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VOLUME III

DATING THE ICELANDIC SAGAS

By Einar Ól. Sveinsson

The publication of this volume
has been made possible by a gift in memory of

DOROTHEA COKE

*But the whimbrel still are calling
And the silver water's falling
Just where Langa River joins the sea.*

DATING THE ICELANDIC SAGAS

AN ESSAY IN METHOD

BY

EINAR ÓL. SVEINSSON

Honorary Life Member
of the Society

VIKING SOCIETY
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

I HAVE great pleasure in presenting Professor Einar Ól. Sveinsson's *Dating the Icelandic Sagas*. This is a pioneer work, for no general treatment of the subject has been published since modern methods of criticism have been applied.

Readers will already be aware of the profundity and the humane qualities of Professor Sveinsson's scholarship, and many will have enjoyed his earlier works, among which I may mention his sensitive *Age of the Sturlungs* (trans. Jóhann S. Hannesson, 1953), his penetrating *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njálssaga* (1953), to say nothing of his edition of *Brennu-Njáls Saga* (1954), a monument of self-sacrificing devotion.

The Viking Society is proud to publish a work by so distinguished an Icelandic scholar, and expresses deep gratitude to him, since he has written this volume especially for us.

G.T.P.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book was completed in Icelandic in September 1956, and nothing has been added since then except for two footnotes. The following books and papers, all of which have some bearing on the subject of this work, have been published since it was finished: Hallvard Magerøy, *Sertekstproblemet i Ljósvetninga* (Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo II, Hist.-fil. klasse 1956, No. 2), Oslo 1957; the same author's *Studiar i Bandamanna saga* (Bibliotheca Arnæmagæana XVIII), Copenhagen 1957; Ari C. Bouman, *Observations on Syntax and Style of Some Icelandic Sagas* (Studia Islandica 15), Reykjavík 1956; Jónas Kristjánsson's edition of *Eyfirðinga Sögur* (Íslensk Fornrit IX), Reykjavík 1956; Jón Jóhannesson's paper *Aldur Grænlandinga sögu* (Nordæla, Afmæliskeðja til Sigurðar Nordals, Reykjavík 1956); Walter Baetke, *Über die Entstehung der Isländersagas* (Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philol.-hist. Klasse, Band 102, Heft 5), Berlin 1956; Anne Holtsmark's Introduction to *The Legendary Saga of Saint Olav* (Corpus Cod. Norv. Med Aev., IV ser., vol. II), Oslo 1956. In this last named work Professor Holtsmark mentions certain palaeographic details, which suggest that the *Míðsaga* of St Ólaf was written as early as about 1200.

To my great regret, two distinguished scholars, who

are mentioned in this book, have died since it was written, viz. Professor Jón Jóhannesson and Barði Guðmundsson, Keeper of the National Archives of Iceland.

I wish to express my warmest thanks to the Viking Society for the honour they have done me in electing me an Honorary Life Member, and for including this book in their Series.

I would like also to thank my friend Professor G. Turville-Petre for the translation, so carefully made, of a book which is in many ways difficult. He has spared no pains to make the translation as exact and readable as possible.

I would like finally to thank Mr Peter G. Foote, who has kindly read the typescript and the proofs, and Mr David Thomas, who has given a great deal of helpful advice on typography and technical problems.

E.Ö.S.

Reykjavík
June 1958

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Bisk.* *Biskupa Sögur* gefnar út af hinu
íslenzka bókmentafélagi, I–II, 1858–78.
Í.F. *Íslensk Fornrit*, 1933– (in progress).
Safn *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenskra*
bókmenta, 1855– (in progress).

Quotations from Old Icelandic texts are given
in normalized form.

CHAPTER I

EARLIER RESEARCHES

LIKE many other medieval works, the Icelandic Family Sagas¹ have come down to us without the names of their authors; nor do these sagas tell us when they were written. As might well be expected, considering the great value of the sagas, scholars have attempted to solve such problems. The first of them, that of authorship, has often made the scholar feel as if he were in the position of Tantalus in the Greek myth: the water and fruits which seemed so close were so elusive when he tried to grasp them.

The second question, that of the dates when the sagas were written, has not appeared nearly so difficult to answer, as may be seen from the unhesitating way in which scholars have made their assertions about the ages of various sagas. But if we regard the problem more closely, we can say that, although there is plenty of evidence, much of it is exceedingly treacherous. In the present essay I shall attempt to examine this latter problem rather more closely.

At one time, scholars used to regard the Icelandic Family Sagas as true pictures of the events, and they

¹ The term *Íslendinga Sögur* (literally 'Sagas of Icelanders') is used in Icelandic for those sagas which relate the lives of Icelanders living in the Age of Settlement and the Saga Age (or Viking Age). Although it is not altogether suitable, the term 'Family Sagas' is used for such sagas in this book, since many English-speaking people know them under that name. The term *Fornaldar Sögur* is rendered by 'Heroic Sagas', and *Riddara Sögur* by 'Romantic Sagas' or 'Romances'.

troubled less about the age when they were written; they asked rather when the events related in the sagas took place, and quoted the sagas as if they were contemporary sources. Examples of this approach may still be found, but on the whole it can be said to belong to a past age. First of all, scholars began to notice, as already Árni Magnússon had done, that many sagas showed in themselves that they were written long after the events related in them took place. Gradually this became clearer; all Family Sagas were written long after their stories took place, but some of them appear to be older than others. If sagas are to be used as sources of history, it is obviously a matter of great consequence how long a period elapsed between the events related and the time when the sagas were written.

One of the first attempts to decide the age when the sagas were written was made by P. E. Müller in his *Sagabibliothek* (I, 1817), but, as Snorri says in the *Háttatal*, first attempts generally leave room for improvement. The dates to which Müller assigned various sagas differ greatly from those to which later scholars have assigned them, although some of the sagas which he thought were written very late are still thought to be so.

I shall not trace the opinions on the dating of Family Sagas expressed by scholars between the appearance of the first volume of Müller's *Sagabibliothek* and the time when Finnur Jónsson turned his attention to the problem in his great history of Old Icelandic and Norwegian literature (*Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, II, 1898). I should, however, mention that during

the interval Konrad Maurer published his *Ueber die Hænsapóris saga* (1871), and K. Lehmann and Hans Schnorr von Carolsfeld published their book *Die Njáls-sage* (1883). Both of these books showed a keener appreciation of the criteria of age than was common in those days.

In his history of the literature, Finnur Jónsson attempted to establish the ages of all Family Sagas. P. E. Müller had supposed that the sagas had been written at various times, but he did not think that there had been any pause in saga-writing from the beginning to the end. But the most striking point in Finnur Jónsson's dating is that he allows for two groups of sagas, one dating from about 1200, and the other from about 1300, and between these two dates he seems to suppose there was a gap. This would certainly be a very strange phenomenon, and the doctrine was bound to awaken suspicion and doubt.

In his later works and in the second edition of his history of the literature (1920-4), Finnur Jónsson expressed more or less the same opinions about the ages of Family Sagas. But about the same time, Björn M. Ólsen published his weighty criticism of the Prologue to *Sturlunga Saga* in which Finnur Jónsson had found the chief support for his peculiar system of dating, as will be explained more fully below. Ólsen attempted in an independent way to decide the ages of various sagas,¹ and he reached important conclusions about the relations of

¹ See B. M. Ólsen, *Om Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu*, 1911; *Um Íslendinga Sögur*, published posthumously in *Safn* VI, 1937-9.

very many of them with the *Landnámabók*, which in course of time provided valuable evidence of their ages.

I regard the bold attempts made in the series *Íslensk Fornrit* (1933 ff.) and by the editors of this series in other writings as a direct continuation of this work of B. M. Ólsen. In my view, there can be no doubt that editors of the *Fornrit* have made great advances in assembling evidence about these questions.

But it was not to be expected that such difficult problems would be settled at one stroke, and I have no doubt that there may be errors in some of the conclusions set forth in these works. At the same time, it should be observed that the evidence and methods used there have never been thoroughly examined, and, I think, it is particularly this which is needed. It is necessary to examine more closely the basis upon which any dating must be founded, i.e. the texts themselves, and closer consideration is also needed of the nature and value of the individual criteria which may be used to establish the age of a work. That was my opinion when I lectured on this subject at the congress of northern philologists in Helsinki in 1950.¹ That lecture was, in fact, the basis of the present essay.

Since that time, Volume VIII B of the series *Nordisk Kultur* has been published, and it contains Sigurður Nordal's remarkable study of the sagas (*Sagalitteraturen*). When it is realized that the whole study of this extensive subject covers no more than ninety-four pages, it can

¹ See *Redogörelse för nionde nordiska filologmötet i Helsingfors och Åbo 1951*, pp. 16-17.

hardly be expected that the author would find room to discuss the methods used in dating Family Sagas, and hence I consider an essay of this kind not altogether superfluous. For this reason I have given renewed and closer attention to all those problems upon which I touched briefly in my lecture of 1950.

TECHNICAL TERMS

BEFORE going further I would like to say something about technical terms. Obscurity in the use of technical terms has seriously hampered scholarly research, and sometimes it has even been difficult to know what the writer really means. First of all we must consider the word 'saga'. As everyone who knows Icelandic is aware, this word has a very wide application in that language. All the same, in works written in Icelandic during the last twenty-five years, I think the usage has never been so obscure as to cause confusion, and this is because of a clear appreciation of the differences. In this essay I shall use the word 'saga' as it is used, for example, in the introductions to the series *Íslensk Fornrit*.

When I speak of sagas in the following pages, I shall always mean written works, such as *Egils Saga*, *Njáls Saga*, *Heiðarvíga Saga*, or *Hrafnkels Saga*, and I shall use the word exclusively for such written works. It is impracticable to use the same word for the sources upon which sagas may have been based. It is also impossible to start out on the assumption, once and for all, that the sources of sagas were of this kind or of that, for such a problem has to be considered separately in every case. If we suppose that the sources of sagas were oral, these sources may be called 'tradition'. I have chosen this word while fully realizing that no more must be said about the form of the oral sources than is known. They

may have been anecdotes, shorter or longer tales, or a complex of short tales. If investigation proves that a saga is based upon a single oral source, a complete oral story, this will have to be especially emphasized.

It may seem strange, but sometimes it appears as though people overlook the fact that sagas, as we designate them, the written works, really exist, while the oral sources upon which they are supposed to be based, do not exist. We must not close our eyes to the danger, when we feel certain that one incident or another is derived from an oral tradition, that this may be only an illusion; this incident may never have existed in oral tradition about the same hero. Scholars should never lose sight of the difference between that which exists and that which does not—the certain and the uncertain.

All who have read works of recent years on the Family Sagas must have come across the expressions 'free-prose theory' and 'book-prose theory'. I shall not expatiate on these, but I have always considered these terms questionable, since the free-prose theory does not in fact allow for a free oral tradition, but rather for one which is more or less fixed; though this is of little importance. The chief difference between the two theories is that the book-prose theory is not, in the first place, a theory, not in the first place a doctrine, but rather an attempt to follow the tracks from the known to the unknown without prejudice, to pass with the help of experience and probability from one point to the other. On the other hand the free-prose theory, at least in its German

form,¹ is primarily a *Lehre*, a doctrine, which is set forth fully fashioned, and the origin of the Family Sagas is explained in accordance with it.

The advocates of the free-prose theory distinguish some of the larger sagas, and say that they are more literary than the others; they allow for exceptions of one kind or another. With such reservations their doctrine may be described in this way: the sources of the sagas (i.e. of the preserved, written sagas) were complete oral stories of fixed form, fixed both in matter and in style. In general it is supposed that these complete oral stories corresponded exactly with the written sagas. It is supposed that they were commonly written down word for word, and it is stated plainly that the differences between a written saga and its oral source are no greater than the differences which two story-tellers would make in telling the same tale; the alterations were no greater than any story-teller would permit himself. These oral stories, from which the written sagas were taken, are believed to have been learnt by heart by one story-teller from another, and finally, as already said, they were written down more or less word for word as one of the story-tellers had told them.

As may readily be appreciated, we are here faced with a series of preconceived ideas, I might almost say postulates, none of which follows from the other. The first postulate is that when we have a saga its source is a

¹ K. Liestöl (in *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, 1930) was less rigid, and had learnt much more from experience. He had wide experience of the development of oral tales.

single, complete oral story, although it is obvious that there are many other possibilities, and the scholar's task is therefore more complicated and difficult. The second postulate is that every oral story which is supposed to have existed was fixed in style and learnt word for word by heart. But even if we start from the first postulate (which I consider wrong) it does not follow that the second is right. It is well known that there are long tales whose substance is preserved orally, although they are not learnt word for word. This, to speak generally, is the case with the popular *Märchen*.¹ I may add that I consider it questionable whether prose texts were ever preserved orally word for word unless there was a distinct class which lived by reciting them, learning them systematically for years together, as the Irish *filid* were said to do. There was no such class as this in Iceland.

We come now to the third postulate. If we suppose for the moment that the first and second are right, it does not by any means follow that the third is right. The third postulate is that the scribe followed the oral tale word for word. But why should he do so? If I may use a rather paradoxical expression, I may say that this kind of writing is against the laws of nature. What I mean is this: for century after century lettered men have been writing down stories which they learned from oral story-tellers, but what writer was ever so oppressed with a sense of

¹ This, of course, does not apply to fixed phrases and suchlike, which are preserved in any kind of oral tale. There are also types of rime-like *Märchen* containing a lot of repetition, which may be learnt more or less by heart, but in style these are nearly the antithesis of Family Sagas.

inferiority that he did not think himself better able to find the right words than an illiterate story-teller? It is only in the last decades that scholars have begun to write down stories word for word, and before they can do it they have to undergo a strict training. It is such an unnatural thing to do.¹

This is not the place to discuss the free-prose doctrine further, although I shall perhaps do so in another context. Indeed, there is no reason to do so here, for this essay is not about the sources of the written Family Sagas, but about these sagas themselves. Only in very rare instances will the free-prose doctrine come in our way, but yet often enough to make it clear that it should be mentioned and explained briefly. It was appropriate to describe it at the same time as I explained what precise meaning I would give to the word 'sagas' in the following pages.

1 I am concerned with oral prose-stories on profane subjects. I realize that rather different conditions may apply to stories about religious subjects, but these have nothing to do with the present problem.

CHAPTER III

MANUSCRIPTS AND TEXTS

THE sagas with which I am dealing in this essay are the extant, written Family Sagas, and when I speak of their age, I mean the date when they were written. But before discussing this, it is necessary to consider one other problem, viz. the state in which these sagas are preserved. The importance of the question whether a saga is well or badly preserved has become ever clearer to me during years of study, and much depends upon whether it is possible to answer it conclusively. To speak generally, most other kinds of scholarly investigation of a saga must depend on the state of its preservation. A good example of this can be found in studies of *Egils Saga*. In his book *Författarskapet till Egla* (1927), Per Wieselgren investigated the style of *Egils Saga*, and among other things, he reached the conclusion that the style of this saga differed so sharply from the style of Snorri that it was inconceivable that Snorri was its author. But on this point Sigurður Nordal refuted him conclusively,¹ showing that what people call the style of *Egils Saga* is, in reality, the style of *Mǫðruvallabók*, in which the saga has been considerably abbreviated, as may be seen by comparison with the fragment designated as *θ*.

Family Sagas have come down to us chiefly in manuscripts of the fourteenth and later centuries, for there are very few manuscripts, and these only fragments, which

¹ *Egils Saga* in *J.F.* II, 1933, Introduction, pp. lxxxii ff.

can be assigned to the thirteenth century. The oldest are thought to be the fragments θ of *Egils Saga*, D2 of *Laxdæla Saga*, and the first hand in the vellum manuscript Sth. perg. 18, 4to.¹ Probably all of these fragments may be assigned approximately to the middle of the thirteenth century. Next come ζ of *Egils Saga* and A.M. 162, E, fol. containing texts of *Eyrbyggja* and *Laxdæla*, and the fragment δ of *Egils Saga*, which is in a similar hand. Dating from about 1300 are the manuscripts D1 of *Laxdæla Saga* and just five manuscripts of *Njáls Saga*, viz. *Reykjabók* (AM 468, 4to), *Gráskinna* (Gl. kgl. sml. 2870, 4to), *Kálfalækjarbók* (AM 133, fol.) and the fragments δ and β .² The fragments of *Njála*, ζ , κ , γ , θ are assigned to the first half of the fourteenth century, as are the fragment γ of *Egils Saga*, and the *Hauksbók* which contains *Eiríks Saga Rauða* and *Fóstbrœðra Saga* (written before 1334). The manuscripts Sth. perg. 7, 4to and β of *Egils Saga* are assigned to the middle of the fourteenth century, as are the Wolfenbüttel manuscript containing *Egils Saga* and *Eyrbyggja* and the text of *Gunnlaugs Saga* in Sth. 18.

The great vellum manuscript *Mǫðruvallabók* (AM 132

¹ The fragments of *Egils Saga* and *Njáls Saga* denoted by Greek letters are contained in AM 162 fol. A-B. I have followed the opinions of Finnur Jónsson (see especially his editions of these sagas) and of K. Kålund on the ages of these manuscripts. In the following pages I have taken consideration of Finnur Jónsson's opinions, although my chief authority is Kålund's catalogue (*Katalog over den Arnemag-næanske Håndskriftsamling I-II*, 1889-94).

² On the manuscripts of *Njáls Saga* see my work *Studies in the manuscript tradition of Njáls saga*, 1953. In that work I have followed the opinions of Finnur Jónsson and of Kålund in dating the manuscripts.

fol.) is slightly older than these last named, and was written at some time between 1316 and 1350.¹ It contains *Njáls Saga*, *Egils Saga*, *Finnboga Saga*, *Bandamanna Saga*, *Kormaks Saga*, *Víga-Glúms Saga*, *Droplaugarsona Saga*, *Olkofra Þáttr*, *Hallfreðar Saga*, *Laxdæla*, and *Fóstbræðra Saga*. Nearly all of these sagas have been edited from the *Mqðruvallabók*, and if it did not exist, we should have no more than paltry fragments of *Kormaks Saga*, *Droplaugarsona Saga*, and *Víga-Glúms Saga*, while *Hallfreðar Saga* would be preserved only in sections, as is e.g. *Bjarnar Saga Hitdælakappa*.

I do not consider it necessary to enumerate manuscripts later than these, but it is plain that there were some manuscripts containing various texts written about 1400 and in the fifteenth century, which contained two or more Family Sagas, sometimes together with Heroic and other later sagas. I shall mention only two of these. *Vatnshyrna* written for Jón Hákonarson of Víðidalstunga about or a little before 1400, which Guðbrandur Vigfússon rescued from oblivion in his Introduction to *Bárðar Saga* (1860). *Vatnshyrna* survives only in fragments and transcripts, but it contained *Flóamanna Saga*, *Laxdæla*, *Hænsa-Þóris Saga*, *Vatnsdæla Saga*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Kjalnesinga Saga*, *Króka-Refs Saga*, *Víga-Glúms Saga*, *Harðar Saga*, *Bárðar Saga*, *Þórðar Saga Hreðu*, *Bergbúa Þáttr*, *Kumblbúa þáttr*, and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*. It may thus be said that *Vatnshyrna* and *Mqðruvallabók* supplement each other. I shall mention

¹ See Jón Helgason, *Gauks Saga Trandilssonar* in *Heidersskrift til G. Indrebø*, 1939.

just one other composite manuscript, *Melabók*, which was written at the beginning of the fifteenth century and contained *Flóamanna Saga*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Vatnsdæla*, as well as *Landnámabók* and genealogical lists. Considerable fragments of this manuscript are preserved.¹

Many vellum manuscripts have been lost, but the loss is partly made good because, early in the seventeenth century, people began to copy the vellum manuscripts, and thus we have complete texts of many sagas of which only small fragments survive on vellum. Sometimes these transcripts have to serve instead of the lost vellums. We shall now consider how some of the sagas were preserved under these conditions. We must consider how many independent texts of medieval sagas now survive in complete vellums written in the Middle Ages, or in fragments of them, or else in later copies of such vellums. When we have to deal with late copies, it does not matter how many they are, but rather what evidence they provide of the independent medieval manuscripts from which they are descended. It need hardly be said that investigation of all the late manuscripts is necessary, so that we may be sure whether they represent one medieval text or more. Such investigation has only been done in part, and I must ask my readers to bear this in mind as they go through the following pages. I must also rely upon the opinions now current. Maybe, the future will bring to light some texts among the paper manuscripts which descend from lost, unknown medieval manu-

1 Guðbrandur Vigfússon has given a list of other manuscripts of Family Sagas in his *Prolegomena to Sturlunga Saga* (1878), § 29.

scripts. But it is wiser not to hold out high hopes on this score.

When we consider the number of medieval codices in which various sagas were preserved, we shall understand the extent of their popularity in the Middle Ages. But their number must also influence our judgement of the value and reliability of the existing texts. It is well known that the early scribes did not care to copy word for word, and hence we may suppose that, in their extant form, very few sagas are anything like exact copies of the texts as they were first written. But even if this is admitted, it does not follow that the manuscripts are not to be trusted at all, and that they have all been interpolated or abbreviated. Certainly some of them have, but it may well be that by studying the existing manuscripts we may gain some knowledge of the history of the texts—knowledge which may be useful to us in deciding their ages and many other problems.

We must first of all consider the number of independent manuscripts in existence. It is a natural probability that the greater the number of witnesses the greater the likelihood that one of them is telling the truth on one point or another. If a saga has been shortened or altered in other ways it may be that one manuscript or another will preserve relics of its form before it suffered these alterations. But if, on the other hand, we have only one witness, one text, we must honestly admit that very little can be certain; we are left to the mercy of one scribe and of other scribes before him, of whom we know nothing.

We have to consider other problems besides that of the

number of the manuscripts, and the first to which I shall turn is that of their age. Needless to say, it does not take long to alter a saga if a man sets out to alter it. But if this does not arise, and if we are dealing with an ordinary scribe who had no intention of altering a saga, then we can say that the longer the time and the greater the number of intermediaries between our text and the original, the greater are the chances of corruption. Hence, we are in a much stronger position if we have old manuscripts, and if they are both old and numerous, we are not altogether at a loss. On the other hand, the scholar must inevitably wander in a maze of bewilderment if he has only paper manuscripts, representing only one medieval codex, whose text may be uncertain in many passages.

