460), *kurz /a/* (pp. 486, 508 twice), *mehrer* (p. 498), *kurz /e/* (p. 508 twice), *lang /a/* (p. 510 five times, p. 511 twice), *lang /o/* (p. 510), *Cd-Rom* for *CD-ROM* (p. 587), *Problems* for *Problem* (p. 588), *Grammer* (p. 594), *Scholarly* (p. 594), *Barðal* for *Barðdal* (p. 599), *Mass* for *Maas* (p. 603), wrong page numbers for Nielsen (p. 606), years missing for Hoops (p. 608), *Consise* (p. 614), *Pjóðaskjalasafn* (p. 620), *Boekh* (p. 621), *Frierich* (p. 627), *De haresibus* (p. 630). On pages 302 and 303, Hildr Hrólfsdóttir's *lausavísa* is reproduced with a misleading comma after *barma* (it is ungrammatical and does not appear in the edition cited), and the 'prose word order' version has failed to rearrange lines 3–4; these errors were inherited from the original (*N*, pp. 237–38).

For the bibliography and indexes, it was decided to employ a Scandinavian alphabetisation. The explanatory note on page 581 lists only the special Icelandic and Norwegian characters involved, crucially omitting the German (and Swedish) umlaut symbols, but the alphabetical order *de facto* seems to be: *aa, a, ab, ac, ad,*

ae, af, . . . d, ð, . . . od, oe, of, . . . t, þ, u, ua, ub, uc, ud, ue, uf, . . . v, x, ü/y, z, ä/æ, ö/ø, ø, å, with non-ligatured *ae, oe, ue* thus treated as two letters. The result looks like this: *Baetke . . . Bagge* (p. 588), but *Munthe . . . Müllenhoff . . . Mæhlum . . . Mørck* (p. 605), *Schulte . . . Schück . . . Schönsperger* (p. 627), and so on. This is a catastrophic choice in a work designed for German students who do not yet command a modern Scandinavian language and are used to a different alphabetisation of their own umlaut characters. To add insult to injury, the preferred order is violated many times. *Norges Indskrifter med de yngre Runer* should precede, not follow *Norges Indskrifter med de ældre Runer* (pp. 585–86), *Gödel* should stand between *Gutenberg* and *Göngu-Hrólfr*, not between *Glúmr* and *Gordon* (p. 623), and similarly misplaced are *Völuspá* (p. 587), *Bödl* (pp. 589, 621), *Schück* (p. 609), *Böðvar* (p. 621), *Düwel* (p. 622), *Jörundur* (p. 625), *Lönnroth* (p. 625), *Stötzner* (p. 628), *Boglunga* (p. 630), *Edda, Ältre* (p. 630), *Jöfraskinna* (p. 632), *Möðruvallabók* (p. 633), *Västgötalagen* (p. 634), *Färöer* (p. 638), *Rök* (p. 639). One error has nothing to do with any special characters: *Braunmüller* should precede, not follow *Bringhurst* (p. 590). A bibliography presented in such a fashion is a slap in the face of its user, to say nothing of the fact that it is missing so many titles referred to in the main text.

What is the verdict? All ten chapters and the introduction are valuable, although some of the information in the original (only in the introduction and Chapter 2) and more in the translation is misleading. But even if the translation were perfect, it would—in price alone—seem out of place on the German market, and I cannot see that the book was prepared with a clear conception of its role in German university education. Students who know a Scandinavian language should read the original volume, and those who do not should invest their time and money in learning one.

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— Other death omens of ill-luck are shared by Scandinavian, Orcadian and Gaelic tradition (cf. Almqvist 1974–76, 24, 29–30, 32–33).

— Anne Holtsmark (1939, 78) and others have already drawn attention to this fact.

— Ninth-century Irish brooches have recently been the subject of two studies by the present author (1972; 1973–74), and the bossed penannular brooches have been fully catalogued by O. S. Johansen (1973).

— This is clear from the following sentence: *iðraðist Bolli þegar verksins ok lýsti vígi á hendi sér* (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 154).

— It is stated quite plainly in *Flateyjarbók* (1860–68, I 419): *hann tok land j Syrlækjarosi*.

— There is every reason to think that this interpretation is correct (cf. *Heilagra manna sögur*, II 107–08).

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