This brings us to the third question, that of the quality of the texts. In deciding this subjective considerations inevitably play a great part, but it is, nevertheless, very important. In considering quality we have the help of the learning which scholars have gained by experience of textual criticism and from the technique of editing, such as may be found in manuals on the subject. We are in a stronger position if we have more than one text, for by comparison we may sometimes acquire some knowledge of the textual history. At the same time, it is as well to realize that, while many of the changes made in the texts are undoubtedly corruptions, they may also include corrections and improvements, although this is less usual. Sometimes a text has been shortened, and then it may be that the shortened text is every bit as

readable as the other, and then we need all our wits about us. Even in cases where we have only one text, we can still acquire some knowledge of its quality. We may notice meaningless phrases, late expressions, sometimes mistakes in personal names, or else the absence of all these faults. But it is one thing to detect errors, another to correct them, and, in doing this, editors have sometimes trusted too much to their own judgement, and even to their own caprices.

I shall now give a survey of the preservation of the Family Sagas, beginning with *Njála*, which survives in the greatest number of manuscripts, for there are relics of nineteen to twenty medieval codices containing it. Besides these there are later vellums, chiefly fragments, whose texts are, of course, no better than those of paper manuscripts of the same period. Among the paper manuscripts, traces of a lost codex, probably but not certainly written in the Middle Ages, may be detected. This codex was the *Gullskinna*, and it appears to descend from the *Reykjabók*, which is still preserved. In this case, *Gullskinna* would have no independent value. Other paper manuscripts of *Njála* preserve texts of certain codices in a more complete form than that which they have now. I should point out that not all the paper manuscripts of *Njála* have yet been examined, any more than have those of many other sagas, and I ask readers to bear this in mind. As already stated (p. 12 *supra*), there are five manuscripts of *Njála*, which are believed to date from about 1300, and another five dating from the next half-century. If *Njáls Saga* was written about 1280, as seems probable,

the manuscripts are, in age, very close to the original. They thus have the advantages both of number and of age.

I have discussed the manuscripts and text of *Njála* in *Studies in the Manuscript Tradition of Njálssaga* (1953) and in *Skírnir* (1952), where I reached the conclusion that, in the original, the text of this saga was similar to that preserved in its best manuscripts, *Reykjabók*, *Gráskinna*, and *Mǫðruvallabók*, each of which is the chief manuscript of one of the three groups. But the differences between them are so slight that they all constitute one version, not only in subject matter, but also in phraseology. In many passages of *Njáls Saga* it appears to be possible to attain the original text by comparing these manuscripts.

In the number of its manuscripts, *Egils Saga* comes next to *Njála*, for there are thirteen medieval manuscripts of it, although most of them are, of course, fragments.¹ In the editions, *Mǫðruvallabók* has been made the basis of the text, and indeed no other course seems possible. Finnur Jónsson divided the manuscripts of *Egils Saga* into three groups, which he designated by the initials of their main manuscripts, *Mǫðruvallabók*, *Wolfenbüttel*, *Ketilsbók*. He pointed out that manuscripts of the *W* group were abbreviated, and maintained that the *K* text was compiled from the other two. But Finnur Jónsson did not notice, or did not state, that *θ*, which belongs to the same class as *Mǫðruvallabók*, has a fuller

¹ See Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Egils Saga*, 1886-8, Introduction, Ch. I.

text than *Mǫðruvallabók*. Sigurður Nordal discussed this problem in his edition of the saga,¹ pointing out that *Ketilsbók* sometimes shares words and sentences with *θ* which are not to be found in *Mǫðruvallabók*, and the same could, in fact, be said of manuscripts of the *W* group. The explanation which he gives is that all of the manuscripts have been abbreviated, each in its own way, except for *θ* which cannot be shown to be abbreviated. Thus one manuscript preserves the original text in one passage, another in another. But *θ*, which is believed to date from about 1250, is only a few decades younger than the original text, and appears to follow it very closely. A new understanding of the history of the text is thus obtained. Although the text of *Mǫðruvallabók* has not suffered great alteration, *θ* gives a different picture of the original, which we could not have obtained, at least not with any certainty, if it did not exist.²

The manuscripts of *Laxdæla* are numerous. There are seven medieval manuscripts of it, or their equivalents, some of which are, of course, fragments. But besides these, there are paper manuscripts, which may or may not descend from yet another medieval codex. It should be added that chapters from the *Laxdæla Saga* have also been incorporated in sagas of Ólaf Tryggvason and of

1 *I.F.* II, 1933, Introduction, § 6. Reference to the problem was also made in my Introduction to the facsimile of *Mǫðruvallabók* (*Corpus codicum Islandicorum medii ævi* V, 1933), pp. 14-15.

2 Jón Helgason has lately published a study of some paper manuscripts of *Egils Saga* (*Nordæla, Afmælishveðja til Sigurðar Nordals*, 1956, pp. 110 ff.). He points out that, in certain manuscripts of the seventeenth century, lost vellums have been followed in some chapters.

Ólaf the Saint. Comparison of all these manuscripts makes it plain that there can be no question of more than one version of the saga, and their similarity indicates that no great changes have been made since the saga was first written. It is particularly fortunate that we have the fragment D2, which must be very close to the original and was probably written only a few years after it. This fragment shows that the text of *Mǫðruvallabók* is a reasonably sound representative of the original, although sentences, or parts of sentences, have undoubtedly been omitted here and there. We would probably not be able to rely so fully on the evidence of the *Z* vellums if we had not got D2. But on this point the evidence of the other manuscripts of the *Z* group is much the same: here and there they contain sentences which are not in the *Y* group.¹

The manuscripts of *Eyrbyggja Saga* have been investigated to some extent in the editions of Guðbrandur Vigfússon (Leipzig, 1864), of Gering (Halle, 1897), and in my edition (Reykjavík, 1935), but these investigations are far from exhaustive. There are fragments of four vellums and transcripts of a fifth (*Vatnshyrna*). Material differences are small, and comparison of the manuscripts does not suggest that the wording has been radically altered. It is possible that manuscripts of the *B* and *M* groups are, in some particulars, closer to the original than those of the *Vatnshyrna* group, on which the

¹ The most important study of the manuscripts of *Laxdæla* is contained in K. Kålund's edition, 1889-91; see also my edition of the saga in *Í.F.* V, 1934.

editions are based. At least, this possibility would be worth considering.¹

There is no thorough critical edition of *Grettis Saga*, since little variant apparatus is provided in the editions of R. C. Boer (Halle, 1900) and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík, 1936). In his Introduction² Boer maintained that six manuscripts of *Grettis Saga* had independent value, and most of these are medieval vellums.³ In a few passages there is considerable difference between these manuscripts, but I doubt whether it would be right to talk of two versions.

Þórðar Saga Hreðu has not been published in a critical edition. In his edition (Copenhagen, 1848), Halldór Friðriksson followed AM 551 d 4to and its transcript AM 139 fol. But besides this there are fragments of four other medieval manuscripts in the AM collection, and there is yet another vellum in Stockholm. I do not know whether any of the paper manuscripts have independent texts. There are two versions of this saga, one preserved in the fragments of *Vatnshyrna*, and the second in the other manuscripts, whose text seems to vary little.

Now we come to sagas whose texts are preserved in four vellums (or their equivalents) or even in less. In

¹ Mr Forrest S. Scott writes to me (3/6/1957) about the remains of yet another old text preserved in two paper manuscripts (AM 446, 4to and 129, fol.). This text belongs to the B-class.

² See also Boer's paper in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* XXXI, 1899, pp. 40 ff.

³ Boer does not mention the vellum AM 571 4to, believed to date from the sixteenth century. It is difficult to understand the interrelationship of the paper manuscripts from Boer's article mentioned above.

such cases, scholars often tend to be less diffident, to place greater faith in these few witnesses although, in reality, the fewer the texts the greater the caution and scepticism needed, for it is even more a question of chance whether all the versions of the saga have come to light, and how faithfully they are preserved.

Bárðar Saga, *Kjalnesinga Saga*, *Finnboga Saga*, and *Víglundar Saga* appear all to be known in three or four texts which can be traced to the Middle Ages, but it is important to note that *Bárðar Saga* and *Víglundar Saga* have not yet been published in satisfactory critical editions.

The case of *Víga-Glúms Saga* is rather different. It may not be the most important point that one manuscript contains an interpolation or, expressed in another way, that one of the manuscripts contains a section not in the others, but what would we say if only this manuscript had been preserved? It is no less remarkable, as G. Turville-Petre has shown in his edition (Oxford, 1940), that the text has been shortened in *Mǫðruvallabók*, which is the oldest manuscript, while relics of an earlier text are preserved in two fragmentary manuscripts.

Then there is the *Gísla Saga*, which is preserved in three texts representing two versions, which differ widely in the early chapters, but afterwards draw closer together. One text is preserved only in paper manuscripts, and the others in manuscripts which are believed to date from the fifteenth century.

Bandamanna Saga is preserved in three medieval vellums, of which the oldest is *Mǫðruvallabók*, written

in the first half of the fourteenth century. The Norwegian scholar, Hallvard Magerøy, after studying the three manuscripts closely, has reached the conclusion that the text of the vellum fragment in Jón Sigurðsson's collection is possibly descended from *Mǫðruvallabók*. This leaves us with two independent medieval texts of the saga, each of which preserves a distinct version. The text of *Mǫðruvallabók* is the fuller, and various theories have been put forward about the relationship between the two, but, after thorough investigation, Magerøy has lately given the opinion that the shorter text is no other than an abbreviated form of the same original text as that from which *Mǫðruvallabók* is descended.¹

In rare instances we may find extraneous evidence about the texts of Family Sagas. As examples, I may mention the chapters of *Laxdæla* which are included in the sagas of Ólaf Tryggvason and Ólaf the Saint (in *Fornmannasögur* and *Flateyjarbók*). There are also three sagas of poets which have been treated in the same way, except that the Kings' Sagas preserve a much greater proportion of their texts than they do of the *Laxdæla Saga*. These sagas are *Fóstbræðra Saga*, *Hallfreðar Saga*, and *Bjarnar Saga Hitdælakappa*.

Fóstbræðra Saga is preserved separately in four independent texts. The oldest is *Hauksbók*, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century, and then come *Mǫðruvallabók* and paper transcripts of a lost manuscript, formerly preserved in the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

¹ See *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for nordisk Middelalder* I, 1956, pp. 332-3.

There are also the vellum fragments in AM 75 e fol., whose text is closely related to that of a paper manuscript in Stockholm.¹ Besides these, a great part of the *Fóstbræðra Saga* is preserved in *Flateyjarbók* and in two other related texts, where it is interwoven with the saga of St Ólaf. There are wide differences between the manuscripts of the *Fóstbræðra Saga*, and the most remarkable is that the text of *Hauksbók* is much shorter than the others. This was formerly held to show that the text of *Hauksbók* was the closest to the original, but Sigurður Nordal and Sven B. F. Jansson have recently argued that the text of the *Hauksbók* has been abbreviated.²

The text of *Hallfreðar Saga* is also preserved in a shorter and a longer form. The shorter is in the *Mqðruvallahók*, where the saga is presented as a single whole; the longer version is in the Greatest Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, where it is broken up into chapters. The text of the *Flateyjarbók* is compiled from that in the Greatest Saga of Ólaf and a complete text of *Hallfreðar Saga* like that in *Mqðruvallahók*. Problems of the relationship between these two versions have not been decided, and it may be that both of them have been altered.³

Finally, we have the *Bjarnar Saga Hitdælakappa*, which is preserved only in fragments. There were two vellum leaves of it in the time of Árni Magnússon, who

¹ See Björn K. Þórólfsson's edition of *Fóstbræðra Saga*, 1925-7.

² See *Í.F.* III, 1938, p. cxxxix, and especially VI, 1943, pp. lxx ff.; also S. B. F. Jansson, *Sagorna om Vinland I*, 1944, pp. 173 ff.

³ Cf. *Í.F.* VIII, 1939, p. lxxviii.

got hold of them, but in the seventeenth century more of this saga survived on vellum, and it had been copied. There are, however, two lacunae in the text, although parts of the opening chapters of the saga have been incorporated in the manuscripts of the Saga of St Ólaf. These chapters have been altered to some extent, but they give a fair idea of the content of the first chapters.¹

Together with these sagas I may mention *Vatnsdæla*, preserved in two texts traceable to the Middle Ages, which do not differ excessively (*Vatnshyrna* and *Melabók* and their transcripts). Besides these, excerpts from the saga are found in versions of the *Landnámabók*, in *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* on the one hand, and in *Þórðarbók* on the other. These excerpts appear to be based upon a better text of the saga than those preserved, but it does not seem that there can be any question of separate versions, and it is by no means certain that the texts varied greatly in style.

We come now to those sagas which are preserved only in two medieval manuscripts, and in some cases one of the manuscripts is no more than a fragment. Our difficulties are then graver.

There are two vellum manuscripts of *Gunnlaugs Saga*, one dating from the middle of the fourteenth century, and the other from the fifteenth century. There are some differences between them, although their texts are, in general, alike. One or other must have been interpolated or shortened.

Kormaks Saga is preserved intact in *Möðruvallabók*

¹ See *f.f.* III, pp. xcv-vii.

and there is, besides, a small vellum fragment of it. These two manuscripts have much the same text, with only slight verbal differences. There is no reason to suppose that these differences were greater in the chapters other than those covered by the fragment. This is of considerable importance, because the *Mǫðruvallabók* text is so concise that scholars have suspected that this saga has been shortened and spoilt. But it may be that we have here an old, clumsy text, which has not been seriously corrupted.

Flóamanna Saga is preserved in transcripts of one intact medieval manuscript and in fragments of another.¹ There is some difference between the two texts, the most remarkable being in the genealogies at the end of the saga, which must certainly have been altered in one or the other.

Svarfdæla Saga is preserved only in fragments; there is one large lacuna in the text and many small ones. The main text is found in paper manuscripts which may be traced to a lost vellum. This text cannot be called a good one, but there is a rather better one on a vellum fragment.

Eiríks Saga Rauða and *Droplaugarsona Saga* are both preserved in two texts, one shorter and the other longer. In the case of *Eiríks Saga* the longer text (dating from the fifteenth century) appears to be closer to the original than the shorter (in *Hauksbók*), as Sven B. F. Jansson has shown,² and it was Lawman Haukr who shortened the text.

¹ See Finnur Jónsson's edition, 1932.

² *Sagorna om Vinland* I, 1944.

Droplaugarsona Saga is preserved entire in *Mǫðruvallahók*, and besides this, a small fragment of it is found in a manuscript of the fifteenth century, which was read by Kr. Kålund in 1886. Scholars have not agreed about the textual history of this saga. Konráð Gíslason considered that the text of *Mǫðruvallahók* had been shortened, but Kålund held that this was the original text, while that of the fragment had been expanded. Jón Jóhannesson has discussed this question in his edition of the saga,¹ and has concluded that the text of the fragment is the closer to the original, while that of *Mǫðruvallahók* has been altered, not only in wording but also in subject matter, especially because of omissions. The problem is difficult, but I think that all the indications suggest that Jón Jóhannesson is right. We must, therefore, suppose that the original text of *Droplaugarsona Saga* has been lost except for the small part preserved in the fragment.

The complete text of *Hænsa-Þóris Saga* is preserved in paper manuscripts which must descend from one medieval vellum, or perhaps from two, and there is also a fragment dating from the fifteenth century. There are no great differences except that most of the complete texts contain an interpolation which, according to the opinions of Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Sigurður Nordal, cannot have been present in the fragment.²

A fragment of *Harðar Saga*, which belongs to *Vatns-lyrna*, is preserved, and besides this there is another

¹ See *Í.F.* XI, 1950, pp. lviii ff.

² See *Í.F.* III, 1938, Introduction, § 4.

text. There are great differences between the two (cf. *Þórðar Saga Hreðu*, p. 21 above).

Ljósvetninga Saga survives only in two late vellum fragments and in paper manuscripts descending from one of the fragments in a form less defective than that which it has now, but there is no complete text of the saga. In this case, there are two divergent versions, one of which is expanded with tales (*þættir*) and, in part, unlike the other in phraseology. Here we are faced with the same question that arose when we considered *Bandamanna Saga*: can we rely on these manuscripts to give evidence of the original text? One of them is certainly unreliable as a witness, but are they not both? Is not *Ljósvetninga Saga* what might be called a badly preserved saga?

Jón Helgason has maintained that in the case of *Hrafnkels Saga* there are two 'branches', one preserved in the vellum fragment and in transcripts of it, and the other in paper manuscripts. There are some, although no great differences between them.¹ It should be mentioned that not all the paper manuscripts have yet been examined.

Finally we come to those sagas which are preserved only in one medieval manuscript or its equivalent. These are *Heiðarvíga Saga*, *Vápnfirðinga Saga*, *Gull-Þóris Saga*, *Reykðæla Saga*, *Þorsteins Saga Hvíta*, *Þorsteins Saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, and *Valla-Ljóts Saga*.

¹ See *Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða*, ed. Jón Helgason, 1950 (reprinted 1955). It should be mentioned that Jón Jóhannesson believes that all the paper manuscripts descend from the codex of which a fragment is preserved. See *Í.F.* XI, 1950, pp. lvi-vii.

Now the problems grow even more difficult. Only chance has decided whether a good or a bad manuscript has been preserved and, in most cases, we have no evidence about the history of the text. Sometimes the text may recommend itself, as does the fragmentary manuscript of *Heiðarvíga Saga*, part of which is very old and written in a very archaic style. At the beginning of the eighteenth century *Þorsteins Saga Síðu-Hallssonar* existed only in fragments on vellum and, for a long time, only one direct transcript was known. But Jón Jóhannesson discovered another transcript from which some corrections may be made. We cannot get back beyond these transcripts of the vellum, but it may be mentioned that the text shows marks of age, e.g. the preposition *of* (for later *um*) occurs often, and this speaks for the age of the text.

We have none but paper manuscripts of *Valla-Ljóts Saga*, and these are carelessly written and descend from a vellum whose text was corrupt.

Even though it cannot be proved that it has been altered or corrupted, we must beware of placing too much faith in the text of a saga which survives only in one vellum or its equivalent.

There is yet another group of sagas, of which even less can be said than of those last named, known only from one medieval manuscript. It so happens that we can deduce from various evidence that, at one time, there were sagas which have since been lost, and there were quite a number of these. Since I shall have little to say about them in the following pages, I shall here content myself with giving a short list.

Skáld-Helga Saga: the substance of this saga is preserved in *rímur*.

The following lost sagas are named in the *Landnámabók*: *Bøðmóðs Saga Gerpis ok Grímólfs*, *Þórðar Saga Gellis*, *Vébjarnar Saga*, *Ísfirðinga Saga* (which contained material similar to that of *Hávarðar Saga*). The *Svarfdæla Saga* and *Þorskfirðinga Saga* mentioned in the *Landnámabók* are generally believed to be older versions of the extant *Svarfdæla* and *Gull-Þóris Saga*.

Landnámabók also contains excerpts from the following sagas: **Fljótshlíðinga Saga*, **Hróars Saga Tungugoða*, **Kjalleklinga Saga*, **Snæbjarnar Saga Galta*, **Kræklinga Saga*.¹

Certain sagas are also named in other texts:

Esphælinga Saga: named in *Þórarins Þáttr Ofsa*. The material is probably included in Þórðr's version of *Landnámabók*.

Gauks Saga Trandilssonar: named in *Möðruvallabók*. Material from it is used in *Njáls Saga*.

Þorgils Saga Høllusonar: quoted in *Laxdæla Saga*.

Álfgeirs Þáttr: quoted in *Harðar Saga*.

In addition to these, scholars have deduced the existence of **Þorsteins Saga Kuggasonar*² and of **Þorlaugar Þáttr*.³

¹ The names of these are not certain, but I follow Jón Jóhannesson, *Gerðir Landnámabókar*, 1941.

² See *Í.F.* III, p. lxxxi.

³ See *Í.F.* X, pp. lxiv ff.

CHAPTER IV

ALTERATIONS IN THE TEXTS

WE often come across the opinion that the texts of Family Sagas were, to so speak, fluid, and that little significance can be attached to points of detail. Not only is this the opinion usually held by disciples of the free-prose doctrine today, but such conceptions appear time and again in the works of Guðbrandur Vigfússon. Even in the works of Finnur Jónsson we may often find statements in which this is implied.

The survey given in the preceding chapter, although too short to do justice to the topic, is enough to show that the problem varies from one saga to another. In some cases we have little evidence about the history of the text and in others a great deal. Sweeping statements and generalizations do not apply, but each case has to be studied separately.

When we are able to follow the history of a saga-text, this history varies greatly. If we consider the texts of *Laxdæla* or of *Njáls Saga*, we come to respect them more highly the longer we study them. To be sure, the *Bolla Þáttr* is tacked on to the end of *Laxdæla Saga* in one group of manuscripts, while verses have been interpolated in some of the manuscripts of *Njáls Saga*, but the other manuscripts show the original form and, by comparison, I think we can get close to the original text of both these sagas. In *Bandamanna Saga* and *Fóstbræðra*

Saga, on the other hand, we find texts which vary considerably. Thus, conditions are by no means invariable; sometimes we find that a text is preserved in fairly conservative form, and sometimes that liberties have been taken. Whether it is possible to obtain any reliable evidence of the history of a text depends on the number, qualities, and dates of the manuscripts, as was explained in closer detail in the last chapter.

If a text has been altered, it may be that it has been expanded or shortened. For example, the longer text of *Gísla Saga* has been expanded. Formerly scholars generally supposed that texts had been expanded, but in recent years it has been proved that the texts of many sagas have been shortened, and more examples of this will probably be found. But it would not be right to regard this as a general rule without investigation, for each text must be judged separately according to the evidence available.

In the preceding pages we saw that, in some instances, new versions of sagas had been made. In *Bandamanna Saga*, the changes made were chiefly in phraseology, but in such examples as *Ljósvetninga Saga*, *Harðar Saga*, and *Þórðar Saga Hreðu* the material of the story had also been altered. Formerly, scholars were very ready to presuppose that there were many versions of sagas, and it would be almost true to say that they regarded the hunt for interpolations as their chief duty. I must confess that I often feel that scholars of the latter decades of the nineteenth century show a certain levity in this. It would certainly be foolish to be altogether stubborn and to pretend that such things never happened, but caution

and care are needed, and every example has to be studied by itself.

In his studies of the *Landnámabók*, Björn M. Ólsen often allowed for more than one version of a saga and, on the whole, his views were in accordance with those of his contemporaries, although he often brought more evidence in support of them than others did. For example, Ólsen supposed that there was an older, lost version of *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, as well as lost *Þorskfirðinga*, *Ísfirðinga*, and *Svarfdæla Sagas*, and some such sagas are named in the *Landnámabók*. R. C. Boer attempted to show that there was an older version of *Grettis Saga*, and Sigurður Nordal has revived this theory in a new form.

When there is more than one version of a saga it is, of course, the duty of a scholar to attempt to show reasons why such great changes have been made in it.

It should be noted that reasons for altering a saga once it had been written were not always equally strong. Let us consider material alterations. If the author of a saga had succeeded in getting all the material from the best informed people, it might well be that he had included everything with which the story was concerned, and there was then no good reason to add anything. But if much of the material had been left unused, there might then be good reason to make additions, or a new version. The form of a saga might also vary in excellence. If it was composed with great skill in its plot, character-drawing, and style, people of later generations could more easily be content with it, and it was then less likely that they would make radical changes. The manuscripts

of *Njála*, *Egils Saga*, and *Laxdæla* seem to give evidence of this. On the other hand, it is easy to understand that defects in the form of a saga might incite people to change it. I think that scholars have not given this point the consideration it deserves.

In one passage Finnur Jónsson wrote: 'In its original form no saga began like this.' Finnur Jónsson had his own, decided views on what sagas must have been like to begin with, at least those sagas which he believed to be old—they must have been well composed and classical. These sagas, as he generally believed, had all been taken, independently of each other, from tradition. He believed, moreover, that changes from the original form were most often damaging. In holding such beliefs, the scholar assumes what he has to prove, for it is obviously just as likely that the original work left room for improvement and, in some cases, it was improved afterwards. As for the relations between one saga and another, the researches of recent decades have shown plainly that saga-writing developed as an unbroken evolutionary process. In all probability, some sagas were preceded by some kind of historical summaries in writing. For obvious reasons, most of these are now lost, but who can say whether some of the oldest sagas were not also more primitive in form than later ones? In the preceding pages I mentioned many lost sagas. Is it not likely that many of them were lost simply because they were less highly developed than extant ones?

We may suppose that a new book, or a new version of a saga, comes into being by the addition of stories

(*þættir*) or by interpolation into an older text, or else that a completely new work is made from the old one, with a new plot and in a new form. I have already remarked that reasons for making a new version might be found in the defects of material or form. But another reason for alteration might be that there were different opinions about the people and the events related, other points of view. Björn Sigfússon has suggested that such differences largely accounted for the two versions of *Ljósvetninga Saga*, for, in the later version, an attempt has been made to present Guðmundr Ríki in a rather more favourable light.

The conditions ruling in other cases may be somewhat different. A man might have been described in one saga or another, but then comes a second author, who takes a different view of the people and events related. He does not make a new version of the old saga, but writes a new one, in which the leading characters are different ones. He touches on the material of the older saga and on the characters described in it, but he gives a picture different from the one given there. I think there were many instances of this, and I shall name a few of them.

In *Njála* we read a little about Guðmundr Ríki. Investigation has shown that the author of *Njála* knew *Ljósvetninga Saga*, but the picture which he gives of Guðmundr is quite a different one; he describes him altogether favourably. In his treatment of Þorkell Hákr the author of *Njála* shows that he is writing in direct opposition to *Ljósvetninga Saga*.

In another passage the author of *Njála* is certainly not

contradicting any other book, but he uses the fame of Mǫrðr Gígja to enhance the splendour of Gunnarr and Njáll; for they succeeded where Mǫrðr had failed, and got the better of Hrútr Herjólfsson. It does not seem possible to prove that the author of *Njála* knew the lost **Fljótshlíðinga Saga*, in which much was told of the wisdom of Mǫrðr—at any rate, he did not have this saga before him as he wrote, but it is clear that he knew about Mǫrðr's fame and used it for his own purposes.

It may be seen from *Laxdæla Saga* that there was a written saga of Þorgils Hølluson, and it is natural to suppose that it gave a favourable picture of him. Þorgils comes into the lives of Snorri Goði and of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, and we may suppose that, in spite of the impartiality of sagas (at least on the surface), the author of the saga about Þorgils took his part against them. But afterwards another man wrote a saga, in which Guðrún and Snorri were among the leading characters, and he favoured them. He knew the saga about Þorgils, and he was careful not to change any of the factual statements in it which he believed to be correct, but he described everything in a different light. That is how it is in *Laxdæla*, which contains a direct reference to *Þorgils Saga*, although this saga is lost, and we have to decide its details from probabilities which are, nevertheless, very strong.

It may also be remembered that the *Laxdæla* contains a reference to the *Njarðvíkinga Saga*. Either this saga is the same as *Gunnars Þáttr Þiðrandabana* or else *Gunnars Þáttr* is an abbreviated version of the *Njarðvíkinga Saga*.

But we may conclude that the incidents told in it have been used in the *Laxdæla Saga*, where they have been touched up in order to embellish the character of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir, and thus an entirely different picture is given. In all these cases we have to do with an unbroken, organic development. These are, as it were, debates about people and events; the later author contradicts the earlier.

Not all of the sagas written in the region of the Breiðafjörður are preserved. I have already mentioned *Þórðar Saga Gellis* and *Þorgils Saga Höllusonar*. Sigurður Nordal has also concluded that there was a *Þorsteins Saga Kuggasonar*, and Finnur Jónsson that there was a *Kjalleklinga Saga*, while some suppose that there was an older *Eiríks Saga Rauða*. We cannot tell what these were like, but other sagas belonging to this district are preserved, i.e. *Heiðarvíga Saga*, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, *Laxdæla Saga*, *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, *Grœnlendinga Þáttr*, which are great artistic unities, the creation of their authors. Attempts to show that these sagas have been interpolated have not, in my opinion, been successful. The authors of later sagas undoubtedly knew the older ones, and we can often see that they did. Sometimes authors of the later sagas take account of what is said in the older ones, e.g. they take care not to repeat it, or they contradict the older sagas by telling the story differently. The surviving sagas of the Breiðafjörður are, for the most part, well constructed.

Sagas of this district, as indeed those of most other parts of Iceland, appear to have been fixed unities ever

since they were first written. But in Eyjafjörður there were a remarkably large number of short tales (*þættir*), written but more or less unattached. The older version of *Ljósvetninga Saga* is very loosely constructed, and many short tales have been inserted in the later version. I think it correct to say, as some scholars have stated, that the version of *Víga-Glúms Saga* in *Möðruvallabók* has been interpolated, and a further tale (*þáttr*) has been added in the *Vatnshyrna*. The relations between the *Esphælinga Saga* and the *Víga-Glúms Saga* are not altogether clear, and the *Valla-Ljóts Saga* is more like a tale (*þáttr*) than a complete saga. Some scholars have deduced from the relations between *Reykðæla Saga* and *Víga-Glúms Saga* that there was an independent *Þorlaugar Þáttr*. It may well be that methods of saga-writing in this region were rather different from those followed, for example, in Breiðafjörður and Borgarfjörður. If so, it would be wise to tread cautiously; the basis for dating the sagas of the Eyjafjörður district may be less secure.

CHAPTER V

SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE EVIDENCE

IN § 12 of his *Prolegomena* to the *Sturlunga Saga*, Guðbrandur Vigfússon discusses the ages of the Family Sagas. It is as if wisps of evidence pass by, one after the other, and he is aware of their weaknesses and of the danger of trusting them. But there is something left, which does not let him down. He writes:

The best we can do is to look at the tone and character of a saga, which even in a late adulterated form is never quite effaced; even the worst, *Svarfdæla*, shows marks of antiquity. No furbishing can hide the antique grace of a true saga, such as Kormak's or Havard's, neither can any affectation of spurious age make Kjalnesinga or Viglund's Saga look ancient.

There is no doubt that Guðbrandur Vigfússon had a keen appreciation of the Icelandic language and of Icelandic sagas, but might he not have failed to distinguish between 'antique grace' and simple 'grace'?

The authors of sagas looked back, for they were trying to describe an age which had passed. These authors differed in taste and temperament, as the sagas show; but between the composition of many sagas only a few years or decades could have elapsed. How could it, then, be possible for anyone to decide their ages simply from 'tone and character'? It is, indeed, certain that few would now accept the assertion that *Hávarðar Saga* is ancient.

So much for the green tree, but what of the dry? What

are we to say when Tom, Dick, and Harry think that they can establish the ages of sagas from their 'tone and character'? I think of young men who are put to write theses after studying sagas only for a few years, when they have perhaps read few of them, and those quickly.

No, it is obvious that fortune will not favour endeavours of this kind. Instead, we must search with all the means available for concrete, objective evidence, and try to estimate the value of every shred of it. In very few instances can we speak of absolute certainty; generally it is rather a question of probabilities, whose strength we must assess. I do not despise the feeling for 'tone and character', but some basis must be found for it; it must be turned into logical argument. Above all, we must avoid confusing 'characteristics' with 'characteristics of age'.

Accordingly, I shall look first for concrete, objective evidence, and try to decide the value of it in every case. Afterwards, I shall come to the less concrete evidence, including the 'tone and character', if it is ever possible to get a grasp of such things.

My aim is not to argue a case, not to 'prove' but, in the first place, to find out where we stand, what we know, and what conclusions we may think it proper to draw.

CHAPTER VI

REFERENCES TO SAGA-WRITING IN EARLY TEXTS

IT is natural that, in their attempts to establish the ages of Family Sagas, scholars have tried to find general principles, according to which the ages of all sagas could be established, or at least the ages of some of them. It is thus natural to conclude that sagas in which the civilization of the Icelandic republic is described in close detail and with verisimilitude were mostly written during the age of the republic, or not long afterwards, since the succeeding age differed in many ways. This seems to accord with other evidence, but it does not suffice for precise dating.

Scholars have tried to date a great proportion of the sagas by other means; they have looked for passages in certain ancient writings in which the authors have spoken in general terms about the ages of sagas. When the author of the First Grammatical Treatise lists the branches of literature which it was fashionable to write in his day, he mentions law, genealogy, renderings of religious works, and those learned works which Ari had compiled. The Grammatical Treatise cannot be dated with absolute certainty, but despite all objections, I think it was probably written about the middle of the twelfth century. From the words of the Treatise it seems that we may conclude that sagas were not commonly written at that time. On the other hand, in the Prologue

to the *Hungrvaka*, written in the first decade of the thirteenth century, mention is made of 'that which is written in the Norse tongue, law, sagas, and family history'.¹ To be sure, the author does not say what kind of sagas these were, Kings' Sagas, Family Sagas, or both; but it is certain that, in his time, written sagas must have been known and fairly common.

Snorri, in his Prologue to the separate Saga of St Ólaf, also tells us something about saga-writing: 'More than two hundred and forty years had elapsed since the time when Iceland was settled before people began to write sagas. That was a long period, and there was the risk that oral traditions would have been corrupted . . .'² It is not altogether clear to what period Snorri alluded in the words 'when Iceland was settled', but even if he meant the beginning of the settlement, he could not imply that saga-writing started before c. 1120. But it may be that he referred to a period twenty to forty years later. Plainly, Snorri was thinking chiefly of the Kings' Sagas, but he speaks in such general terms that it is natural to conclude that no sagas, and therefore no Family Sagas, were written before.

Of all that was said in ancient works about saga-writing, the words of the so-called 'Prologue' to *Sturlunga Saga* have undoubtedly had greatest consequence. This 'Prologue' stands between *Sturlu Saga* and the *Prestsaga Guðmundar Góða*, and it was certainly written

¹ 'Þat, er á norrœnu er ritat, lög eða sögur eða mannfœði.'

² 'Þat var meirr en tvau hundruð vetra tólfœð, er Ísland var byggt, áðr menn tœki hér sögur at rita, ok var þat löng ævi ok vant, at sögur hefði eigi gengizk í munni . . .'

by the man who put the *Sturlunga* collection together, Þórðr Narfason, or whoever it was. The 'Prologue'¹ reads as follows:

Many of the sagas here will be contemporaneous, but yet they cannot all be written at once: the sagas of Bishop Þorlákr the Saint and of Guðmundr Arason the Good up to the time when he was ordained priest; the Saga of Guðmundr Dýri begins three years after the death of Sturla and ends after the death of Bishop Brandr, and Guðmundr the Good was then consecrated Bishop; the Saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and Þorvaldr Snorrason is contemporaneous with that of Guðmundr the Good, and it ends after the death of Bishop Brandr, as Sturla Þórðarson relates in the *Íslendinga Sögur*. Nearly all the sagas whose stories were set in Iceland were written before Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson died, but those whose stories took place after that were mostly not written until the poet Sturla Þórðarson compiled

Margar sögur verða hér samtíða, ok má þó eigi allar senn rita: saga Þorláks biskups ins helga ok Guðmundar ins góða Arasonar, þar til er hann var vígðr til prests; saga Guðmundar ins dýra hefsk þrimr vetrum eptir andlát Sturlu ok lýkr þá, er Brandr biskup er andaðr, en Guðmundr inn góði vígðr til biskups; saga Hrafns Sveinbjarnarsonar ok Þorvalds Snorrasonar er samtíða sögu Guðmundar ins góða, ok lýsk hon eptir andlát Brands biskups, svá sem Sturla Þórðarson segir í Íslendingasögum. Flestar allar sögur, þær er hér hafa gqrzk á Íslandi, váru ritaðar, áðr Brandr biskup Sæmundarson andaðisk, en þær sögur, er síðan hafa gqrzk, váru lítt ritaðar, áðr Sturla skáld Þórðarson sagði fyrir Íslendingasögur, ok hafði hann þar til vísendi af fróðum mönnum, þeim er váru á qndverðum dögum

1 *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. K. Kálund, 1906-11, I, 119-20.

the *Íslendinga Sögur*; and for this he relied upon information supplied by knowledgeable men who had lived in his early years; some of it he got from records written by people who lived at the same time as those of whom the stories tell. He had also been able to witness many momentous events which took place in his own day. . . .

hans, en sumt eptir bréfum þeim, er þeir rituðu, er þeim váru samtíða, er sögurnar eru frá. Marga hluti mátti hann sjálf sjá, þá er á hans dögum gerðusk til stórtíðenda. . . .

When it says in this text that Sturla wrote the *Íslendinga Sögur*, the work referred to is that commonly known now as the *Íslendinga Saga*, which tells of events in the Sturlung Age. But many scholars believe that the words 'nearly all the sagas . . . (*Flestar allar sögur* . . .)' refer to the works which are now called Family Sagas. It was probably P. E. Müller who first put forward this view,¹ and he concluded from this passage that the Family Sagas were mostly written before 1201, the year when Bishop Brandr died. Many later scholars shared this opinion, and it was especially important that Finnur Jónsson advocated it in his great history of the literature. Many scholars, however, criticized this interpretation, including N. M. Petersen, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, and Konrad Maurer. That perceptive scholar Guðbrandur Vigfússon felt sure that there was something questionable in the text, and when the second vellum was examined, it was found to contain the very sentence which

1 *Sagabibliothek* I, 1817, p. 248.

Guðbrandur Vigfússon had guessed should be there. Björn M. Ólsen discussed this problem in three works¹ and, as it seems to me, it was he who finally solved it.

The text quoted follows the *Króksfjarðarbók*, one of the two main manuscripts of *Sturlunga Saga*. This text is a little strange, since it gives no chronological limits for these sagas, not saying when the events related in them took place, but only that they were written before the death of Bishop Brandr. There are other difficulties as well. Of the sagas directly named in the 'Prologue', it is known that *Guðmundar Saga Dýra* and *Prestssaga Guðmundar Góða* must have been written a considerable time after the death of Bishop Brandr, so that the evidence of the *Króksfjarðarbók*, even about the sagas named, is wrong. If the Family Sagas were included as well, we should have to admit that some of them must have been written after the death of Bishop Brandr, and evidence in support of this will be given later in the present essay.

But investigation has shown that in *Reykjarfjarðarbók*, the other vellum manuscript of *Sturlunga*,² the text of the passage is different, and reads:

Nearly all of those sagas	Flestar allar sögur, þær er
whose stories were set in Ice-	görzk höfðu á Íslandi, áðr
land before Bishop Brandr	Brandr biskup Sæmundarson
Sæmundarson died were writ-	andaðisk, váru ritaðar, en
ten, but those which took	þær sögur, er síðan hafa
place afterwards were mostly	görzk, váru lítt ritaðar, áðr

¹ *Um Sturlungu* in *Safn* III, 1897, pp. 193-510; *Om den såkaldte Sturlungaprolog*, 1910; *Um Íslendingasögur* in *Safn* VI, 1937-9.

² *Sturlunga Saga*, edition cited above I. 120.

not written before the poet Sturla skáld Þórðarson sagði Sturla Þórðarson compiled fyrir *Íslendinga Sögur*. the *Íslendinga Sögur*.

If these words were taken to apply to those sagas which deal with the 'Saga Age' (i.e. Family Sagas), the latter reading would only tell us that they were written before the *Íslendinga Sögur* of Sturla, which he can hardly have started to compile before the mid-thirteenth century, or even later. But is it really true that the author of this passage was talking about Family Sagas? Is not P. E. Müller's interpretation wrong on this point? The Prologue is otherwise concerned only with sagas in the *Sturlunga* collection and sagas about later times. Björn M. Ólsen showed that the difficulties disappear if the text is taken to apply to the so-called contemporary sagas. *Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða*, *Sturlu Saga*, and *Þorláks Saga* all end before 1200; *Prestssaga Guðmundar* ends in 1203, but is concerned chiefly with the time before the death of Bishop Brandr, and the chief events related in the *Guðmundar Saga Dýra* also took place before 1203.

Björn M. Ólsen did not let the matter rest there. He also showed that the *Sturlunga* Prologue was compiled from one which Sturla had written himself and had placed at the head of his *Íslendingasögur*, and the sentences under discussion would there have read:

Nearly all of those sagas whose stories were set in Iceland before Bishop Brandr Sæmundarson died have been written, but those which have taken place since have mostly not been written.¹

1 'Flestar allar sögur, þær er görzk höfðu á Íslandi, áðr Brandr biskup Sæmundarson andaðisk, eru ritaðar, en þær sögur, er síðan hafa görzk, eru lítt ritaðar.'

Since this was the case, since the sagas of the later period had been little written, Sturla set to work and began to compile his book. Although in his *Íslendinga Saga* he mentions some events which took place before the death of Bishop Brandr, the detailed account given in it begins just after the death of Bishop Brandr. When we realize this, the whole problem becomes clear. This also explains why phrases which were natural as Sturla wrote them have become clumsy in the *Sturlunga* Prologue, with two parallel main clauses with relative clauses inserted, while the ending necessary for both of them (the subsidiary temporal clause) does not come until afterwards.

The conclusion, therefore, is that all evidence suggests that the *Sturlunga* Prologue has no relevance to the Family Sagas, and even if it had, it would only tell us that many of them were written before the middle of the thirteenth century. Thus, we can make no use of P. E. Müller's interpretation of this Prologue in establishing the ages of the Family Sagas.

On the other hand, the evidence about saga-writing which I quoted earlier, from the Grammatical Treatise, the Saga of St Ólaf, and the *Hungrvaka*, is sound and reliable as far as it goes. But if we are to learn more about the ages of individual sagas, we must look for evidence of other kinds, and to this I shall now turn.¹

¹ The manuscript Sth. perg. 2, 4to contains a list of books, written in a hand said to date from about 1300. The list consists of: *Skjöldunga Saga*, *Rímverja Saga*, two books, *Sturlu Saga*, *Drauma Saga*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Qnundarbrennu Saga*, *Víga-Glúms Saga*. See *Saga Ólafs Konungs hins Helga*, ed. O. A. Johnsen and Jón Helgason, 1941, II, 886. This list is interesting, but it would have greater value if it were older.

CHAPTER VII

THE AGES OF MANUSCRIPTS

FIRST of all we have to consider the ages of manuscripts. Only very few manuscripts of Family Sagas are older than 1300, but we should probably not attach too much significance to this. It is always dangerous to draw hasty conclusions *ex silentio*, unless there is other evidence as well. It may be mentioned that the profane sagas of contemporary life (chiefly preserved in the *Sturlunga* collection) are not found in manuscripts older than the fourteenth century. In so far as sagas did not circulate widely, and existed only in a few copies, it could hardly be expected that more than very few copies should be preserved, and it is less likely that the older than the later manuscripts should survive. Since we have so few very old manuscripts, the ages of sagas are generally delimited more closely by other evidence. Nevertheless, it is sometimes useful to consider the ages of manuscripts. It is, for example, of great significance that the oldest manuscripts of *Njáls Saga* are believed to date from about 1300, and that there are five of these. Their large number assures us that the saga is not younger than this date, for although the dating of manuscripts is generally somewhat uncertain, it is unlikely that they should all be supposed to be later than they really are. It is also surprising that so many manuscripts should appear at the same time, and that there should be none older. On the other hand, we must suppose that some of

the manuscripts have been lost, so that the saga must be a good ten or even twenty years older than 1300. *Finnboga Saga* is preserved only in *Mǫðruvallabók* which, as already said, was written between 1316 and 1350, shall we say 1330-40. There is nothing to suggest that the saga is much older than that, and the evidence of the manuscript is valuable, for it gives a *terminus ante quem*.

The manuscript AM 162 D2, containing part of *Laxdæla Saga*, is believed to date from about the middle of the thirteenth century, and this is also important, for we might otherwise suppose that the saga was written rather later than that.

The oldest manuscripts of *Egils Saga*, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, and *Heiðarvíga Saga* are not without importance, but in these cases, other evidence shows that the sagas belong to a still older period than these early manuscripts.

Thus, the age of manuscripts is sometimes of value in establishing the ages of sagas. But we cannot base conclusions on the fact that a saga exists only in late manuscripts, least of all if the medieval manuscripts of it are few. To prove that a saga was written late we need other evidence.

CHAPTER VIII

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

WE come now to what we may call 'historical evidence', i.e. a saga mentions people or events of an age later than that with which it is concerned, or else it alludes to practices or details of antiquity which give some evidence of its age.

First of all we may mention the closing sentences of the *Droplaugarsona Saga*, which are very famous, and not without reason. It says there:

After Ingjaldr was dead, Helga lived at Arneiðarstaðir, as well as Þorkell, son of Helga and Grímr. Þorvaldr had a son called Ingjaldr, and his son was Þorvaldr, who told this story. A year after the priest Þangrbrandr came to Iceland, Helgi Droplaugarson was killed.¹

This is the only instance in which it is said that a Family Saga was 'told', and in which the 'teller' is named. But as soon as the passage is examined a little more closely, its faults come to light. Mention is made of Þorkell, the son of Grímr, but in the next sentence it says: 'Þorvaldr had a son.' It is obvious that some mistake has been made, and the usual explanation is that 'Þorkell' is a mistake for 'Þorvaldr'. This is an old correction, for it is found already in the text of the *Fljótsdæla Saga*. We might thus suppose that 'Þorvaldr' was

1 'Helga bjó eptir Ingjald liðinn á Arneiðarstöðum ok Þorkell, sonr þeira Gríms. Þorvaldr átti son, er Ingjaldr hét. Hans sonr hét Þorvaldr, er sagði sögu þessa. Vetri síðar en Þangrbrandr prestur kom til Íslands fell Helgi Droplaugarson.'

the original reading. In that case, the man who told the story must have lived about the same time as Ari the Wise. The fault might also have arisen by dropping one or more generations out of the genealogy, and this was what Björn M. Ólsen supposed.¹ He looked for men living in the Sturlung Age, who might have belonged to this family. Jón Jóhannesson has suggested, on the other hand, that the original author of the *Droplaugarsona Saga* drew on a written account of these brothers, a summary life, in which Þorvaldr was cited, but the compiler of the version in *Mqðruvallabók* misunderstood this, and thought that Þorvaldr was the source of the saga itself. Jón Jóhannesson mentions two small points which would be explained on this supposition,² but, as it seems to me, his brilliant surmise has too little basis, and the explanation given by Björn M. Ólsen, that a part of the genealogy has dropped out, is more probable. I can neither accept nor reject Björn M. Ólsen's attempts to find descendants of this family among the people of the Sturlung Age, but if one or more generations have been omitted from the genealogy, the time-limit given for the age of the saga would not be close, and it would be implied only that it was written in the latter part of the twelfth century or in the early thirteenth century. But in this case we must apply the rule which we usually apply to the evidence of one manuscript alone; it is dangerous to rely on the text, and moreover, the text of the *Droplaugarsona Saga* given in *Mqðruvallabók* appears to have suffered rather substantial alteration.

1 See *Safn* VI, 17.

2 *I.F.* XI, pp. lxiv-vii.

I shall mention some other examples of sagas in which people who lived long after the events related took place are named. Sometimes events of later ages are also mentioned, and well-known men are named in connexion with them. The first example which I shall cite is from *Egils Saga*, where it is told how Egill's bones were dug up. 'The priest Skapti Þórarinnsson was present', says the saga, and it goes on to give details telling how he struck the skull with an axe.¹ Skapti is mentioned in the *Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða* and in Ari's List of Priests, and he might have lived until after the middle of the twelfth century.

Occasionally mention is made of people who must have lived during the author's own time. In *Njáls Saga* mention is made of Kolbeinn Ungi, the Hvammverjar, and the Skógverjar, as well as of older people and families.² In these cases so many manuscripts agree that we can have no doubt about the text. This goes to show that *Njála* cannot have been written before the second half of the thirteenth century. But, when Þorvarðr Þórarinnsson is named in the manuscripts of one group (Y) alone, this should warn us to tread warily if manuscripts are few. The other manuscripts show that this name has been interpolated, but what would we say if we had manuscripts of the Y group alone?

In the genealogies of *Laxdæla Saga* mention is made of Archbishop Eysteinn (d. 1188), of Ari the Strong (d. 1188), Þórðr Gilsson (father of Hvamm-Sturla), of Ketill, who was made Abbot of Helgafell (d. 1220), and

1 *I.F.* II, 299.

2 *I.F.* XII, pp. lxxv-vi.

of his brothers Hreinn, Styrmir, and Koðrán. *Laxdæla Saga* also names Brandr Þórarinnsson, who founded the church estate at Húsafell, adding that his son was the priest Sighvatr, 'who lived there for a long time'.¹ Finally, the family of the Vatnsfirðingar is traced down to Þorvaldr Snorrason, who died in 1228.²

Needless to say, we may suppose that scribes inclined to add names to genealogies in order to bring them closer to their own time. Finnur Jónsson and other scholars believe that they did so in a great many instances. But in the case of *Laxdæla*, as in that of *Njáls Saga*, the number, age, and quality of the manuscripts are of great significance. When we have only one manuscript, everything is uncertain, but when the manuscripts are many and good, and some perhaps even old, it must be considered that we have an old text, perhaps even that of an archetype.

I shall name a few more examples from sagas which are preserved in several manuscripts. In *Grettis Saga*, Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284) is named several times. Sigurður Nordal has conjectured that the reference is to a book, a saga, which Sturla wrote about Grettir.

In *Eyrbyggja Saga* Þorfinnr of Straumfjörður 'from whom the Sturlungs are descended'³ is named. In the genealogies of Ch. 65 of that saga, many people and families of the thirteenth century are named, including the Sturlungs, the Vatnsfirðingar, and the Ásbirningar. Mention is also made of the exhumation of the bones of

¹ 'er þar bjó lengi'.

² *I.F.* V, pp. xxv-vi.

³ 'er Sturlungar eru frá komnir'.

Snorri Goði, Þorkr the Stout, and Þórdís; and it is added: 'Guðný Þoðvarsdóttir, mother of Snorri, Þórðr and Sighvatr, sons of Sturla, was present then'.¹ The Wolfenbüttel manuscript and *Melabók* add, after naming Guðný, that she 'then had charge of the household at Hvammr'.² Guðný certainly lived at Hvammr after the death of Sturla Þórðarson (1183), and down to the beginning of the thirteenth century, and after that she kept house for her son Þórðr at Staðr and at Eyrr, and in 1218 she was with Snorri at Reykholt, where she died in 1221. The words of the saga could have been written in the second decade of the thirteenth century, although, of course, they could equally well have been written later.³

I shall now list some examples from sagas of which there are fewer manuscripts, and the details of the original text are therefore more doubtful.

The *Flóamanna Saga* ends in a normal way according to *Melabók*, but in the transcripts of *Vatnshyrna* a genealogy is traced down to Bishop Jörundr and to Jón Hákonarson of Víðidalstunga, and this is obviously a later addition (cf. the genealogies of *Þórðar Saga Hreðu* as given in *Vatnshyrna*).⁴

In *Eiríks Saga Rauða*⁵ a genealogy is traced in both manuscripts to Bishop Þorlákr Rúnólfsson, Bishop Bjarni Gilsson, and to 'the first Bishop Brandr'. This

1 'Þá var þar við stödd Guðný Þoðvarsdóttir, móðir þeira Sturlu-sona, Snorra, Þórðar ok Sighvats.'

2 'er þá var húsfreyja í Hvammi'.

3 *f.f.* IV, pp. xlv-vi.

4 See *Flóamanna Saga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. 71.

5 Ed. G. Storm, 1891, p. 48.

must, therefore, be inherited from an older manuscript, from which both are descended, but in the *Hauksbók* a genealogy down to Lawman Haukr and others is added.

According to both manuscripts of *Bandamanna Saga*, Snorri Kálfsón of Melr (probably the one who died 1175) was descended from Oddr Ófeigsson.¹

Ljósvetninga Saga says: 'afterwards Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson used often to say when a tumult was made "now let us have the Veisa prank"'.² In this passage there is a lacuna in *A*, and we have to rely on the *C* version alone.

Now we come to sagas preserved only in one medieval manuscript or its equivalent.

Reykðæla Saga: 'the spear Vagnsnautr belonged afterwards to Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson'.³

Grœnlendinga Þáttr (*Flateyjarbók*):⁴ a genealogy is traced to Bishop Brandr, Bishop Þorlákur Rúnólfsson, and to Bishop Björn (Gilsson). This may be compared with the end of *Eiríks Saga Rauða*.

Bjarnar Saga Hitdœlakappa:⁵ 'Björn had a church built at Vellir and dedicated it to God and St. Thomas the Apostle, about whom Björn composed a fine *drápa*; this is what Rúnólfr Dagsson said.' An early emendation is *Dálksson* for *Dagsson*, and Rúnólfr Dálksson was a well-known man who lived in the twelfth century.

¹ *Í.F.* VII, 363.

² *Í.F.* X, 73: 'hofum nú Veisubragð'.

³ *Í.F.* X, 213: 'Spjótir Vagnsnaut átti síðan Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson.'

⁴ See *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, ed. G. Storm, pp. 73-4.

⁵ Ed. R. C. Boer, 1893, p. 42: 'Á Vøllum lét Björn gøra kirkju ok helga með guði Tómasi postula, ok um hann orti Björn drápu góða. Svá sagði Runólfr Dagsson.'

Sigurður Nordal believes that the reference is to a written work.¹

*Þorsteins Þáttr Stangarhöggs*² contains a long genealogy down to people who lived in the thirteenth century, such as Ormr Svínfellingr and the sons of Sturla.

Vápnfirðinga Saga: 'Þorkell was lucky in his descendants. His daughter Ragnheiðr was married to Loptr Þórarinnsson, and they had nine children. Halla was their daughter, and she was mother of Steini, father of Halla, mother of Bishop Þorlákr the Saint. Ragnheiðr was the sister of Bishop Þorlákr, and mother of Bishop Páll, of Ormr Jónsson, and of the priest Jón Arnþórsson' (d. 1224).³

It cannot be said that the sagas contain much of this kind, and they almost give the impression that their authors did not care to introduce too much modern material into sagas which were concerned so distinctly with ancient times. But, on the other hand, if they did mention people of later times, they could just as well mention those of their own as of the intervening period. When it says in *Ljósvetninga Saga* that Þorvarðr Þorgeirsson 'used often (*var vanr*)' to use the words quoted above (p. 55), this does not by any means show that he had been dead for a long time when the passage was written, but only that he was off the scene. He went off

¹ *Í.F.* III, p. lxxxiv.

² *Í.F.* XI, 78-9.

³ *Í.F.* XI, 65: 'Þorkell var kynsæll maðr. Ragnheiði, dóttur hans, átti Loptr Þórarinnsson, ok áttu þau níu börn. Halla var dóttir þeira, móðir Steina, fœður Høllu, móður Þorláks biskups ins helga. Ragnheiðr var systir Þorláks biskups, móðir Páls biskups ok Orms Jónssonar ok Jóns prests Arnþórssonar.'

the scene when he entered a monastery in his declining years, and these words could have been written at that time, for he was dead to the world. But they would be still more natural after his death in 1207, so that they could very well have been written in 1208, or 1218, or later. The same may be said about the words quoted from *Reykðæla Saga*.

Occasionally it is remarked in sagas that something used to be different from what it is now, i.e. at the time when the saga was written; e.g. farms or buildings were different, institutions or the lie of the land, customs or practices.

In most cases so little is known about such things that we cannot say when one change or the other took place, and indeed, some of them could well have occurred long before the saga was written. Therefore, statements like these do not give a precise date for every saga. Nevertheless, I consider that such things are very important in deciding the period when the Family Sagas, as a whole, were written. There are, in fact, so many examples that it is unthinkable that they were all interpolated and, taken altogether, they show incontrovertibly that many years must have passed between the time when the events related took place and that when the sagas were written. I do not think it rash to conclude that they show that the sagas cannot have been written before the latter part of the twelfth century, and can, indeed, have been written in the thirteenth. ✕

But if it can be said that some of the changes mentioned occurred early, the memory of the older

conditions suggests that the sagas which preserve it were not written very late. This does not allow of exact dating, but all the same, it has much significance.

In the following pages I shall cite some examples of such things from several sagas, enough to give some idea of their prominence. I shall not trouble whether or not I have taken all the examples in the sagas from which I gather them.

First I shall quote some passages from sagas which refer to farms, institutions, buildings, which were not the same at the time of the author as they were when the events took place.

Laxdæla quotes the words of Gestr Oddleifsson: 'I will have my body taken to Helgafell, for that will be the most noble place in this neighbourhood, and I have often seen a light burning there.'¹ This is a reference to the monastery which was moved to Helgafell in 1184.

Laxdæla says that Hǫskuldr made Hǫrðaland 'at the point where the market town of Bergen has since stood'.² The market town was founded in the days of Ólaf Kyrri. Needless to say, there are many things in the saga which show that it was written much later than that.

Heiðarvígá Saga:³ 'Hesthǫfði who lives at the place now called Staðr in Skagafjörðr.' *Eiríks Saga Rauða* in *Skálholtsbók*: 'There was a man called Þorfinnr Karlsefni,

¹ *Í.F.* V, 196: 'Ek vil mik láta færa til Helgafells, því at sá staðr mun verða mestr hér í sveitum; þangat hefi ek opt ljós sét.'

² *Í.F.* V, 22: 'þar sem kaupstaðrinn í Björgvin er síðan'.

³ Ed. K. Kálund, 1904, p. 102: 'Hesthǫfði er býr þar, er nú heitir at Staðr í Skagafirði.'

son of Þórðr Hesthøfði, who lived in the north, in Reynines in Skagafjörðr, at the place which is now called Staðr (*at Stað*).¹ The words *at Stað* are not in the manuscript, but they must have been in the original text. In this passage, *Hauksbók* has been altered, and its text taken from *Landnámabók*. In *Sturlunga Saga* and in the Bishops' Sagas this farm is always called *Staðr* or *Staðr í Reyninesi*. It is not certain when the name was changed, but it was most probably in the early years of the twelfth century. This happened because, at some time or other, all the land of the estate had been made over to the Church and a church estate (*staðr*) had been established there.

Laxdæla Saga says 'that is now deserted' (of Hrappsstaðir, Melkorkustaðir, and Hafratindar).²

Laxdæla Saga and *Eyrbyggja* both contain many examples of the phrase: 'the marks of that can still be seen'.³

In *Droplaugarsona Saga* it says of a hall: 'this hall still stands on Mjóvanes'.⁴ In both versions of *Þórðar Saga Hreðu* it says that Þórðr built a hall at Hrafnagil 'which is still standing today'.⁵

Sometimes the scribes are not content with such statements; they are more precise about the date, although in such cases, the texts usually differ. *Þorvalds Þáttr Völþfurla* says of the church built by Þorvarðr Spak-

¹ 'Maðr hét Þorfinnr karlsefni, son Þórðar hesthøfða, er bjó norðr í Reyninesi í Skagafirði, er nú er kallat (*at Stað*).'

² *Í.F.* V, 19, 28, 151: 'þar er nú auðn'.

³ 'Sér þess enn merki.'

⁴ *Í.F.* XI, 155: 'Stendr sá skáli enn í Mjóvanesi.'

⁵ *Íslendinga Sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, VI, 1946, pp. 466, 485: 'þann sem enn stendr í dag'.

Boðvarsson of Áss: 'it remained without any alteration'.¹ These words are not in the *Flateyjarbók*; but as Guðbrandur Vigfússon points out in a footnote to his edition of the Bishops' Sagas, the original text must have read: 'and it still stands without any alteration'.² This must be an exact translation of the words of the monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson, but in the *Kristni Saga*, which is based upon this same work, it says of the church: 'it was still standing when Bishop Bótólfur was at Hólar, without any alteration except for the turfs'.³ Bótólfur was bishop from 1238 to 1246.

In the version of the *Jóns Saga Helga* which follows the Latin of Gunnlaugr most closely it says of Jón's school: 'which we have seen with our own eyes'.⁴ But in the 'Oldest Saga' which was undoubtedly written considerably later than the Latin version of Gunnlaugr, it says: 'the remains of the buildings can still be seen'.⁵ Here the wording is changed and made to conform more closely to the style of the native sagas, but we can see that the buildings must have fallen down by the time this was written. In the *Fóstbræðra Saga* it is said of the hall at Reykjahólar that it was still standing 'right down to the time when the second Bishop Magnús occupied the See of Skálaholt'.⁶ These words are found in the ver-

1 *Bisk.* I, 44: 'en hon stóð svá at ekki var at gort'.

2 'En hon stendr (enn?) svá at ekki er at gort.'

3 *Bisk.* I, 7: 'hon stóð þá er Bótólfur biskup var at Hólum, svá at ekki var at gort útan at torfum'.

4 *Bisk.* I, 235: 'hvern vér sá með várum augum'.

5 *Bisk.* I, 163: 'ok enn sér merki húsanna'.

6 *Fóstbræðra Saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson, 1925-7, p. 88: 'allt till þess, er Magnús biskup var at staðnum í Skálaholti inn síðari'.

sions of *Mǫðruvallahólk* and *Flateyjarbók*, and in the copies of the vellum once preserved in the Royal Library it says: 'until Magnús Gizurarson was made Bishop . . .'.¹ Magnús was bishop from 1216 to 1237. In the *Hauksbók*, on the other hand, the passage reads: 'it was still standing when the second Bishop Árni was consecrated Bishop of Skálholt'.² This was in 1304.

In *Porgils Saga ok Hafliða* mention is made of a hall which Porgils Oddsson built while in outlawry: 'and that hall was still undamaged when Bishop Magnús died'.³ These words are found in manuscripts of the *Reykjarfjarðarbók* group, but are not in those of the *Króksfjarðarbók* group, but in these, the text of the passage, as of many others, must have been shortened.⁴ *Reykjarfjarðarbók* must here preserve the original text of *Sturlunga*, but that does not imply that *Sturlunga* preserves the original text of *Porgils Saga* which, indeed, is by no means likely. Finally, I may notice that *Þórðar Saga Hreðu*, in its *A* version, says that Þórðr built a hall at Flatatunga: 'it was a remarkably strong building; this hall remained standing right down to the time when Egill was Bishop of Hólar'.⁵ This was 1331-41.

In studying the ages of sagas, scholars have attached great weight to statements like these, but investigation

1 *Ibid.*: 'til þess er Magnús Gizurarson varð biskup.'

2 *Ibid.*: 'hann stóð enn, er Árni biskup inn síðari var vígðr til Skálholts'.

3 'ok sá skáli var þá óhrærligr, er Magnús biskup andaðisk'.

4 See *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. K. Kálmund, 1906-11, I, 32.

5 *Íslendinga Sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, VI, 1946, p. 446: 'var þat furðu sterkt hús. Stóð sá skáli allt til þess er Egill biskup var á Hólum.'

shows plainly how deceptive they are. The differences in manuscript readings show that there was a strong tendency to alter such sentences, and when there is more than one manuscript their readings most often differ. It is also clear that the readings of the original texts always implied 'now' or 'still' without further specification ('still stands . . .', 'is still undamaged', etc.). Therefore, when instead of words like these, allusion is made in the manuscripts to the lifetime of one man or another, this generally has no relevance to the original text, except perhaps in the case of *Þórðar Saga Hreðu*. On the other hand, it may well be that the variant readings are of some importance for the history of the text and its development. Thus, *Kristni Saga* might, in this passage, be based upon a manuscript written in the time of Bishop Bótólfr; *Sturlunga* might go back to a manuscript of *Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða* written about the time when Bishop Magnús died; *Hauksbók* was certainly not written long after the time when Árni Helgason was Bishop of Skálaholt, and Haukr might have seen the hall then. In the same way, the other manuscripts of *Fóstbræðra Saga* might give evidence of the history of the texts preserved in *Mjóðruvallabók*, *Flateyjarbók*, and the copies of the manuscript once in the Royal Library, without preserving the original text.

Occasionally changes made in the countryside since the time described in the saga are mentioned, and I shall cite a very few examples.

Heiðarvígá Saga says: 'at that time there was a great forest in Hvítársíða, as in many other parts of the

country', and: 'at that time, and for long afterwards, there was a bridge over the river, up by Bjarnafoss'.¹

Laxdæla Saga: 'there was a dense forest in the valley at that time'.²

I see no reason to assemble further examples like these, although it could easily be done. Such remarks show an historical sense and an appreciation of the differences between the Saga Age and the age when the sagas were written, but obviously they cannot be used for precise dating.

Very often, saga-writers allude to cultural matters, objects, fashions, customs, which were formerly otherwise than they were when the saga was written, and this is fully emphasized. I give a few examples.

Heiðarvígja Saga: 'it used to be the custom to place the food on the table in front of people, for in those days there were no plates'.³

There are many examples like this one in *Eyrbyggja Saga* where it is said: 'in those days it was the practice among merchants to employ no cooks, but mess-mates would draw lots among themselves to decide who should take charge of the cooking'; 'Egill had tasselled shoelaces, as was then the custom'; 'Pórir had a knife hung on a strap round his neck, as was then usual'; 'at that time there used to be outdoor privies on the farms';

1 *Heiðarvígja Saga*, ed. K. Kålund, pp. 85, 88: 'þá var skógr mikill í Hvítársíðu, sem þá var víða hér á landi . . .', 'þá var brú á ánni uppi hjá Bjarnaforsi ok lengi síðan.

2 *Í.F.* V, 165: 'skógr þykkir var í dalnum í þann tíð'.

3 *Heiðarvígja Saga*, ed. Kålund, p. 73: 'En þat var siðr, at lagðr var matr á borð fyrir menn, en þá váru öngvir diskar'.

'at Fróðá there was a large living-room and a lock-bed (lokrekka) on the inner wall of the living-room, as was then the custom . . . meal-fires were lit every evening in this living-room, as was the custom then'.¹

Laxdæla says of a funeral feast: 'that was the practice in those days',² and of the outdoor privy: 'that was very common in those days';³ of a long pin in a cloak: 'as was then common'.⁴ Describing a pagan trial by ordeal (*skirsla*), *Laxdæla* says 'the heathens did not feel that they carried any less responsibility when such trials were to be performed than Christians do now when trials by ordeal are made'.⁵ The last sentence seems to imply that trials by ordeal were in force when the saga was written. It is known that they were held in Iceland in the twelfth century and the thirteenth, and last of all in 1237. The Lateran Council of 1215 forbade clerics to take part in them, although ordeals continued to be held in Norway after that. Cardinal William of Sabena forbade trials by ordeal in Norway in 1247, and mention is made in the Icelandic annals of a 'change of

1 *Í.F.* IV, 104, 117, 161, 66, 145: 'Þat var þá kaupmanna siðr at hafa eigi matsveina, en sjálfir mætunautar hlutuðu með sér, hverir búðarvörð skyldi halda . . .', 'Egill hafði skúfaða skóþvengi, sem þá var siðr til . . .', 'Þórir hafði haft tygilkníf á hálsi, sem þá var títt . . .', 'Í þann tíma váru útikamrar á bæjum . . .', 'At Fróðá var eldaskáli mikill ok lokrekka innar af eldaskálanum, sem þá var siðr . . . þar váru górvir máleldar hvert kveld í eldaskála, sem siðr var til.'

2 *Í.F.* V, 73: 'þat var tízka þá í þat mund'.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 145: 'í þann tíma var þat mikil tízka'.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 219: 'sem þá var títt'.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3: 'Ekki þóttusk heiðnir menn minna eiga í ábyrgð, þá er slíka hluti skyldi fremja, en nú þykkjask eiga kristnir menn, þá er skírslur eru górvar.'

ordinance' in 1248. It is most likely that trial by ordeal was then abolished in Iceland. It seems, then, that this passage gives excellent evidence of age.

Vatnsdæla Saga says: 'at that time it was the custom for the sons of noblemen to have some occupation'.¹

It is worth noting at this point that an indication of age may be given when saga-writers allude to objects or cultural practices which were fashionable at the time of the author, but not at the time which he is describing (anachronism). A well-known example is that of the building of stone in which, according to *Njála*, Gunnhildr the Mother of Kings used to live. It is well known that castles of stone did not become fashionable in Norway until much later, possibly in the twelfth century, and certainly in the thirteenth. The same may be said of the heraldic signs described in *Laxdæla* and *Njála*, which heroes of these sagas are said to have borne when they came from foreign lands. These must be based upon contemporary practice, which can hardly be older than the thirteenth century. I do not doubt that an observant reader could assemble various points like these, but it is seldom possible to date the introduction of new objects or fashions precisely.

It would obviously be possible to enumerate many practices which were changed when Iceland became Christian, and the learned men were well aware of many of these. A great knowledge of the heathen religion is displayed in Snorri's *Edda*, and it is obvious that

1 *Í.F.* VIII, 57-8 (cf. *Í.F.* X, 109): 'þat var siðr ríkra manna sona í þann tíma at hafa nokkura iðn fyrir hendi.'

memories of it did not fade until the very end of the Sturlung Age, and were subsequently preserved by the *Edda*.

We should also consider allusions to law and to legal procedure. It may be considered certain that sound knowledge was preserved about assemblies (*þing*) and the places where they were held, and the changes which had been made in these, although only people well versed in the law knew about the changes in the constitution and distribution of the *goðorð*.

In *Eyrbyggja Saga* (Ch. 38) mention is made of the proceedings taken after the death of Arnkell goði, which were less vigorous than they should have been, with the result that new regulations for the conduct of the prosecution in cases of manslaughter were introduced 'and these have been maintained ever since'.¹ In many passages of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* ancient laws are mentioned,² and some of the stories told in this saga conflict with the *Grágás*. Konrad Maurer³ investigated this point in detail, and reached the conclusion that *Eyrbyggja Saga* was based upon ancient procedure, which was older than that of the *Grágás*. Some other scholars have turned their attention to passages in which sagas contradict the *Grágás*, e.g. Vilhjálmur Finsen, Wilda, Karl Lehmann, and A. Heusler. Only a few of these inconsistencies (such as some in *Njála*) can be explained as legal mistakes of the saga-writers, and most of them have to be

¹ 'ok hefir þat haldizk jafnan síðan'.

² See *Í.F.* IV, p. xxix.

³ *Zwei Rechtsfälle in der Eyrbyggja*, 1896.

explained in some other way. A. Heusler,¹ who wrote most about this, maintained that, when the Family Sagas conflict with the *Grágás*, they are generally following an older law. The problem has not been thoroughly studied by later scholars, although it well deserves to be. A few points have been noticed which rather weaken Heusler's conclusions; he did not fully realize that the penalties imposed in the settlement out of court must have been quite different from the sentence. Others have pointed out that, in a society which had no unified executive, the letter and the practice of the law must have differed. It should be added that it was a great pity that Heusler did not write his book *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungenzeit* (1912) before his *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*. If he had, he might have realized that the Family Sagas sometimes follow the legal practices of the Sturlung Age, while *Grágás* preserves the law of the early twelfth century, as may be noticed, for example, in accounts of *weregild*.² But although Heusler's conclusions certainly need much modification, I think there are a good many instances left in which Family Sagas do preserve memories of an older law. This is obvious in their references to laws of matrimony. As they are laid down in the *Grágás*, these laws had been subjected to strong ecclesiastical influence, and the changes made in them were so radical that it may be said that most people would know about the older conditions. On the other hand, many legal changes were comparatively slight, and

¹ *Das Strafrecht der Isländersagas*, 1911.

² See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu*, § 10.

in such cases it is very remarkable that memories of older conditions should survive. It may be said that points like these tend to place the sagas in which they occur in a rather earlier period, although we have also to consider the reliability of the oral sources and the historical interest and proficiency of the individual authors.

In the latter decades of the thirteenth century radical changes were made in the civilization of the Icelanders as well as in their laws. They then submitted to the King of Norway, and new laws were established, which entailed great alteration, not only in the system of government, but also in the administration of justice and in legal procedure in general. The new laws were based largely upon Norwegian ones, in which the technical terms differed, to some extent, from those used in the older Icelandic law. The first law-code compiled under Norwegian influence was *Járnsíða*, introduced in 1271, and the next was *Jónsbók*, introduced in 1281; and we may also mention the laws of Christian observance of Bishop Árni, introduced in 1275. Since these new laws differed sharply from those of the Republic, both in substance and in terminology, there is some likelihood that we may notice it if a saga-writer confuses the laws of his own time with the ancient ones. This seems to have happened occasionally, and when it does it gives evidence of age.

Karl Lehmann¹ maintained that in *Njála*, which, in matters of law, is based largely upon an old legal codex,

1 *Die Njálssage*, 1883.

the influence of post-republican law-books, both in terminology and implication, may sometimes be detected, and especially the influence of *Járnsiða*. Many scholars have accepted this view and since, if it is correct, it provides such weighty evidence of age, I considered it in detail in my edition of *Njála*. I attempted to dismiss everything which could be explained in any other way, but there were some points left over, indisputable ones as it seemed, and so many of them that they could not possibly have arisen by accident. It appeared that all of these could be traced to *Járnsiða*, or to legal practices introduced after Iceland had submitted to the King, although nothing could be found which suggested the influence of *Jónsbók*. This is, in fact, among the most telling evidence of age in the whole saga.

Hugo Gering remarked on the words of Öspakr in *Eyrbyggja* (Ch. 58): *hvárki váru gefin né goldin né solum seld*; and he said that in Icelandic law such a formula consisting of two parts only was used, while one consisting of three parts did not occur before the *Járnsiða*.¹ But on this point the learned Gering was mistaken, for in *Grágás* we find in one passage: . . . *ok hann hefir þat eigi gefit né goldit né solum selt*.² This shows how cautious we must be in judging such details.

In the old days, the authority of the *goði* (*goðorð*) was not territorially limited, except to some extent by the division of the country into Quarters, and exemption

¹ See *Eyrbyggja Saga*, ed. H. Gering, 1897, pp. xvii–viii.

² *Grágás* II, 1879, p. 521; III, 1883, p. 392; cf. *Grágás* Ib, 1852, p. 123; II, 510.

from the restrictions which this implied could be obtained. Even in the Sturlung Age when, in some regions, the 'hundred' (*herað*) was the real unit, people remained fully conscious of this characteristic of the *goðorð*. When sagas refer to the *goðorð* simply as if they were territorial, this is the mark of a later age, when the country was divided among sheriffs (*sýslumenn*). I quote the following examples:

Harðar Saga (the longer version):¹ 'Grímkell held the *goðorð* over all these districts.'

Kjalnesinga Saga:² Þorgrímr of Hof 'held authority all the way up to Nýja Hraun (*Minna Hraun*, manuscript *A*), and this is called the Brundælagoðorð'. Þorgrímr's authority must have extended from Botnsá; Búi assumed authority after him: 'all the way from Nýja Hraun to Botnsá'.

Finnboga Saga:³ Ásbjörn Dettiáss held a *goðorð* 'over Flateyjardalr, and up to the boundary of his brother-in-law Þorgeirr'.

Þórðar Saga Hreðu (*B* version).⁴ Qzurr 'held a *goðorð* over the upper part of Skagafjörðr and northward to the boundary of the sons of Hjalti'. Miðfjarðar-Skeggi was 'goði over Miðfjörðr and many other districts'.

¹ *Íslendinga Sögur* II, 1847, p. 26: 'Grímkell hafði goðorð yfir þessum sveitum öllum.'

² Ed. J. Posthumus, 1911, pp. 6, 68: 'hafði mannaforráð allt til Nýjahrauns (*Minna Hrauns A*) ok kallat er Brundælagoðorð', '... allt frá Nýjahrauni til Botnsár'.

³ Ed. H. Gering, 1879, p. 3: 'Um Flateyjardal ok upp til móts við Þorgeir, mág sinn.'

⁴ *Íslendinga Sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, VI, 426, 401: 'hafði goðorð um hinn efra hlut Skagafjarðar ok út til móts við Hjaltasonu', '... goðorðsmaðr yfir Miðfirði ok víða annars staðar'.

Gunnars Þáttr Keldugnúpsfífls:¹ Þorgrímr 'held a *goðorð* between Jökulsá and Lómagnúpr. He abused his authority, and laid hands on the farmers' property, both oxen and horses, and because of all this he became very unpopular.' It is obvious that this is a description of a wicked sheriff and not of a *goði*.

Fljótsdæla Saga:² 'Þiðrandi held authority in Njarðvík and up to Fljótsdalshérað as far as Selfjót. Selfjót flows from the moor on the eastern side, between Gilsárteigr and Ormsstaðir, and then it runs down into the Lagarfjót. Selfjót marks off the district to the south and Lagarfjót to the west, and this is called the Útmanna-veit. This was the property of a hundred and seventy farmers.'³

Under the new constitution the office of Lawspeaker (*lögsgumaðr*) was abolished and replaced by that of the Lawman (*lögmaðr*). The titles were so much alike that there was always the danger that later writers would describe the Lawspeakers of the Republic as Lawmen. On the other hand, the functions of the two differed considerably, and we can sometimes see that the practices of later times are being described. Mention is made

¹ *Íslendinga Sögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, X, 455: 'hafði goðorð milli Jökulsár ok Lómagnúps. Hann fór illa með sínu goðorði. Hann tók upp góz fyrir bændum, bæði yxn ok hesta; varð hann af þessu öllu mjök óvinsæll.'

² Ed. K. Kålund, 1883, p. 7: 'Þiðrandi átti mannaforráð um Njarðvík og upp í hérað að Selfjóti. Selfjót gengr fyrir austan úr heiðinni milli Gilsárteigs og Ormsstaða og svo fellr það ofan í Lagarfjót fyrir vestan, og er það kölluð Útmannasveit. Þetta var þá hundrað bónda eign og lxx.'

³ Cf. Guðmundr Jónsson in *Eimreiðin*, 1955, p. 249.

of Lawmen, who gave legal decisions, in *Svarfdæla Saga* (Ch. 11), *Hávarðar Saga* (Chs. 1 and 3), and in *Grettis Saga* (Ch. 77). In the last-named saga (Ch. 72) mention is also made of a *logrétta* (i.e. legislative council) on Hegrane. This expression indicates a late date.

CHAPTER IX

FAMILY SAGAS AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

AT this point it is perhaps appropriate to consider another question. Is it possible that events, people, or incidents which took place in the time of their authors could have provided models for the characters and events described in the sagas?

It is a long time since scholars first thought of this possibility. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and Kr. Kålund¹ remarked on the similarity between the 'Deildartunga case' in *Sturlunga* and the law-suit about the inheritance of Þorsteinn Surtr, described in the *Laxdæla Saga*, while Björn M. Ólsen noticed similarity between the account given in *Sturlunga* of the fall of the Vatnsfirðingar (1232) and Ch. 63 of *Laxdæla*,² and again between a story told in *Víga-Glúms Saga* and events which took place in Eyjafjörður in the time of Sighvatr Sturluson.³ Björn Sigfússon⁴ has independently noticed a similarity between these last two. Stefán Einarsson has remarked on a similarity between *Laxdæla Saga* (Ch. 75) and events described in Ch. 16 of *Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða*.⁵ I have also touched on these problems, both in

1 *Origines Islandicae* II, 1905, p. 137; *Aarbøger for nord. Oldkyndighed*, 1901, p. 387; cf. Finnur Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.*, ed. 2, II, 551.

2 *Um Sturlungu* in *Safn* III, 437-8.

3 *Um Íslendingasögur* in *Safn* VI, 359-62.

4 *Arkiv för nord. fil.*, 1937, pp. 62 ff.

5 *Skírnir*, 1953, p. 212.

a general way in a lecture delivered before a philological congress in 1935,¹ and in various other works.²

The scholar who has compared the Family Sagas with *Sturlunga* in closest detail is Barði Guðmundsson. In 1939 he delivered some broadcast talks about *Njáls Saga* and the age in which it was written,³ and in later years he has published a series of papers in *Andvari*.⁴ He wrote a separate paper on *Olkofra Páttir*,⁵ and two on *Ljósvetninga Saga*,⁶ which were later expanded and published as a book.

It must be said that all these attempts to find similarities between the sagas and events of the age in which they were written present exceedingly difficult problems. In the first place, similar incidents often occur in real life, without there being any relationship between them. Secondly, while there may be some literary relationship between a Family Saga and a story of contemporary life, it may be difficult to decide which is the borrower. If we can be sure that there is some direct relationship between a Family Saga and contemporary history, then it is certainly probable that the saga is the borrower, but it need not be so in every case. For example, I think that the corselet, Fulltrúi, which Þorvarður of Saurbær wore

1 Published in *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* XII, 71-90.

2 About *Laxdæla* in my edition (*Í.F.* V, 1934), especially p. xxxiii (on Ásbjörn Guðmundsson and Helgi Harðbeinsson); about *Njála* in *Skirnir*, 1937, pp. 15 ff.; *Á Njálsbúð*, 1943, 11, 25-7; *Sturlungaöld*, 1940, p. 87-8; in my edition of *Njáls Saga* (*Í.F.* XII, 1954), pp. cxiv-v.

3 Published in *Alþýðublaðið* 25/3, 1/4, 27/4-29/4, 1939.

4 *Andvari*, 1947, 1949 (1950-1), 1955.

5 *Ibid.*, 1951, afterwards published separately.

6 *Ibid.*, 1950-1; *Ljósvetninga Saga og Saurbæingar*, 1953.

at the battle of Örlygsstaðir (1238), took its name from *Víga-Glúms Saga*.¹

There are many possibilities in cases like these, and the problem is tricky, and has not yet been fully studied from all aspects. It would, therefore, be wise not to use such things as the basis for dating sagas, but rather to look for other evidence.

1 Cf. *Víga-Glúms Saga*, ed. G. Turville-Petre, 1940, p. xxxvii, footnote. In *Víga-Glúms Saga* (Ch. 14) Glúmr names his 'patrons' (*fulltrúar*) as his purse (*fésjóðr*), his axe (*øx*), his log store-house (*stokkabúr*). This strange use of the word *fulltrúi* is well understandable if we consider its older usages on the one hand and the foreign tale upon which the concept is based (*integer amicus*) on the other. After this clever story was written it was natural that a man should call his corselet his 'patron' (*fulltrúi*), but before this it would not be so easy to understand. It should be mentioned that corselets generally had feminine names (see H. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 1914, p. 178, and cf. the *pulur* in *Snorra Edda*). Exceptions are *Sigfússnautr*, which is masculine (*-nautr* masc.) and *Fulltrúi* in *Sturlunga*. I may also mention *nati* which is a variant of *náin* in the *pulur* and undoubtedly a scribal error for that word.

CHAPTER X

LITERARY RELATIONS

WE have next to consider the literary relations between the sagas. Of all the means of deciding the ages of sagas, it is their literary relations which are most fruitful. It is well known that this is the case with the Kings' Sagas, but the same conditions apply to the Family Sagas, although research is not so far advanced. I shall now attempt to explain this in a few words.

The expression 'literary relationship' implies that the author of a saga shows in his own work that he knew an older written work. It may be that he uses the older work consciously, or it might be that he has been influenced by the older work without being conscious of it. It might be that he had the older work lying on the table in front of him, but it might be that he had read it earlier, or heard it read. There is yet another possibility. The author of a saga might have written a summary of the older work, or of some chapters of it, and he might have relied on this summary, and not on the work itself. We have to bear all these possibilities in mind when we attempt to decide questions of literary relations.

We may be faced with grave difficulties, for it is only rarely that reference is made in one saga to another. Such references to sagas are often to be found in the *Landnámabók*, as I have shown by examples, and they are occasionally found in Family Sagas. To quote some instances, *Egils Saga* refers to *Hákonar Saga Góða*;

Eyrbyggja refers in its last chapter to *Laxdæla Saga* and *Heiðarvíg Saga*; *Laxdæla Saga* refers to *Þorgils Saga Hóllusonar* and to *Njarðvíkinga Saga*; *Grettis Saga* refers to *Eiríks Saga jarls* (perhaps *Fagrskinna*), *Laxdæla*, *Bandamanna Saga*, and *Bjarnar Saga Hítðælakappa*. I think that investigation will show that all these references apply to written works.

But much more often, a saga contains no reference to another, and yet the two correspond with each other in such a way that literary relations are probable. In such cases it is often difficult to reach a conclusion. Material similarity need not necessarily prove scribal relationship; the same incident might have occurred twice independently; the same motif may come into being in two independent traditions. Moreover, the influence of one oral tradition upon another is a phenomenon widely known.

But the closer the likeness is, and the more numerous and distinctive the incidents involved, the greater is the likelihood of literary relationship. Differences in material do not in themselves prove that there was no literary relationship, for these differences may arise from other causes. It may be that the author of the saga *B* knew saga *A*, but rejected its story, partially or totally, because he knew another source or other sources, written or oral, in which he placed greater faith, and therefore followed more closely. It might also happen that the author of *B*, although he knew *A*, diverged from it because he thought that its account was improbable or its story inartistic, or because he saw the people and the events described in a

different light. In an earlier chapter of this essay (pp. 35-7) I remarked upon instances in which a chapter of one saga is written to contradict a chapter in another. This has also to be considered as literary relationship.

Saga-writers seem rather frequently to avoid writing in detail about events which had already been described in an earlier saga. Excellent examples of this may be found in *Eyrbyggja*, as was remarked by Guðbrandur Vigfússon and later considered by H. Gering, and it seems to have been very usual.

Sometimes we come upon instances in which a saga-writer more or less avoids repeating events told in an older saga, and yet he does relate some of them, although rather differently. The explanation of this is obviously that the later saga-writer thought it unnecessary to repeat what the older one had said, when he had no criticism of it to make, but he wrote down the incidents which he had heard, read or interpreted in another way. It is worth remarking that it was contrary to the objective narrative style of the sagas to discuss corrections, or, if the author was expressing his own opinions, to say so. Such things were generally put down as facts, in ordinary narrative style.

Much more could be said on this score. For example, the author of a saga sometimes writes with the assumption that the reader would be aware of the things which he knew from a well-known book. This often happens and it is fairly easy to detect. Often individuals or objects are talked of as if they had already been described in the saga, although the description was really in the author's

source. I may cite a good example of this from the *Eyrbyggja Saga*. In Ch. 24 we read of events which led to the discovery of Greenland by Eiríkr the Red. The saga says:

At this same meeting Þorgestr the Old and the sons of Þórðr Gellir prosecuted Eiríkr for the slaughter of the sons of Þorgestr, who had lost their lives in the autumn when Eiríkr went to Breiðabólstað to fetch *the* plank-beams.¹

No mention of these plank-beams had been made in *Eyrbyggja* before, but they had been mentioned in the source which the author was following, whether this was an older *Eiríks Saga Rauða* or an early *Landnámabók*. It may be added that, if there were very well-known oral tales, the same thing could happen; reference could be made to them even though they were not written down, but only to the best known of them.

The most certain indication of literary relationship is in verbal similarity. Naturally, we can attach little significance to the occurrence of the same proverb or of well-known expressions in two works. Moreover, scholars must beware of concluding that there is literary relationship because of short standardized sayings attributed to a man, which may have been widely known in oral tradition. But leaving these and other such things aside, it can be said, in general, that verbal similarity gives evidence of literary relationship. Obviously, we need to be cautious and to appreciate the difference between greater and lesser similarities. One word, one sentence

1 'Á þessu sama þingi sóttu þeir Þorgestr inn gamli ok synir Þórðar gellis Eirík inn rauða um víg sona Þorgests, er látizk hqfðu um haustit, þá er Eiríkr sótti setstokkana á Breiðabólstað.'

may appear by chance in two works, but the greater the similarity, the more distinctive and significant it is, the greater are the probabilities of literary relationship. At the same time, absence of similar wording is not conclusive evidence that there is no literary relationship, but we must then have doubts unless there should be compelling reasons for supposing it.

Most scholars will be in general agreement with what I have said about the value of verbal similarity for deciding whether there are literary relations. Nevertheless, the advocates of the free-prose theory are not of one mind on this problem. Liestöl, as I believe, shows in more than one passage that he hesitates to deny literary relationship when the wording is similar. Heusler and many other adherents of the free-prose theory go rather further. Heusler suggested, for example, that the two versions of *Bandamanna Saga* were independent texts of two oral variants. I have recently seen a scholar go so far as to maintain that the texts of *Fóstbræðra Saga*, *Hauksbók* on the one hand, and the rest of the manuscripts on the other, were independent texts of variants of an oral saga. This might be called reducing the theory to an absurdity. In earlier pages I discussed the strength of this theory's foundations, and there is no reason to say more about it at this point.

While it may appear certain that there are literary relations between two works, it may still be difficult to decide which was the giver and which the receiver. But yet it can often be seen when a story has been shortened, as I remarked earlier. And it often happens, although not

necessarily in every case, that when one saga has imitated the episodes of another, some sign of this is shown; e.g. the secondary version contains 'blind' motives or such-like faults. I may quote an example from *Heiðarvígá Saga* and *Njáls Saga*. *Heiðarvígá Saga* tells of a portent which appeared to Þorbjörn of Veggir on the morning before the battle of the moor:

Þorbjörn Brúnason got up early at Veggir and told his servant to get up too: 'and we shall go to Þorgautr in the smithy today and shall forge there'; this was early in the morning, just at sunrise. Þorbjörn called for their breakfast, but it is not related what was served, except that the housewife put a dish on the table before them. Þorbjörn said that this was not good food, and he hurled the dish at her back. She turned and was angry at this and spoke to him sharply, as they both did to each other: 'and you', said he, 'just serve up food which is nothing but blood; and a wonder it is that you do not see anything wrong with it'. Then she answered him calmly: 'I did not serve up anything which you could not well enjoy, but I think it none the worse that you have seen portents which show that you will soon be in your grave. Indeed, you have seen your fetch.' He answered in a verse . . . Then she ran off and picked up a cheese and threw it in front of him, and she sat down on the dais on the opposite side and wept. Þorbjörn spoke in another verse . . . 'but yet things seem strange now; it seems to me as if both the gable-ends had been taken away from the house, and a heavy stream seems to flow through the building from the moor in the north. The cheese looks to me like nothing but earth, and that is how it tastes.'¹

1 Þorbjörn Brúnason stóð upp snimma á Veggjum ok biðr húskarl sinn standa upp með sér,—'ok skal fara upp til smiðju í dag til Þorgauts ok skal smíða þar'. Þat var snimma, þegar í sólar upprás. Hann kvaddi

This is what *Njála* says about the last supper of Njáll:

Now it is to be told that, at Bergþórshváll, Bergþóra said to her household: 'Now you should choose your own food this evening, so that everyone may have what he likes best, for this is the last evening on which I shall place food before my household.' 'That must not be,' said those who were present. 'But that is how it will turn out,' said she, 'and I could tell you of many more things if I pleased; and this will be a sign of it that Grímr and Helgi will come home this evening before the household have finished supper, and if this turns out, so will the other things which I say.' Then she placed the food on the table, and Njáll said: 'Things look strange to me now, and it seems as if I can see through the whole room, and as if both the gable-walls had gone, and the whole table and food were covered with blood.'¹

þeim dögurðar, ok var þat eigi á kveðit, hvat fengit var annars, en húsfreyja setti fyrir þá trygil á borðit. Þorbjörn vattar, at honum sé eigi vel fengit, ok rekr meðal herða henni trygilinn. Hon snýsk við ok verðr illa við ok mælti við hann hrapalligt, ok svá hvárt við annat,— 'ok berr þú þat fram', segir hann, 'er ekki er í nema blóð eitt, ok undr, er þú sér eigi missmíði á því'. Hon svarar honum þá stilliliga: 'Ekki bar ek þat fram, er eigi mættir þú vel neyta, ok ætla ek eigi því verr, at þau undr beri fyrir þik, at þú sér brátt í helju, ok víst mun þetta þín furða vera.' Hann kvað vísu . . . Þá hleypr hon á braut ok tekr osthleif ok kastar fyrir hann; hon sezk í pallinn öðrum megin ok grætr. Þorbjörn kvað vísu aðra . . . 'En þó bregðr nú kynligu við; undan þykki mér nú gaffhlaðit vera hvárttveggja undan húsinu, ok á sýnisk mér falla ströng eptir húsinu ok norðan af heiðinni, en mold ein sýnisk mér ok svá kennisk mér eigi síðr ostrinn, sjá er ek et.' (*Heiðarvíga Saga*, ed. K. Kálund, 1904, pp. 82-3.)

1 Nú er til máls at taka at Bergþórshváli, at Bergþóra mælti til hjóna sinna: 'Nú skuluð þér kjósa yðr mat í kveld, at hverr hafi þat, er mest fýsir til, því at þenna aptan mun ek bera síðast mat fyrir hjón mín.' 'Þat skyldi eigi vera,' segja þeir, er hjá váru. 'Þat mun þó fram koma,' segir hon, 'ok má ek þó segja af miklu fleira, ef ek vil, ok mun þat til marka, at þeir Grímr ok Helgi munu heim koma í kveld, áðr menn eru mettir. Ok ef þetta gengr eptir, þá mun svá fara annat sem ek segi.' Síðan bar hon mat á borð. Njáll mælti: 'Undarliga sýnisk

It is obvious that in the *Heiðarvíga Saga* the removal of the gable-wall has significance in the story, and stands in relation to the river which flows from the moor in the north, for this is the symbol of Barði's assault. The vision of blood, in this text, symbolizes the battle and the shedding of blood, but in *Njála* it symbolizes death in general, and it has no specific significance that the gable-walls should be gone, although it has poetic force and heightens the eeriness of the vision.

It should be added that examples may, no doubt, be found in which a later writer has improved on the older story. There are many possibilities, and it is sometimes difficult to arrive at conclusions.

It is especially helpful in dating Family Sagas if we can trace literary contact between them and other works which can be dated with reasonable precision. In this, the Kings' Sagas and *Landnámabók* are especially valuable.

One of the most important observations of this kind was made when Sigurður Nordal showed that *Fóstbræðra Saga* had been used by the so-called Middle Saga of St Ólaf, which is now lost, although its existence can be proved from later sources. Sigurður Nordal has shown that Styrmir the Wise used this book when he wrote his Saga of St Ólaf, and Snorri, who probably wrote during the years 1220-30,¹ based his Saga of St Ólaf on that of Styrmir. It could reasonably be

mér nú. Ek þykkjumsk sjá um alla stufuna, ok þykki mér sem undan sé gafiveggirnir báðir, en blóðugt allt borðit ok matrinn.' (*f.f.* XII, 324.)

¹ See S. Nordal, *Om Olav den helliges Saga*, 1914, pp. 142 ff.

conjectured that the Middle Saga was written ten years earlier, but it could equally well have been written twenty years earlier or even more, and the *Fóstbræðra Saga* is older than this. The *Fóstbræðra Saga* was, therefore, written at the latest in 1210, and it may have been written considerably before that. The Family Sagas, as a branch of literature, cannot possibly have begun later than 1210. I have explained this in some detail because Paul V. Rubow¹ once made the suggestion in an article that the Norwegian translation of *Tristrams Saga*, which Brother Robert made in 1226, was the beginning of the Family Sagas. There is really no evidence for such an assertion, and the relationship of *Fóstbræðra Saga* with the Kings' Sagas shows with certainty that Family Sagas flourished before King Hákon Hákonarson began to have the French romances translated.

I shall now cite some examples of relationship between Kings' Sagas and Family Sagas. In *Egils Saga* reference is made to a Saga of Hákon the Good, and on this point we need no further evidence, although it is another question what this saga was like. There are also literary relations between *Egils Saga* and *Heimskringla*, and G. Storm² was probably right in suggesting that *Egils Saga* had been used in the compilation of *Heimskringla*. This opinion does not conflict with the view that Snorri might have been the author of *Egils Saga*, and is really irrelevant to it. Indeed, Sigurður Nordal favours both of these theories.

1 *Smaa kritiske breve*, 1936, pp. 7 ff.

2 *Snorre Sturlassöns Historieskrivning*, 1873, pp. 52-3.

It can hardly be doubted that the author of *Hallfreðar Saga* knew one saga or another about Ólaf Tryggvason. Evidence of this may be found in the way in which some people, who are known from sagas about Ólaf Tryggvason, are named in the *Hallfreðar Saga* without introduction. At the same time there is every probability that Snorri knew the *Hallfreðar Saga*.¹

In his edition of *Víga-Glúms Saga* G. Turville-Petre noticed a similarity between that saga and *Heimskringla*, on which I would like to make a remark. In Ch. 9 of *Víga-Glúms Saga* we read of a dream which Glúmr dreamed:

Hann þóttisk vera úti staddr á bæ sínum ok sjá út til fjarðarins. Hann þóttisk sjá konu eina ganga útan *eptir heraðinu*, ok stefndi þangat til Þverár; en hon var *svá mikil, at axlirnar tóku út fjöllin tveggja vegna*. En hann þóttisk ganga ór garði á mót henni ok bauð henni til sín; ok síðan vaknaði hann.

This is the text of the *Mjóðruvallabók* which, in this passage, differs little from that of AM 445c, 4to, the most noticeable difference being that the latter reads: *sjá út eptir firðinum*. The story is supported by a verse ascribed to Glúmr, of which the authenticity need not be questioned, and the poet describes the arrival of the woman, saying that she was seen walking 'in unnatural size' (*í miklum auka*) and 'it seemed to me' (*mér þótti*) that she stood 'beside the mountains' (*með fjöllum*). This verse appears to provide the model for the prose.

Now, in *Heimskringla* we read of the magical voyage of the wizard:

¹ See Hallvard Lie, *Studier i Heimskringlas stil*, 1937, pp. 54-8; *f.f.* VIII, pp. lxi-iii.

En hann lagðisk í brot ok vestr fyrir land, allt fyrir Eyjafjörð. Fór hann inn *eptir* þeim firði. Þar fór móti honum fugl *svá mikill*, at vængirnir tóku út fjöllin tveggja vegna, ok fjöldi annarra fugla, bæði stórir ok smáir.¹

We have no older source of the voyage of the wizard to Iceland, and it is probable that Snorri was the first to write about it. Hence we might suppose that the details in Snorri's description of the wizard's encounter with the elemental spirits (*landvættir*) of Eyjafjörður were modelled on the story told in *Víga-Glúms Saga*. It is well known that Snorri would sometimes complete his stories by such means.²

There is no need to explain in detail that in some of the Family Sagas, which for various reasons are believed to be written late, the use of the Kings' Sagas may be noticed. Such is the case with *Vatnsdæla Saga* and *Grettis Saga*, which probably drew on *Fagrskinna*, and with *Njála* whose author used one or other of the sagas of Ólaf Tryggvason. One of the sagas of Ólaf Tryggvason appears to have been known to the author of *Laxdæla Saga*. Besides this, the *Laxdæla Saga* appears to be used in the Arnamagnæan manuscript of the translation of Oddr's Saga of Ólaf Tryggvason, and this provides another limit for the age of *Laxdæla Saga*. I shall mention two further points on which there is correspondence between the Family Sagas and the Kings' Sagas.

Sigurður Nordal pointed out in his edition of *Heiðarvíga Saga* that some of the verses in it bear certain

1 *Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*, Ch. XXXIII (*f.F.*, XXVI, 271).

2 See S. Nordal, *Snorri Sturluson*, 1920, pp. 206 ff.

resemblances to the verses of other early scalds, and he remarked especially on their resemblance to the verses found in sagas which he believed to be written at Þingeyrar. He thought it likely that the verses in *Heiðarvíga Saga* were composed by the author of the saga, or by his informants, or else revised by the author. But Sigurður Nordal's list of similarities does not convince me. If we read through the scaldic poems, we can easily find many resemblances between verses by various scalds. The scalds themselves, probably unconsciously rather than consciously, imitated each other, and we must also remember the many years in which the verses were preserved orally; this provided sufficient time for the one to influence the other. But if we doubt that these similarities prove literary dependence of *Heiðarvíga Saga* upon the books written at Þingeyrar, we have no proof that *Heiðarvíga Saga* was written after 1200.

Ljósvetninga Saga contains a story about the death of Hallr Ótryggsson, and a similar story is told in *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. Björn Sigfússon has compared these stories, and he believes that the story of *Ljósvetninga Saga* is compiled from those of *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. But there is yet another work which might be considered as the source of *Ljósvetninga Saga*, and this is the Saga of Hákon Ívarsson, of which only fragments are preserved. It should, however, be noticed that this chapter of *Ljósvetninga Saga* survives only in the C manuscript, and it is difficult to say what the original text was like.

Obviously, *Landnámabók* is difficult to deal with

because of its variant versions. In spite of the valuable studies which have been published (I would mention especially those of Björn M. Ólsen and Jón Jóhannesson), the relations between the variant versions of the *Landnámabók* and the Family Sagas are not altogether clear. Three medieval versions of *Landnámabók* are preserved: *Sturlubók*, written by Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284); *Hauksbók*, written by Haukr Erlendsson (d. 1334); *Melabók*, written by a member of the family of the Melamenn, perhaps Snorri Markússon (d. 1313). Unfortunately only small fragments of this latter version are preserved. There are also the seventeenth-century versions: *Skarðsárþók*, compiled by Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (d. 1655) from *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók*; and *Þórðarbók*, compiled by Síra Þórður Jónsson of Hítardalur (d. 1670) on the basis of *Skarðsárþók* and *Melabók*, which was then less defective than it is now. Thus, *Þórðarbók* throws light on the text of *Melabók* in the chapters of it which are now lost. An edition of *Skarðsárþók* which is now in preparation will probably make it easier to distinguish the passages from *Melabók* which are preserved in *Þórðarbók*, and even as it is this should be possible to some extent.

As for the relations between the medieval versions of *Landnámabók*, it is known that *Hauksbók* was compiled from *Sturlubók* and a version written by the priest Styrmir the Wise (d. 1245), but the position of *Melabók* is more doubtful. Björn M. Ólsen thought that it descended from a version which was older both than Styrmir's book and *Sturlubók*, but Jón Jóhannesson

maintains that *Melabók* descends from *Styrmisbók*. *Hauksbók* and *Melabók* differ greatly, and Jón Jóhannesson believes that this is because Sturla, who, in his opinion, knew and used *Styrmisbók*, added a great deal to it, while Haukr himself made further additions when he combined these two versions. The opinion that *Melabók* descends from *Styrmisbók* seems to me the most questionable in Jón Jóhannesson's work, which I consider one of the most remarkable studies of the early literature made in recent years.

It may be noted that Haukr wrote in the epilogue to his version of *Landnámabók*:

I, Haukr Erlendsson, wrote this book following the book written by Herra Sturla the Lawman, a very wise man, and also that other book, which Styrmir the Wise had written, and I took from each of them that which was told more fully, but for the most part, they both said the same, and so it is no wonder that this *Landnámabók* is longer than any other.¹

In these sentences it is stated clearly that most passages were the same in both books, and it is explained (1) that there were rather many versions of the *Landnámabók* in existence, and (2) that *Styrmisbók* was so detailed that it was in parts fuller than *Sturlubók*, although *Sturlubók* was fuller in other parts, and it could hardly be expected that such a thing would be said of

1 'En þessa bók ritaða (ek) Haukr Erlendsson eptir þeiri bók, sem ritat hafði herra Sturla lögmaðr, inn fróðasti maðr, ok eptir þeiri bók annarri, er ritat hafði Styrmir inn fróði, ok hafða ek þat ór hvárri, sem framar greindi, en mikill þori var þat, er þær sǫgðu eins báðar, ok því er þat ekki at undra, þó þessi Landnámabók sé lengri en nǫkkur ǫnnur.'

Styrmisbók if it had not a fuller text than the original *Melabók*.

Comparison shows that *Sturlubók* contains a great deal of material derived from the Family Sagas, and sometimes summaries of these are given. Thus, we have a *terminus ante quem*, which is particularly valuable in dating the later sagas. Jón Jóhannesson considers that the following sagas were used in compiling *Sturlubók*, and in some cases the evidence had already been given by Björn M. Ólsen and others: *Egils Saga*, *Hænsa-Þóris Saga*, *Harðar Saga*, *Bjarnar Saga Hítðælakappa*, *Eyrbyggja*, *Þorfinns Saga Karlsefnis* (older version), *Þorskfirðinga Saga*, *Hávarðar Saga* (older version), *Gísla Saga Súrssonar*, *Hrómundar Þáttr Halta*, *Vatnsdæla Saga*, *Svarfdæla Saga* (?), *Reykðæla*, *Droplaugarsona Saga*. Besides these, it is believed that the following lost sagas were used: *Þórðar Saga Gellis*, **Kjalleklinga Saga*, *Vébjarnar Saga Sygnakappa*, **Snæbjarnar Þáttr Galta*, *Boðmóðs Saga Gerpis ok Grímólfs*, **Hróars Saga Tungugóða*, **Fljótshlíðinga Saga*.¹

At the same time, it can be seen that *Sturlubók* has been used in some of the later sagas, such as *Grettis Saga*, *Flóamanna Saga*, *Bárðar Saga Snæfellsáss*, and perhaps *Víglundar Saga*; and Jón Jóhannesson also includes the surviving *Þorskfirðinga Saga*² in this group. Thus we have another valuable criterion of age, a *terminus a quo*.

We may ask whether Sturla Þórðarson was the first to introduce material from the Family Sagas into the

¹ See Jón Jóhannesson, *Gerðir Landnámabókar*, 1941, pp. 75-121.

² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Landnámabók, or whether *Styrmir* had already done this to some extent. The answer to the first question depends largely on whether *Melabók* descends from *Styrmisbók* or not.

In *Melabók*, *Vatnsdæla Saga* and probably a lost *Esphœlinga Saga* have been used. Jón Jóhannesson maintains that it was the compiler of *Melabók* himself who drew on these; in other words, these summaries were, in his opinion, not in the version of *Landnámabók* which the compiler of *Melabók* followed.¹ Moreover, while there is, no doubt, some relationship between *Melabók* and *Reykðæla Saga*, it is very difficult to decide what it is. I shall not go further into this problem at present.²

If it is true that the compiler of *Melabók* added the material from *Vatnsdæla Saga* and *Esphœlinga Saga*, and that his main source was *Styrmisbók*, it is probable that *Styrmisbók* did not contain material derived from the Family Sagas. It is, of course, possible that *Melabók* only gave a shortened text of *Styrmisbók*, whether shortened by the compiler of *Melabók* or by an intermediary. Nevertheless, it is improbable that this shortening particularly affected the material which *Styrmisbók* had from the Family Sagas, and so this explanation can hardly be right. But if, on the other hand, the text of *Melabók* does not descend from *Styrmisbók*, but from another early *Landnámabók*, dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century, then it might be supposed that some of

1 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14 and references given there.

the Family Sagas had been used in *Styrmisbók*. This is what we might suspect from the words of Haukr, who talks of *Styrmisbók* precisely as a detailed version of *Landnámabók*. If it is true, as all the evidence seems to suggest, that Sturla used *Styrmisbók*, it is then understandable that the greater part was the same in both versions.

Haukr used *Styrmisbók* and *Sturlubók*, taking from each the more detailed account. Even if we allow that this may have been his theory rather than his practice, there must have been some passages in which *Styrmisbók* was fuller and was followed by Haukr. I think there is one example of this in Ch. 161 of *Landnámabók* (*Hauksbók* Ch. 85, *Sturlubók* Ch. 111), which is about the Kjalleklingar on Meðalfellsströnd. Only a part of the text of *Hauksbók* in this passage is preserved (in *Skarðsárþók*), but there is enough for us to be able to judge the difference between the two texts. The text of *Hauksbók* is fuller and more lucid than that of *Sturlubók*, which is excessively abbreviated. If Haukr has taken up the text of *Styrmisbók* this is quite understandable. Let us suppose that this text was compiled from an early *Landnámabók* and a summary, which Styrmir made, of the lost **Kjalleklinga Saga*. Sturla followed the text of Styrmir, but abbreviated it immoderately. When Haukr came to this chapter, he rightly preferred the text of Styrmir because it was fuller and better. It would be worth considering whether there may not be other chapters in *Hauksbók* which would naturally be explained in this way, but I shall not go further into the question

now. There is the possibility that when *Sturlubók* provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of Family Sagas, future researches may, in some instances, put that *terminus* back to the time of Styrmir the Wise.

Before leaving this subject, I shall mention one further instance in which *Hauksbók* and *Sturlubók* differ, although conditions are not the same as in Ch. 161 of *Landnámabók*. This is in the story about Ormr the Lean and Þorbjörn the Stout at Fróðá, which is told in *Landnámabók* Ch. 129 (*Hauksbók* Ch. 67, *Sturlubók* Ch. 79). As Björn M. Ólsen showed, in the *Hauksbók* we obviously have an early text of *Landnámabók*, related to that of *Melabók*, as well as a short chapter based on *Eyrbyggja*. Jón Jóhannesson thought that the text of *Hauksbók* was compiled by Haukr himself.¹ but Guðni Jónsson derived it from *Styrmisbók* in his unpublished dissertation for the M.A.; and I also worked on this assumption in my edition of *Eyrbyggja Saga* (1935).² There is no difficulty in supposing that if this was the text of *Styrmisbók* it acted as a spur to Sturla to make a more exact summary and to rewrite this chapter of *Landnámabók*. But it is less easy to see why Haukr should have preferred the shorter text of *Styrmisbók* to the longer one of *Sturlubók*. Perhaps there was no other reason than negligence. Perhaps Haukr also laid store by the reference to *Eyrbyggja* and the verse which was cited. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the text of *Styrmisbók* in this passage was the same as that of

¹ *Gerðir Landnámabókar*, pp. 40-3.

² *J.F.* IV, pp. xv, xlvii.

Melabók, it is impossible to understand why Haukr did not give preference to that of *Sturlubók*, and why he did not follow it, but instead gave himself the trouble of compiling a new text from an old version of *Landnámabók* on the one hand and *Eyrbyggja Saga* on the other.

Although many details about the relationship of the Family Sagas with the Kings' Sagas and *Landnámabók* remain obscure, yet these works provide valuable information about the ages of the Family Sagas, and they often give us more or less fixed points to which we can attach ourselves. Moreover, we can often discover literary relationship between works whose ages we do not otherwise know, and this gives evidence of their relative ages. If such investigations are pursued, they may become very important, because we may gradually acquire a kind of yardstick of relative ages, and in the end it may be possible to discover relations with works whose ages are known. I have no doubt that here we have one of the most valuable means of finding out the ages of sagas.

The editors of the series *Íslensk Fornrit* have frequently tried to establish literary relationship between various sagas, and similar attempts were made, for example, in my book *Um Njálu*. It has been thought that, in some ways, scholars have gone too far in this. Needless to say, much may be doubtful in such attempts, and criticism, contrary evidence, and discussion are very valuable. Perhaps it will be shown that scholars have sometimes pursued this line too far and that other evidence is more

trustworthy. Such discussions may perhaps bring to light reliable evidence in course of time.

Before leaving this subject I shall mention one other point which deserves attention. It seems that literary relations between sagas are very usual. If it should turn out that one saga has no literary relations with any other, it is worth paying particular attention to this. Sometimes, it may be due only to chance, and sometimes it may be because there were not many written works in the place where the saga was written. It might give evidence of the place where it was written, but it might also provide evidence of the age when it was written; it might suggest that it was an old saga (e.g. *Heiðarvígja Saga* and *Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða*).¹

Some of the criteria of age which I have given may be disputed, but on the whole they may be called tangible. But there are also other criteria, which may sometimes be objective, and at other times more subjective, and then greater caution is needed. In such cases, the scholar's approach, his prejudices, and even his mood may lead him astray.

1 References to oral tales are often made in sagas with such phrases as *þess er getit*, *eigi er þess getit*, *svá er sagt*, *sumir segja*, etc. No general study of the use of such phrases in sagas has been published, but I do not think that they can be altogether without significance. We might suppose that, during the earlier period of saga-writing, oral tales flourished more vigorously than they did later, and in this case, a great number of allusions like these would suggest a rather early date for the sagas in which they occur. This problem needs closer attention.

CHAPTER XI

LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE

WE may next consider such evidence of age as may appear in the language of a saga. When we study the problem from this point of view, it is no less important than before to bear in mind the state in which sagas are preserved, and perhaps even more so.

It is well known that every copyist modernized the language, substituting word-forms used in his own time for the older ones; he would even put in new words in place of those which seemed obsolete. Consequently, late word-forms in a manuscript are no proof that a saga was composed late but, on the other hand, archaic forms which are older than the linguistic stage of the manuscript do suggest an earlier age, and as far as they go, they are noteworthy indicators of age. When we come to the vocabulary there is, of course, much that is neither late nor old, but rather both, i.e. words which were used both in later and in earlier times. But there are other words which seem particularly to indicate an early date, and these suggest that the original text was old. One or two late words might be ascribed to a copyist, but if there are very many of them, late loan-words and suchlike, they clearly suggest that the original was late, and the more strongly the greater their proportion. The basis of these rules is that, although we know that copyists modernized the language, we do not know that they archaized it.

If there is likelihood that only a short time had elapsed between the oldest manuscript and the original, the value of the manuscript in deciding the linguistic stage of the original is increased. That is the case with the oldest manuscripts of *Njála*.

But, in general, conditions are not like these, and often a long period must have elapsed between the original and the extant manuscripts. It is not, therefore, surprising that they do not bear traces of the archaic language which may have been current up to or during the time of the author. As an example I may mention the sound-change *s > r* in the verb *vesa* and the relative *es*. Such archaisms must have been expunged by scribes, even if they were in the original, but it is remarkable that in compounds, where the *-s* was suffixed, it could be preserved, and this could give evidence of early writing, as in the forms *þars*, *hvars*, in *Morkinskinna*¹ and *þars* in the Oldest Saga of St Ólaf.² Similar forms are found in *Heiðarvígá Saga*: *þarstu*, *þars*.³

The occurrence of the expletive *of/um* is very rare in the texts of Family Sagas, and it must have been lost in the spoken language in the twelfth century.⁴ I have not come across it in the oldest Miracle Book of Bishop Þorlákr, written about 1200 and preserved in a manuscript of slightly later date. But this expletive does occur

1 Ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, p. viii.

2 *Otte Brudstykker*, ed. G. Storm, 1893, 6/11, 6/33.

3 *Heiðarvígá Saga*, ed. K. Kálund, 1904, 62/6, 83/27 (in verse).

4 See H. Kuhn, *Das Füllwort of-um im Altwestnordischen*, 1929; Ingrid Dal, *Ursprung und Verwendung der altnordischen Expletivartikel of, um*, 1930.

in the *Heiðarvíga Saga*:¹ *um skyldr* (97/31), *heðan of sér* (103/22). Otherwise, it is very rare in manuscripts of Family Sagas, except in proverbs and in fixed expressions.

At this point I may mention the prepositions *of* and *umb*, which fall together in Icelandic in the first half of the thirteenth century, so that *umb* comes to dominate in the form *um*. This development had been known for a long time, although it had not been investigated thoroughly or used systematically for dating literary works. When I went through the *Sturlunga Saga* in lectures on Icelandic literature in the University of Iceland during the winter 1949-50, I noticed that the form *of* was by no means equally common in all the sagas preserved in the *Króksfjarðarbók*, the older manuscript of the *Sturlunga* (mid-fourteenth century). The count was only approximate, but the conclusion seemed to be that, according to Kálund's edition, *of* occurred more than once on every page in *Þorgils Saga ok Haflíða*, once every two pages in *Sturlu Saga*, *Guðmundar Saga Dýra*, and *Hrafns Saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, but rarely or not at all in the others. These figures apply only to those chapters which are preserved in the *Króksfjarðarbók*. I regarded this as evidence of age but it was, of course, clear that closer investigation was needed.² It therefore gave me pleasure when, at my suggestion, Peter Foote went thoroughly into the problem in his article 'Notes on the preposition *of* and *um(b)* in Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Prose', published in *Studia Islandica* 14 (Reykjavík, 1955). In this article the whole problem is

1 Ed. Kálund, 1904.

2 Cf. *Skírnir*, 1952, p. 252.

carefully studied. I may refer to the article itself for details about individual writings, but Foote's general conclusions are as follows:

(1) In Norway *um* was the regular prepositional form from the beginning of the 'manuscript-age', though the disappearance of *of* could not have taken place long before. *Of* may have remained longer in some dialects.

(2) In twelfth-century Icelandic *of* was the regular preposition, but *umb* tended to be retained in a few phrases where its peculiar spatial sense was strongly marked. During the latter half of the century, *um(b)* began to be used more widely as a preposition, developing from its adverbial and compounded use. Its occurrence in the earliest manuscripts is rare, but for the change to have proceeded with such rapidity after *c.* 1200, it is necessary to presume that it had begun some time before that and had gained considerable momentum by then. The conservatism of a written language conceals to some extent this early development.

(3) Between *c.* 1200 and *c.* 1250 the transition from the use of *of* to the use of *um* seems to have been generally made, perhaps completely so with some speakers. *Of* could remain the common form in poetry longer than in prose, probably to the end of the thirteenth century. The high point in the transition is marked by the general disappearance of *umb*, the final *-b* being assimilated to give *um*. This took place not later than *c.* 1230, by which time *um(b)* must have made large advances as a preposition.

(4) Where a text shows a high proportion of *of*, it may be safe to use this as evidence in assessing the date of the work. A high proportion will suggest that it was written before *c.* 1250, possibly before *c.* 1235 (the form *umb* is important in this respect); under favourable circumstances it may be possible to decide the date, or at least the *terminus ad quem*,

even more closely. The possibility of dialect usage must however be taken into account. Finally, it must be remembered that we can only argue from the presence of *of* in a text, never from its absence.

In Table I (pp. 63-4), Foote gives a survey of certain writings preserved in relatively early manuscripts, and the proportion of *of* and *umb* to *um* is often as we might expect, although sometimes one copyist has modernized the language more than another. Such is the case in the surviving part of the *Heiðarvíga Saga* in which *of* does not occur often, although it seems to have occurred rather more frequently in the chapters which Jón Grunnvíkingr wrote out from memory. There are, nevertheless, many other archaisms in the language of this fragment.

The scribe who wrote θ of *Egils Saga* changed *of* to *um* in every case except one, but in ζ the proportion of *of-umb* to *um* is 43.3 per cent. In manuscripts of *Laxdæla Saga*, *of* hardly occurs at all, and that is as we should expect. It is surprising how often *of* occurs in *Þorsteins Saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, which is preserved in paper manuscripts. It may be that this saga is rather an old one, or perhaps the old practice continued rather longer in the east of Iceland than elsewhere.¹ The very high percentage of *of* in *Konráðs Saga Keisarasonar* (50 per cent) might partly be explained as dialectal, although this saga may be older than generally supposed.

I may mention a few other points; my examples will

¹ On *Þorsteins Saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, see my remark, *Í.F.* XI, 1950, p. cix n.

be chosen largely at random, and there is urgent need of further investigation.

The suffix *-k*, *-g* (for *ek*) after verbs was common both in poetry and in prose in the twelfth century, but it gradually vanished.¹ It is common in the *Morkinskinna*,² but it may be counted rare in manuscripts of the Family Sagas, although it does occur both in *Laxdæla* and in *Njála*.³

The negative suffix *-a* (*-at*, *-t*) was current in the prose of the twelfth century. It occurs in manuscripts of *Grágás* (e.g. *Codex Regius*), and was therefore obviously in common speech in the twelfth century. Examples of it may be found in the First Grammatical Treatise,⁴ and this and other linguistic peculiarities have been preserved by copyists through two centuries. This suffix never occurs in the Miracle Book of Bishop Þorlákr, where *ñ* is generally written instead, and sometimes *ekki* or *eki*. In *Morkinskinna*, however, the negative *-a* is used in a considerable number of passages,⁵ and this shows incontrovertibly that parts of *Morkinskinna* are based on texts written in the twelfth century. In manuscripts of the Family Sagas this negative is very rare, and appears chiefly in standard phrases.⁶

¹ Cf. A. Noreen, *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik*, ed. 4, 1923, p. 310 and references there given.

² Ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, Introduction, p. viii.

³ See *Í.F.* V, p. xxx n.; *Í.F.* XII, p. lxxxiii n.

⁴ See E. Haugen's edition in *Language*, XXVI, No. 4, Supplement, 1950, p. 9.

⁵ Ed. Finnur Jónsson, Introduction, p. viii.

⁶ See e.g. *Í.F.* IX, 86; XII, 106 n. 2; *Flóamanna Saga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, 67/15. The form *era* (*Í.F.* V, 88) does not appear to be used in a fixed phrase.

The positive, emphasizing suffix *-gi*, which is common in the *Grágás*, appears now and again in Family Sagas, but it was obviously rather rare in the thirteenth century.¹ The negative *-gi* is very rare indeed.²

I may also remark on word-forms like *-dali*, *gryðri* (:grynnri), *bruðr* (:brunnr), *miðlum*, *þeima*, *þvísa*, *ér* and *þér*, *it* and *þit*, and on the forms of the word *nøkkurr*, *nakkvat*, *nøkkvi*, etc. Some of these may prove to be evidence of age on closer examination. The word-forms *ýr*, *úr*, *ór* might also deserve attention, but I cannot predict whether they will prove useful in dating.

Before leaving the problems of word-forms, I may remark that old spellings of certain words are sometimes retained for a remarkably long time. For example, the name of Brynjólfur the Old, who appropriated land in the Eastern Fjords, appears in *Þórðarþók* time and again as *Brunnolf-*, which I believe to be a corruption of *Bruniolf-*, dating from the time when *u* was often written for *y*, as it sometimes is in the oldest manuscripts, e.g. *Reykjaholtsmáldagi*. In *Droplaugarsona Saga* the name *Seyðarfjörðr* is written *Sauðarfjörðr*, and this might be an old spelling. The same might apply to *fullar* for *fyllar* in the second strophe of that saga,³ although this is less certain. There are instances in which mutated vowels are written in a similar way (i.e. with the letter which represented the sound from which the mutated

¹ E.g. *Heiðarvíga Saga*, ed. Kålund: (*eigi*) *miklogi* (88/29), (*eigi*) *stóruði* (101/6-7); see also *Njála* (Í.F. XII), p. lxxxiii n.

² *Heiðarvíga Saga* 62/10: *manngi*; *Bjarnar Saga Hítðælakappa* (Í.F. III, 154/17): *þvígít*.

³ Í.F. XI, 158, 172.

vowel was derived) in verses and poems: e.g. *Egils Saga* str. 25/8: *eiðsært*, -*sort* θ, -(*z*)*ort* κ, -*sott* W; str. 27/5: *sýrar*, *surar* W, 30/1: *lyngs*, *lungs* η; and in *Njála* str. 6/3 *bæna*, *bona* M,R, *boðnar* Gr, Krs.

The first is certainly the most significant of the examples from *Egils Saga*. In these cases, the spellings are not, to be sure, evidence of the age of the sagas, but they may descend from early written texts, which were followed.¹ I once guessed that the spelling *ekia* in *Kormaks Saga* str. 39/5 (in *Mǫðruvallabók*) was derived from the ligature of *k* and *c*, used by early scribes for *kk*,² but a single *k* for *kk* is also a possibility. The text of the verses in *Kormaks Saga* is not such as to suggest that they were written before the saga itself.

As already mentioned, the great body of words used in the sagas gives no evidence of their age. But yet, there are some words which seem to suggest an earlier period, and others a later one. The innovations are of diverse origin; some of the late words are loan-words, and others are words or word-combinations which came into fashion, and they sometimes give evidence of a taste different from that followed in the archaic or classical sagas. It must be admitted that many aspects

¹ It is not altogether certain that *o* was written for *œ* in the early texts. The irregularity might have arisen because the scribe misread an old, unrecognizable form of the letter *œ*. I may also refer to *Grottasǫngr* (10/1, 5 in *r*) and to the instances of *o* for *œ* in the Codex Regius which S. Bugge mentioned in his edition of the *Edda* (*Norræn Fornkvæði*, 1867, p. x). Finally I may mention archaic word-forms and spellings in *Njála* which should probably be traced partly to the genealogical sources of the saga (see *f.F.* XII, p. 1, n).

² *f.F.* VIII, p. cix n.

of this problem are difficult to grasp. Except for Larsson's book (*Ordförrådet i de äldsta isländska handskrifterna*, 1891), our authorities for word-usages in prose are the dictionaries, and these are not *thesauri*, for they cite only selected passages in which the words occur. It is, therefore, only experts who can decide which words were used during one or another decade of this comparatively short period. It is easier to get a grasp of the loan-words, for they are fairly easy to recognize, and besides this there is a study of them by F. Fischer (*Die Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen*, 1909) which ought, nevertheless, to be replaced by a more thorough one. Besides this, difficulties arise from the state in which texts are preserved and the late dates of their manuscripts. The archaic idiom of ancient texts may be obliterated, while only relics of early words and phrases survive, and later ones may have taken their place.

For these reasons, many scholars have been suspicious of late linguistic characteristics. Finnur Jónsson, for example, emphasized again and again that examples of late words in a saga, or passages showing late taste, do not necessarily prove that the original was of late date. This was not because Finnur Jónsson was lacking in sensibility for the changes in taste which took place in the late thirteenth century. He mentioned late expressions in the texts of *Gísla Saga*, *Vatnsdæla Saga*, *Ljósvetninga Saga*, and others, while insisting that they showed nothing about the original text.¹ Nevertheless,

¹ *Litt. Hist.*, ed. 2, II, 454, 471, 476-7 (cf. Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Vatnsdæla Saga*, 1934, p. xii), 498.

Finnur Jónsson did cite loan-words in *Njála* when discussing the age of chapters which he believed to be later than the rest.¹ Lehmann and Carolsfeld also cited late words as an indication of the age of *Njála*.² Again Finnur Jónsson mentioned the late style as an indication of the age of the extant *Gull-Þóris Saga*, and late loan-words (*kumpán*, *kjallari*, *buklari*, *piltr*, *prófa*, *partr*) to show the age of *Grettis Saga*.³

Björn M. Ólsen frequently cited early and late words, although he was well aware that single late words proved nothing.⁴ He mentioned archaic words as an indication of age in *Gísla Saga*, *Heiðarvíga Saga*, and *Kormaks Saga*,⁵ and enumerated late words found in *Grettis Saga* and *Finnboga Saga*.⁶ In my book *Um Njálu*⁷ I discussed the late words, and especially the loan-words used in *Njáls Saga*, and in my editions of *Eyrbyggja Saga*, *Laxdæla Saga*, and *Vatnsdæla Saga*⁸ I have also touched on the characteristics of age in the idiom. Features of this kind may still provide valuable information, especially about the later sagas, and I shall quote one example.

Harðar Saga is preserved in two versions, a longer one in AM 556 A, 4to, and a shorter in the fragments

1 See e.g. Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Njáls Saga*, 1908, p. xxiii.

2 *Die Njálssaga*, 1883, p. 3.

3 *Litt. Hist.*, ed. 2, II, 449, 743.

4 On the word *logklókr* in *Valla-Ljóts Saga* see *Um Íslendingasögur* in *Safn* VI, p. 392.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 130 (on the word *æva* in one manuscript of *Gísla Saga*); p. 210 (list of archaic words in *Heiðarvíga Saga*); p. 224.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 288 (more words could be added), 343.

7 *Um Njálu*, 1933, § 62; cf. *Í.F.* X, pp. lxxxii-iii, lxxvi-lxxx.

8 *Í.F.* IV, p. li; V, pp. xxx-i; VIII, pp. xxiv, liii-v.

of *Vatnshyrna* (564 A, 4to). Finnur Jónsson said that the longer version could not possibly be older than about 1300. It contains many post-classical verses, which cannot be older than the fourteenth century, and Finnur Jónsson¹ thought that the main text and the verses in this later version were the work of one hand. In this case, an old text has been refurbished rather verbosely, and somewhat expanded materially. The language and style of the verses show decisively that they are not older than the fourteenth century, and I know of no one who has disputed this.² But Vera Lachmann³ argued that the verses had been interpolated in an older prose text, which she did not think showed characteristics of a particularly late date. I shall not discuss the content of the saga, but I maintain that there are turns of phrase which indicate that the prose text is of late date. Even if some of these might be found in older writings, taken altogether they give this text a stamp which is not that of sagas of the thirteenth century, but rather of the fourteenth; in other words the prose is of the same age as the verses. The expressions which I have in mind are *próf* (12/16, 45/12), *sérliga* (31/14), *náttúra* (46/15, 112/4), *banna* (?) *með fjölkynngi* (56/9), *váru goðin í busli miklu* (59/5-6), *kífinn* (62/9), *spennum ok ónáðum* (63/14), *boli* (78/6), *teikna til* (103/19), *fangaðr* (105/17).⁴ I think

¹ *Litt. Hist.*, ed. 2, II, 422-3.

² See Janus Jónsson's paper in *Tímarit hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* XIII, 1892, pp. 259-75.

³ *Das Alter der Harðarsaga*, 1932.

⁴ References apply to the edition of Jón Sigurðsson in *Íslendingasögur* II, 1847.

that these are the chief tangible examples, but in general the language of this text gives me the impression that it was written in the fourteenth century. Of course, this text may well have been rewritten from one that belonged to the thirteenth century, and it probably was. The *Vatnshyrna* version must derive from the same original, but it has undoubtedly been shortened. I think that some of the differences between the two are the result of mistakes made when the shortened version was written.

I think that we may find many characteristics of late date in the language of sagas which, for other reasons, we believe to be written late, but I shall not discuss this problem further for the present.

CHAPTER XII

CLERICAL AND ROMANTIC INFLUENCES

IN the last chapter I mentioned among examples of late expressions used in the *Harðar Saga: vǫru goðin í busli miklu*. Every one of these words may be old, for I have no evidence that *busl* is a late word. But since the dictionaries give no other examples of it than this, we may suppose that it did not belong to the vocabulary of the classical sagas, and when it is used about the gods, as it is here, it is evidence of a late taste. This brings us to the style of sagas which, without doubt, does sometimes give evidence of their ages, but on the whole, this evidence is much more tricky and difficult to assess. The same may be said of narrative form, narrative skill, ideas. Since such things are so intangible, their value in dating is much less than that of many other characteristics already discussed.¹

1 In his book *Untersuchungen über den Entwicklungsgang und die Funktion des Dialogs in der isländischen Saga* (1934), W. Ludwig distinguishes two different uses of dialogue for describing characters in sagas: 'Die eine entwickelt objektiv, nur durch Wiedergabe des Wahrnehmbaren und wirklich Wahrgenommenen, das Bild einer Persönlichkeit, ohne selbst dazu irgendwie Stellung zu nehmen . . . Die andere Erzählweise benutzt Gespräche um zu reflektieren; subjektive Auffassungen werden breit und ausführlich vorgetragen.' The first kind of dialogue, common in *Heiðarvíg Saga* and *Drop-laugarsona Saga*, is considered by Ludwig the older. The second kind appears in *Bjarnar Saga Híttdælakappa*, *Laxdæla Saga*, *Hrafnkels Saga*, *Gunnlaugs Saga*, etc. Although the one form of dialogue is believed to be older in itself than the other, Ludwig maintains that we

Here and there we may notice clerical influences on the style, material, or outlook, but it is wise to be cautious in estimating their value as criteria of age. The Icelandic clerics were the first to write, and they went on writing. It might be expected that clerical influences would appear here and there, even in the oldest sagas. On the other hand, in Iceland the twelfth century was the age of clerical chiefs and the fourteenth century that of ecclesiastical authority, and Icelandic clerics of the twelfth century thought and wrote otherwise than those of the fourteenth century. More thorough investigation of the development of clerical writing is needed,¹ and the consideration of clerical influences on the style of certain Family Sagas might be of some value in deciding their ages. Influences of Christian morality and outlook might also appear at any time, but the sources show that they were much stronger at the end of the thirteenth century than they were at the beginning of it.²

have here to do with two *literarische Strömungen*, flowing at the same time, and he does not appear to believe that sagas can be dated on such evidence. Nevertheless, this question seems to deserve closer attention.

1 I may remark that investigation of the vocabulary and the loan-words (especially from Latin) in the version of *Jóns Saga Helga* preserved in Stockholm (perg. 5 fol.) suggests strongly that this version belongs to the fourteenth century. The version called by Vigfússon 'the Oldest *Jóns Saga*', in which the original is shortened in parts, must be older. The version in Stockholm must, in this case, have been made by a man who had both the older translation and Gunnlaugr's Latin original before him, and realized that passages had been omitted in the older translation. He decided to make a complete translation of Gunnlaugr's work, but to save himself trouble he used the older translation where he thought possible.

2 See e.g. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld*, 1940 (*The Age of the Sturlungs*, 1953), *passim*.

I shall now mention a few phrases used in sagas, phrases which must be derived from clerical letters, although these provide little evidence of the ages of the sagas.

In Latin writings it was common to introduce places named in stories with the words: *in loco qui dicitur* and suchlike. Phrases of this kind were translated early into Norse by *staðr heitir*, *i þeim stað er heitir*, etc. This usage seems to have been common in the twelfth century.¹ Many examples of it may be found in the *Heiðarviga Saga*. It is obvious that it was less usual in the thirteenth century although it occurs occasionally right down to the fourteenth century, as in *Finnboga Saga*.² The phrases just quoted must not be confused with *er nú heitir*, *er síðan heitir*, and others of that kind, which belong to the native idiom and contain allusion to oral records of places and events.

In Latin works authors often write in the first person, saying *ego* or *nos*. In Icelandic historical writings of the twelfth century *ek* is often used, and there are examples of it in Ari's *Íslendingabók*, *Hryggjarstykki*, and the Oldest Saga of St Ólaf. For obvious reasons later scribes did not like to write this word when copying early texts, and they would put something else instead. Our knowledge

¹ See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu*, 1933, pp. 69-70.

² See the examples given in my *Um Njálu* (p. 69). One example from the *Kristni þáttir* of *Njála* is cited there, and there is another in *Í.F.* XII, 32/17. I have noticed the following examples in some other sagas (references apply to editions in *Í.F.* unless otherwise stated): *Bjarnar Saga Hit.* 163/17, 164/1; *Viga-Glúms Saga* (ed. G. Turville-Petre), p. 26/20; *Reykðæla Saga* 179/18, 214/18; *Ljósvetninga Saga* 25-6; *Hænsa-þóris Saga* 6/12, *Finnboga Saga* (ed. Gering, 1879) 1.

of the authors of many ancient works results from this practice, for later copyists thought it proper to give some details about this *ek*. I have not thoroughly considered the practices of the learned clerks of the thirteenth century, or whether they still wrote *ek* to any extent, but in the profane sagas it vanishes, and I do not think it appears in Family Sagas except at the end, in such phrases as: *ok lýk ek . . . (Njála; Finnboga Saga)*.¹ The sentence: *at því sem mik minnir in Þorgils Saga ok Hafliða*² is unique in its content and also in its archaic form. Instead of *ek*, *vér* occurs in some passages of Family Sagas, and I may cite a few examples of it:

kunnum vér nú eigi annat segja (*Heiðarvíga Saga* 101/17);
þótt vér kunnim eigi at greina (*Bjarnar Saga Hitdælakappa* 201/11);
ok vitu vér þó eigi (*Reykðæla Saga* 159/25);
En ekki kunnu vér með sannindum at segja. . . En þat vitu vér (*Víga-Skútu Saga* 214/10-12);
ok eigi vitu vér manna frá honum komit (*Eyrbyggja Saga* 183/9);
en eigi vitum vér (*Gunnars Þáttr Þiðrandabana* 204/9);
Heyrum vér (*Finnboga Saga* 71);
þat hofum vér heyrt (*Finnboga Saga* 76);
hofum vér ekki fleira heyrt með sannleik af honum sagt (*Þórðar Saga Hreðu*, longer version, near the end).

1 It should be mentioned that in *Njála* the phrase *lýk ek* appears only in *M*; *Ga* have *lýkr*; *X* manuscripts have *líku vér*. The original text is thus not certain but *M* has the *lectio difficilior*. *Bjarnar Saga Hít*. Ch. I has the sentence: *en því get ek eigi þeira smágreina . . .* but these are the words of the redactor who inserted the chapter in the *Ólafs Saga Helga*, not those of the author of the saga.

2 *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. K. Kålund, 1906-11, I, 44/23; only in II manuscripts, but the text of I has been shortened.

Undoubtedly many more examples like these could be found, for I have noticed these only while looking for many other things. Nevertheless, we may suppose that authors in the age of the classical sagas tended to avoid such expressions. These expressions and especially the little word *ek* (*vér*) await investigation, as do many other things.

It is of great help in deciding the ages of sagas if we can detect unquestionable influences of courtly life or of romances in them. Least can be deduced from the presence of the same motifs in Icelandic sagas and romances, for motifs could easily be brought to the North orally at an early period by pilgrims and students, and some of them might even have been conveyed by Varangians and Vikings. In *Morkinskinna* there are a number of tales about military ruses, e.g. in the Saga of Haraldr Harðráði, which are also found in foreign literature and in romances.¹ The story told by the monk Oddr of the words spoken as Ólaf Tryggvason's ships sailed past Svoldr—a story perfected in Snorri's *Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar* (Ch. 101)—also has parallels in foreign literature, e.g. in stories and poems about Charles the Great.² The motifs in the *Ingólfs Þáttr* in *Víga-Glúms Saga*³ are derived from southern stories,

¹ J. de Vries has discussed southern elements in Kings' Sagas in *Arkiv för nord. fil.* XLVIII, 1931; A. Stender-Petersen has dealt with Varangian traditions in various works.

² See S. Bugge, *Norsk Sagaskrivning og sagafortælling i Irland*, 1908, pp. 73-4; J. Bédier, *Les Légendes épiques*, II, 329-31.

³ See especially K. Liestöl in *Nordiskt Folkminne, studier till. C. W. von Sydow*, 1928, pp. 207 ff.; Björn Sigfússon, *Arkiv för nord. fil.* LIII, 1937.

although not from romances, and the same may be said of those in the story about the fly on the foster-father's skull, told in *Ljósvetninga Saga*.¹

One of the most remarkable examples of early and, as it seems, oral influence of romance poetry is found in the *Rauðólfs Þáttr*,² where a circular building is described, apparently in imitation of the castle of the Byzantine Emperor, as it was described in the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*. Fortunately, we can see that Snorri knew the *Rauðólfs Þáttr*, so that it cannot have been written much later than 1220. A Norse translation of the *Pèlerinage* is included in the *Karlamagnús Saga*, which is believed to have been written considerably later than this. No similarity in phraseology between the translation of the *Pèlerinage* and the *Rauðólfs Þáttr* has been detected, and so this must be a case in which tales or motifs were brought to the north orally before the *Þáttr* was written. The material came from abroad, but neither the outlook nor the style of the *Rauðólfs Þáttr* is that of the translators of romances.

In the time of King Hákon Hákonarson people began to imitate the culture and civilization of France, its outlook and customs, and before long also its social order. Then they started to translate the romances into Norse, beginning, as far as is known, in 1226, with Brother Robert's translation of the story of Tristram. The writers of Romantic Sagas now developed a distinct

¹ See especially Jan de Vries, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal en Letterkunde*, 47, 63-80.

² See especially Joan Turville-Petre, *The Story of Rauð and his sons* (Viking Society), 1947.

style, and it was naturally influenced by the foreign poems, although also based partly on the Norse clerical style. People were struck nearly dumb by the splendour of the Romantic Sagas, by their courtoisie, levity, and gallantry. We can see from the *Sturlunga Saga*, to some extent, how and when these influences penetrated Iceland about 1240-50, and if unquestionable marks of them are found in Family Sagas they provide excellent criteria of age.¹

1 On this question see, e.g. *Í.F.* V, Introduction, §§ 1-2; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu*, §§ 69-72; *Í.F.* XII, pp. cxvii-ix. Romance influence on the national life of the Icelanders is discussed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sturlungaöld (The Age of the Sturlungs)*, Ch. IV.

CHAPTER XIII

ARTISTRY

WE may next consider the skill displayed in the sagas, the ability of their authors in constructing them, their control of the material, their narrative methods, and literary artistry.

We might well suppose that such accomplishments developed gradually; at the beginning authors had less control over their material, but this developed as more sagas were written. But there is much to beware of, and if some of the evidence given above was thought doubtful, our doubts must now get out of hand. I suspect that some scholars use their intuitions about artistic qualities, about the 'character' of sagas, to quote Guðbrandur Vigfússon once more, as the basis for dating them. We need not examine such evidence for long before we realize how perilous it is to trust in it.

It is reasonable to expect that the sagas which were written first would show certain marks of the primitive, if only we can detect them. But an unskilful author of later times might perhaps show a similar clumsiness in his first work. Much discrimination is needed in judging features like these. I cannot give a strong enough warning against rashness in dating sagas by their 'composition'. I may mention that in the chief study of the composition of sagas, A. U. Bååth (*Studier öfver kompositionen i några isländska ättsagor*, 1885) showed that some sagas are primitive, in so far as they consist of loosely connected

þættir, while others are closely woven. But when we compare the dates to which later scholars have assigned these sagas, we see that it is not wise to make the authors' skill in composition the basis for dating sagas.

One of the chief characteristics of classical Family Sagas is the illusion of reality which they create. It is as if the reader or listener witnesses the events himself, and as if there is no author, no one between these events and the reader. Only when characters are introduced is any judgement passed upon them. The author does not pause in the middle of the story to explain; he does not pass judgement upon people or incidents. He takes pains to say neither too much nor too little. He does not predict the future in his own words. If he wishes his reader to have an idea, a suspicion of future events, he uses special devices which do not break the illusion.

Of course there are exceptions, and there are some sagas in which these rules are more flagrantly broken than in others. These sagas might perhaps be called 'archaic'.

Firstly I may mention the *Heiðarvígga Saga*. A well-known example of a breach of the rules of artistic illusion is in the advice given by Þórarinn the Wise in Ch. 16, where the words of the author and those of Þórarinn are so confused that Sigurður Nordal gave up trying to distinguish them:

. . . there is a farm called Bakki; it is beyond Húnavatn; there was a woman living there called Þórdís and nicknamed Gefn, and she was a widow. Living with her was a man called Oddr, and he was a manly man. He was not particularly rich or well

born, but yet he was well known. You must call on him to go with you; he shall decide what answer he will give. In that region there is a district called Kól gumýrar, and there are many farms in it, one of which is called Meðalheimr. There was a man living there called Þorgísl, who was a first cousin of Gefn's Oddr, a doughty fellow and a fine poet, well off for money and a manly man; call on him to go with you. There is a farm called . . .¹

Thus the story goes on. Later on, in Ch. 24, more details about Þórarinn's advice are given, and he tells Barði how to conduct his attack on the men of Breiðafjörðr. It says there, among other things:

'take night quarters on the moor'—*and from this it got its name and was called Two-day Moor*—'and you must go to both of the vantage points on the moor.'²

A little later, describing these same directions, the saga says:

And midway another six must stop, the brothers Þóroddr and Þorgils of Þernumýrr, first cousins of Barði, and the third man shall be the one *who came in place of Halldórr*, and your sister's sons must also be there . . .

1 'Bær heitir á Bakka, hann er fyrir útan Húnavatn; þar bjó kona sú, er Þórdís hét ok var kǫlluð gefn ok var ekkja. At ráðum var með henni maðr sá, er Oddr hét; hann var gildr maðr fyrir sér. Ekki var hann eins kostar fégoðfugr eða ættstórr; þó var hann frægr maðr; hann skaltu biðja fylgðar með þér; hann ræðr svorum. Þar er kallat í sveit þeiri á Kól gumýrum, ok eru þar margir bæir, ok heitir einn bær á Meðalheimi; þar bjó sá maðr, er Þorgísl hét; hann var systrungr Gefnar-Odds at frændsemi ok var hraustr maðr ok skáld gott ok átti góða kosti fjár ok gildr maðr fyrir sér; kveð þú hann til farar með þér. Bær heitir . . .'

2 'Hafið náttstaði á heiðinni'—*þá fekk hon þat nafn, at hon var Tvídægja kǫlluð*—'ok skuluð koma til vígis þess hvárstveggja, er á heiðinni er'.

She (Guðrún) said that she had tried by every means, but said that Björn would do nothing for him, *even for Guðrún* (97/26-8) . . .¹

The author speaks of the future:

And he took a strap-knife off his neck and then the stone necklace which the old woman had put round his neck moved a little, *and this will be mentioned later* (81/13).²

The author passes judgement:

and they loved him greatly, and thought much more of him *than he deserved* (66/23-4).³

It is noticeable that in the *Heiðarvígá Saga* the author harps on the same words with less restraint than is usual in the classical sagas;⁴ the whole narrative is uneven and unpolished, and these are the sort of features we might expect in the infancy of a literary form, but they largely vanish with practice and the growth of literary skill.

Of all Family Sagas, the *Fóstbræðra Saga* breaks the ordinary rules of narrative most flagrantly, and this is

1 'En miðleiðis skulu sitja aðrir sex, [þeir] bræðr Þóroddr ok Þorgísl af Þernumýri, *bræðrungr Barða*, ok sá maðr inn þriði, *er kom í stað Halldórs*, þeir skulu ok þar vera systursynir þínir . . .'

Hon (Guðrún) kvezk alla vega eptir hafa leitast ok segir Björn vilja honum ekki gott gera *sakar Guðrúnar* . . .

2 ok tekr tygilkníf af hálsi sér, ok þokask þá nokkut steinasörvit, *er hon hafði látit á háls honum kerlingin*, ok *þess verðr getit síðar*.

3 ok unnu þau honum mikit ok virðu hann meira *en hann var verðr*.

4 Sigurður Nordal gives some good examples of this feature in his edition of the saga, see *Í.F.* III, cxxxiii. The same tendency is noticeable in the text of *Droplaugarsona Saga* in 162, and may be a mark of age. See *Í.F.* XI, p. lix.

especially because of the digressions which occur in various parts of it. These digressions sometimes consist of strange anatomical lore, while at other times they are nothing more than bombast. The digressions are not included in the *Hauksbók*, but they are in all the other manuscripts. It was for a long time the received opinion that they were later accretions, and that the original text of the saga was that preserved in the *Hauksbók*. But in 1938 Sigurður Nordal put forward the opinion that the text of *Hauksbók* had been shortened, and that the digressions had been present in the original.¹ Since then, he and Sven B. F. Jansson have discussed the problem in closer detail.² Certainly the text of *Hauksbók* has been shortened, whether or not the digressions were in the original, and if they were, the *Fóstbræðra Saga* was different from all other Family Sagas. This might be because it was written in the infancy of saga-writing. But even if we exclude the digressions, the *Fóstbræðra Saga* departs in many ways from the conventions of the classical sagas. For example, I may mention incidents in Ch. 6 of this saga; it would be groundless and arbitrary to maintain that all of these were added in later times, and many of them must have been in the original.

We may ask whether archaic sagas are necessarily old sagas, and whether these archaic characteristics are enough for us to conclude that a saga is old. Fortunately,

¹ See *Í.F.* III, p. cxxxix.

² See *Í.F.* VI, Introduction, § 10; S. B. F. Jansson, *Sagorna om Vinland*, 1944, pp. 172-262.

we have reliable evidence of the great age of the *Fóst-bræðra Saga* (see pp. 83-4 above), and there is much evidence of the age of the *Heiðarvígá Saga*, but I may mention a saga which is generally believed to have been written much later than these, although the rules of 'illusion' common to the classical sagas are broken. This is the *Reykðæla Saga*. It says in this saga:

Eysteinn submitted to the arbitration of Áskell in this suit *for he was a most just man in arbitration, whoever might be concerned* (p. 153).

We have now to tell what was Eysteinn's reason for telling him to throw down his stick and his gloves by the hole in the ice; he thought that people would think that he had been drowned, and that was why he was lost (p. 156).

There was a man called Hánefr, who lived at Ópveginstunga; *little good will be said of him in this saga*, and he was badly spoken of (p. 160).

Now Áskell got to know this, and he thought it strange that Vermundr should agree to have his child fostered by such a disreputable man as he said he believed Hánefr was (p. 160).¹

This may well be defended, but in this saga more is told in *oratio obliqua* about people's thoughts and wishes than is usual in classical sagas:

1 Eysteinn lagði gørð undir Áskel um þetta mál, því at hann var réttlátastr manna í sættargørðum, hverir sem í hlut áttu . . . (p. 153).

En frá því er at segja, hvat Eysteini gekk til þess, er hann bauð honum at kasta niðr stafnum ok vottunum hjá vökinni, en hann hugði, at menn skyldi þat ætla, at hann væri drukknadr ok at hvarf hans myndi af því vera . . . (p. 156).

Hánefr hét maðr. Hann bjó í Ópveginstungu. *Fátt verðr frá honum vel sagt í þessari sögu*, ok var hann óorðsæll maðr (p. 160).

Nú verðr Áskell varr við þetta, ok þótti þat kynligt, at Vémundr vildi þiggja þat barnfóstr at svá skitligum manni, sem hann kvezk hyggja, at Hánefr væri . . . (p. 160).

It is told that Áskell got to know about this, and he said that he could not see that Þorgeirr was in any way related to them, and he called it imprudent to share one's food with such a ruffian as Þorgeirr. . . . But Vermundr sat talking with Þorgeirr *as if he were a man of worth* (p. 182).

But then their journey was delayed, *and this was because of Steinfinnr's magic*, as will be told later (p. 192).¹

We may wonder whether statements like these show merely that the author had not kept up with the times, or whether this saga is really older than is generally believed.

I shall finally mention two examples of an archaic mode of expression in sagas, while admitting that it is chiefly by chance that I have hit on these. In the last chapter of *Bjarnar Saga Hítðelakappa* an account is given of the settlement made after Björn had been killed:

It was (*hefir verit*) almost as if Þorsteinn alone decided the terms of settlement after Þorkell had saved Þórðr, his kinsman, from outlawry, and he was not moderate in his award of pecuniary damages, for there was plenty of money available.²

In Ch. 2 of *Þorsteinns Saga Síðu-Hallssonar* it is said that Þorsteinn went from Orkney to Norway:

where he came to the court of King Magnús Ólafsson, and

1 Þat er sagt, at Áskell varð varr við þetta ok kvazk ekki vita ván í, at Þorgeirr væri þeim nokkut skyldr, ok kallar þat óvitsamligt at gefa slíku óvendismanni mat sinn sem Þorgeirr var . . . En Vémundr . . . sitr nú á tali við Þorgeir, *svá sem hann væri dugandismaðr* (p. 182).

En þá dvalðisk ferð þeira, ok var þat af fjölkynngi Steinfinns, sem enn mun sagt verða síðar (p. 192).

2 Mjök *hefir verit*, sem Þorsteinn réði einn gørðinni, þegar Þorkell hafði Þórði komit undan sekðum, frænda sínum; en ekki sparði hann fé til sakbóta, því at ærit var til.

was made his courtier, and was unlike those who only hear the tidings in their houses at home. He was in the company of many powerful men, was well respected, and thought to be a most excellent man. He was also most lavish in his house-holding, and his house might well be equalled with the residences of noblemen. Þorsteinn was loyal to his friends, cheerful and humble, wise and patient, perceptive and vengeful, and severe with those who offended him; he was generous to the poor and to all who needed his help, but he often overcame greater men while he was in Iceland. He was distinguished by birth, and he also acquired good kinsmen by marriage, and the support of the Vápnfirðingar. When Þorsteinn had been abroad for three years and had won great fame, he came out to Iceland. Þorsteinn was twenty years old when he fought in the battle of Clontarf (*Brjánsorrosta*). He made land in the eastern fjords before the autumn assembly, and he went to his house, and his kinsmen and friends and all his liegemen rejoiced in his return.¹

It can safely be said that it is unusual in Family Sagas to place passages like these in the middle of the story. Although these two examples prove nothing in themselves,

1 Ok kom til hirðar Magnúss konungs Ólafssonar ok gerðisk hans hirðmaðr ok var ólíkr þeim, er heima spyrja tíðendin at búm sínum. Hann var með mörgum ríkum mönnum ok vel virðr ok þótti inn mesti ágætismaðr. Hann var ok inn mesti rausnarmaðr í búi, ok vel mátti bær hans jafnask við ríkra manna herbergi. Þorsteinn var vinholtr, glaðr ok lítillátr, vitr ok þolinmóðr, djúpsær ok langrækr, en grimmr mótgørðarmönnum sínum, góðr við elmusur ok alla þá, er hans þurftu, en ina stærri menn bar hann opt ofríki, þá er hann var hér á landi. Uppruni hans var merkiligr. Hann fekk sér ok góða mægð ok traust þeira Vápnfirðinga. En er hann hafði þrjá vetr utan verit ok var orðinn frægr mjök, þá fór hann út higat. Þá var Þorsteinn tvítögr, er hann var í Brjánsorrustu. Hann kom út í fjörðum austr fyrir leið of haustit ok fór heim til bús síns, ok urðu honum fegnir frændr ok vinir ok allir hans þingmenn.

they are not valueless if considered together with the other features which give evidence of an early date.¹

1 In *Víga-Glúms Saga* (Ch. XIX) it says of a lawsuit after the death of Bárðr Hallason: 'attempts were made to reach a settlement, but such was the opposition that there was no chance of this, for on the other side were skilled lawyers and men of courage, Møðrvellingar and Esphœlingar' (var leitat um sættir. En þar var svá þungt fyrir, at engi váru vól á því, því at í moti váru lögvitir menn ok hugðjafir, Møðrvellingar ok Esphœlingar).

This praise of Glúmr's enemies may derive from the *Esphœlinga Saga*.

CHAPTER XIV

HEROIC SAGAS AND THE DECLINE OF REALISM

FINNUR JÓNSSON argued rather strongly that if the influence of Heroic Sagas on Family Sagas could be detected plainly, or if Family Sagas closely resembled Heroic Sagas, this was sound evidence of their ages, and such sagas must be late.

Again we must be cautious. In twelfth-century Iceland stories used to be told which resembled our Heroic Sagas in content. It is, therefore, not surprising if motifs similar to those of Heroic Sagas appear already in the oldest Family Sagas, especially in chapters whose scene is laid abroad. But this does not imply that episodes like these are valueless as criteria of age. If sagas which, for one reason or another, are known to be old are compared with Heroic Sagas, then the older Family Sagas are generally characterized by a striking realism. But the Heroic Sagas, probably all written later than 1250, show a much stronger taste for the fantastic, the exotic, and the supernatural, and this is clearly a characteristic of the age. If, in a Family Saga, we find a great deal similar to the style of the Heroic Sagas, and if fantastic material is used in such a degree as to show a taste or an inclination for it, then it may be a criterion of age.

This brings us to a point which is more important, more radical, and of wider implication. Individual motifs

of Heroic Sagas may not be significant, but it is significant if a predilection for the fantastic and supernatural is displayed. It implies discontent with reality, escape from it. It signifies the collapse of the appreciation of reality and realism. The way in which the Heroic Sagas flourished in the latter decades of the thirteenth century is itself evidence of this.

I have spoken of the influence of Heroic Sagas on Family Sagas, but the Heroic Sagas are rather symptoms, I might almost say symptoms of a malaise, than an original cause. The cause must be something in people's outlook, in their society and culture. I have tried to trace this complex development in my book *The Age of the Sturlungs* (*Sturlungaöld*).

If we consider the Family Sagas on the basis of objective evidence, it seems that extraordinary changes took place in the first generation after the fall of the Republic. Appreciation of the ancient moral values vanishes quickly; the cruel compulsion of honour had driven men of old to tragic actions, but now the champion grows more and more into the insensitive prize-fighter. Hitherto the heroic spirit had been admired in sagas no less than physical prowess, but now the 'strong man' becomes the hero, and that is really the main point. Before long character-drawing fades and all kinds of excesses develop. The interest in magic and supernatural happenings increases. Taste declines, as well as moderation, the balance between the aristocratic and the popular, the harmony between them. Bad taste is more in evidence, and there is a predilection for the gross and

vulgar. The fictitious element grows stronger and deteriorates at the same time. Nevertheless, it looks strongly as if some of the sagas which appear to be written late are nevertheless based partially on oral tradition, e.g. *Svarfdæla Saga*, *Harðar Saga*, *Gull-Þóris Saga*, but as the times change, so the traditions change; the old moral values decline and the tales become popular legends. Thus, people cease to concern themselves with history, and sagas in the end become pure fiction, like *Víglundar Saga* and *Finnboga Saga*.

As far as form is concerned, the composition of sagas and narrative skill, it is plain that many of the later writers knew their job well enough. The decline is internal.

In judging the ages of these sagas we must first look for objective, concrete evidence; but the changes which took place in the latter decades of the thirteenth century were so radical that subjective evidence is also valuable. Indeed, it was chiefly on such considerations that scholars first learned to distinguish the latest sagas from all the rest.

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

I BELIEVE that I have now spoken of most of the more weighty evidence which may be used in dating Family Sagas. If it should be asked whether there is any likelihood that sagas could be dated within reasonably narrow limits, I think the question may be answered in the affirmative. But this can only be done if the correct methods are applied, and applied with precision. Moreover, much necessary research in this field remains to be done.

I may repeat a few of the points of which I have spoken:

- (1) Exact consideration should be paid to the state in which each saga is preserved; if the preservation is poor, the basis for exact dating may be destroyed.
- (2) The method must be as soundly and solidly based as possible; if it is not, everything will be uncertain.
- (3) First we must look for objective, concrete evidence, and make that the basis, and then we may turn to more subjective considerations, and try to find as much independent evidence as possible, weighing every grain of it, one against the other if they conflict.
- (4) Much of our evidence consists of probability, and we must estimate its value, for this may vary greatly. It is of greater service to scholarship that the student should train himself to evaluate the various grades of probability, than that he should master the trade of the attorney.